**Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā***

**Spring 2023**

**Time: 9-9:50**

**Location: Wren 2**

**Instructor:** Akshay Gupta

**Office #:** Wren 305

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**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 2-3pm and by appointment.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The main purpose of this course is to carefully study the *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of the most influential Hindu sacred texts,in its entirety. The course’s various readings will examine the historical context of the text, outline its central teachings, and probe into its various interpretations. At the end of the course, you should have an awareness of the religious significance of the *Gītā* and how it has been received and interpreted both in the East and in the West.

**REQUIRED READINGS (TO BUY)**

Schweig, Graham. 2010. *Bhagavad Gita: The Beloved Lord’s Secret Love Song*. New York: HarperOne (Kindle is a cheap option).

Theodore, Ithamar. 2010. *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*. London: Routledge (a free proof copy is available at <https://www.academia.edu/11304432/Exploring_the_Bhagavad_gita_Philosophy_Structure_and_Meaning>. Otherwise, renting the Kindle version is a cheap option).

Theodore, Ithamar. 2020. *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction*. New Delhi: Routledge (buying the Kindle version is probably the cheapest option).

**REQUIRED READINGS (AVAILABLE FREE ONLINE)**

RC Zaehner’s *Bhagavad Gītā*: <https://archive.org/details/20200219bhagavadglta>

There will be other readings for this course; however, you can access these for free.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

There are a total of 1000 points possible in this course, allocated in the following way:

Attendance and Participation (200 points)

I will take attendance in every class after the add/drop period. You get two “free” unexcused absences. However, every unexcused absence thereafter will deduct 10 points from your attendance and participation grade. You are also expected to actively participate in class by asking questions and participating in discussions. Points will be deducted from your attendance and participation grade if you are consistently unprepared and make no contributions to group discussions. In extenuating circumstances, I can waive additional absences by having you complete an alternative assignment relevant to the course material of the class that you missed.

Reflection Papers (125 x 4 = 500 points)

There will be four reflection papers throughout the semester. Each one of these papers will count for 125 points. You will reflect on the readings that we have covered since the last reflection paper (or since the start of the course in the case of the first reflection paper). You can reflect on any topic or topics of your choosing. Papers that get the full 125 points will demonstrate attentiveness to the class readings and lectures, critically analyze the *Gītā* in an insightful way, and show that you thought deeply about the course material. Topics might include: reflections on how the teachings of the *Gītā* have developed throughout the text, reflections on how the *Gītā* relates to contemporary issues, reflections on how the *Gītā* relates to other religious texts that you have encountered, reflections on how the *Gītā* might influence someone’s ethical code, reflections on what you learned in the course so far, reflections on a topic that has started to make more sense to you, reflections on some aspect of the *Gītā* that doesn’t make sense to you, and so on. You can be creative with this! Each reflection paper should be 3-4 pages doubled spaced, in Times New Roman font.

Final Paper (300 points)

There will be a 7-10 page double spaced, Times New Roman final paper that counts for 300 points. Final papers can be on any topic related to the *Bhagavad Gītā*. However, to receive the full 300 points, you should not write a paper that merely describes or summarizes the readings thus far. The best papers will engage critically with the readings and other sources relating to the *Bhagavad Gītā*. For instance, one might try to address questions like: “how do author X and author Y differ in their understanding of Z?”, “does the *Gītā* have a tension between *dharma* and *bhakti*,” or, “what are some ways that the *Gītā* could have influenced influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi?” Reading and referencing sources that we have not covered in classes is a plus; however, it is possible to get the full points by focusing primarily on assigned readings if one’s analysis is insightful and demonstrates careful attention to the readings.

**TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

The usage of cell phones is not permitted. Laptops are permitted provided that you use them for taking notes or to access electronic books. If your laptop use becomes distracting to the class you will no longer be permitted to use them.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**

It is the policy of The College of William & Mary to accommodate students with disabilities and qualifying diagnosed conditions in accordance with federal and state laws. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more info, please see [www.wm.edu/sas](http://www.wm.edu/sas).

**RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS**

It is my policy to make accommodations (i.e. exemptions from late penalties on assignments, exemptions from deductions on one’s attendance/participation grade) for religious observances, as long as such practices are in accordance with state and federal regulations and consistent with safety regulations of the university. If you need accommodations, please inform me of them by the drop/add period.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

The Honor Code is, as always, in effect in this course. The current version of the Honor Code is available at www.wm.edu/honor. At all times, the written work you submit must be solely your own, with all sources properly cited. Instances of plagiarism will face severe punishment, including possible expulsion from the College. Plagiarism occurs when a student presents any information, ideas, or phrasing of another as if they were his or her own and does not give appropriate credit to the original source.

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Unless your circumstances prevent you from turning in assignments on time, there will be a penalty for late assignments. This penalty will be 5% a day, so if you turn in a late assignment 3 days late, the highest grade you can receive for this assignment is an 85%.

**THE WRITING RESOURCES CENTER**

Located on the first floor of Swem Library, this is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product, and across disciplines. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage [www.wm.edu/wrc](http://www.wm.edu/wrc)

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STATEMENT**

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. I (like many people) am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something is said in class (by anyone) that makes you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.

**RESPECTFUL DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE**

In our class discussions, we will explore some challenging issues and increase our understandings of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy; we sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening; sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. Always, we will need respect for others.

**WILLIAM & MARY LAND AND SLAVERY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

William & Mary acknowledges the Indigenous peoples who are the original inhabitants of the lands our campus is on today – the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway), Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Pamunkey, Patawomeck, Upper Mattaponi, and Rappahannock tribes – and pay our respect to their tribal members past and present. William & Mary acknowledges that it owned and exploited slave labor from its founding to the Civil War; and that it had failed to take a stand against segregation during the Jim Crow Era. For more information, see W&M’s Decolonizing Humanities Project, [www.wm.edu/sites/dhp/](http://www.wm.edu/sites/dhp/)

**THE CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY**

Located at the lower level entrance of the Wesley House located off the left side parking lot at the back of house, this confidential program aims to provide W&M students, staff, and faculty with food insecurities and their dependent family members access to nonperishable and hygiene products when school is in session. If you need any accommodations to access the pantry, please call Wesley at 757-229-6832 prior to visiting the pantry, so they can provide accommodations. Campus Food Pantry webpage: <http://wmwesley.org/campus-food-pantry>

**ENGLISH (AS A SECOND) LANGUAGE STATEMENT**

W&M welcomes students from around the country and the world, and their unique perspectives enrich our learning community. To support students whose primary language is not English, there are a number of services available on campus. See the ESL Campus Resources webpage: https://www.wm.edu/offices/revescenter/geo/global\_programs\_oncampus/english\_language/ESL\_Campus\_Resources/Index.php#WM

**MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL BEING**

William & Mary recognizes that students have many different responsibilities and can face challenges that make learning difficult. There are many resources available at W&M to help students. Asking for help is a sign of courage and strength. Please reach out to me if you or someone you know are facing problems inside or outside the classroom, and I will do my best to guide you to appropriate resources on campus. Those resources include:

* For psychological/emotional stress: the W&M Counseling Center (757-221-362), 240 Gooch Dr. 2nd floor, https://www.wm.edu/offices/wellness/counselingcenter/. Services are free & confidential.
* For physical/medical concerns: W&M Health Center (757-221-4386), 240 Gooch Dr, https://www.wm.edu/offices/wellness/healthcenter/
* For other additional support or resources, please contact the Dean of Students by submitting a care report (757- 221-2510) or by email at [deanofstudents@wm.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@wm.edu)

**COMMUNICATION**

Throughout this course, I expect you to keep lines of communication open with me. You can always come and talk to me. Should stresses in your personal life make it difficult for you to meet the course’s obligations, please communicate with me so that we can try to make reasonable arrangements to accommodate the circumstances you are facing.

**COVID-19 RELATED MATTERS**

Due to the continuing pandemic, flexibility may be required this semester in our modes of learning. Should you need to miss class for Covid-19 -related reasons (positive test, symptoms, etc.), communicate with me immediately letting me know about the absence. In other matters, we will make contingency plans when the need arises.

**GRADING**

**Letter Grades (In Points)**

930-1000 = A

900-929 = A-

870-899 = B+

830-869 = B

800-829 = B-

770-799 = C+

730-769 = C

700-729 = C-

670-699 = D+

630-669 = D

600-629 = D-

Below 600 = F

**LAST DAY TO ADD/DROP:** February 3rd.

**LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW:** March 27th.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**January 25: Introduction**

Readings: Course Syllabus

**January 27: Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Schweig)**

Readings: Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Introduction (all sections)

**January 30: Mahābhārata**

Readings: Video summary of Mahābhārata: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yh4OxzEFFzA>

**February 1: Introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Theodore)**

Readings: Chapter 1 of Theodore’s *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* (“The *Bhagavad*-*gītā* and its contents)

**February 3: Hindu Practices Part 1: The Divine Presence**

Darshan (by Diana Eck) – pages 4-8, pages 63-75. A free link is here: <https://books.google.com/books/about/Dar%C5%9Ban.html?id=jEzh2QSNdlEC&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

**LAST DAY TO ADD/DROP**

**February 6: Hindu Practices Part 2: Kīrtan/Bhajan**

Readings: Kīrtan and Bhajan (Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism) (read everything)

**February 8: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 1**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 1

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 1

**February 10: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 2 Part 1**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: verses 1-38 (read explanation for verses 31-38)

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 2: (verses 1-37)

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 2.22 (verse and commentary)

**February 13: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 2 Part 2**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: verses 39-72

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 2 (verses 38-72):

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 2.39 (verse and commentary)

**February 15: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 3**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 3

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 3

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 3.17 (verse and commentary)

**February 17: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 4**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 4

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 4

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 4.6; 4.11 (verses and commentaries)

**February 20: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 5**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 5

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 5

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 5.1; 5.4; 5.29 (verses and commentaries)

**February 22: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 6**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 6

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 6

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 6.30; 6.47 (verses and commentaries)

**February 24: Vedānta**

Readings: *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta*: Introduction, pages 1-8 (stop before the section Vedāntic Doxagraphies in Medieval India

**February 27: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 7**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 7

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 7

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 7.1; 7.3; 7.19; 7.26 (verses and commentaries)

**March 1: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 8**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 8

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 8

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 8.3 (verse and just the commentary on page 258); 8.4; 8.6; 8.8; 8.22 (verses and commentaries)

**REFLECTION PAPER #1 DUE**

**March 3: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 9**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 9

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 9

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 9.4 (verse and commentary)

**March 6: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 10**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 10

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 10

**March 8: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapters 11 and 12**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapters 11 and 12

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapters 11 and 12

**March 10: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 13**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 13

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 13

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 13.2; 13.31 (verses and commentaries)

**March 20: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 14**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 14

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 14

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 14.27 (verse and commentary)

**March 22: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapters 15-16**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapters 15 and 16

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapters 15-16

**March 24: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 17 and Chapter 18 Part 1**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 17; Chapter 18: verses 1-44

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 17; Chapter 18, verses 1-40

Zaehner’s *Gītā*: 17.23 (verse and commentary)

**March 27: *Bhagavad Gītā* Chapter 18 Part 2**

Readings: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita: Philosophy, Structure, and Meaning*: Chapter 18: verses 45-78

Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: Chapter 18: verses 41-78

**REFLECTION PAPER #2 DUE**

**LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM THE COURSE AND LAST DAY FOR SOCIAL CLASS JUNIORS AND SENIORS TO ELECT PASS/FAIL**

**March 29: Malinar**

Readings: Angelika Malinar, The *Bhagavadgītā*: Doctrines and Contexts, chapter 4

**March 31: Schweig Post-*Gītā* Part 1**

Readings: Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: “The Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gītā*,” “Sanjaya: Minister and Visionary;” and “Arjuna: Warrior and Softhearted Soul,”

**April 3: Schweig Post-*Gītā* Part 2**

Readings: Graham Schweig’s *Gītā*: “Krishna: Intimate and Infinite Divinity,” and “The Secret Love Song”

**April 5: The Structure of the *Bhagavad*-*Gītā***

Readings: Chapter 2 of Theodore’s *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* (“The Structure of the *Bhagavad*-*gītā*”)

**April 7: Advaita Vedānta**

Readings: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Advaita Vedānta, section 2a and 2b: <https://iep.utm.edu/advaita-vedanta/#SH2a>

Śaṅkara’s Commentary on the *Gītā*: 2.16 (verse and first paragraph of the commentary), 9.32 (verse only), 18.66 (verse and the commentary on pages 499-502 – stop before the section “Refutation of the theory that salvation is attained by works alone”). Link: <https://archive.org/details/Bhagavad-Gita.with.the.Commentary.of.Sri.Shankaracharya/page/502/mode/2up?view=theater>

**April 10: Rāmānuja/Viśiṣṭādvaita**

Readings: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Rāmānuja, section 2c, 2d, and 3. Link: <https://iep.utm.edu/ramanuja/#H3>

Rāmānuja’s *Gītā*, verses 9.1-9.11; 9.34; 18.66 (verse and commentaries). Link here: <http://www.srimatham.com/uploads/5/5/4/9/5549439/ramanuja_gita_bhashya.pdf>

**April 12: Madhva/Dvaita Vedānta**

Readings: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Madhva, all sections: <https://iep.utm.edu/madhva/>

Madhva’s *Bhagavad Gītāi:* verse**s** 9.8 (verse and commentary), 12.1 (verse and just the paragraph on page 177), 15.5-7 (verse and commentary on page 211), and 18.66 (verse and commentary). Link: <http://michaelsudduth.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Madhvacarya-Bhagavad-Gita.pdf>.

**April 14: Prabhupāda/Acintya Bhedābheda**

Readings: Prabhupāda’s *Gītā*: verse 9.4 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/4/>; verse 9.5 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/5/>; verse 9.6 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/6/>; verse 9.9 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/9/>; verse 9.10 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/10/>; verse 9.29 - <https://vedabase.io/en/library/bg/9/29/>

**April 17: *Gītā* and Other Religions**

Readings: Chapter 3 of Theodore’s *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* (“*Bhagavad*-*gītā* Its Philosophy and Interpretation”)

**April 19: Dharma**

Readings: Chapter 4 of Theodore’s *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* (“Śaṅkara’s Deconstruction of the *Bhagavad*-*Gītā* Grounded In His Preunderstanding”)

**REFLECTION PAPER #3 DUE**

**April 21: Free Will**

Readings: Handout on free will

**April 24: Structured Dialogue**

Readings: Complete assignment before class.

“Explaining White Privilege To A Broke White Person”: <https://medschool.duke.edu/sites/default/files/2022-02/explaining_white_privilege_to_a_broke_white_person.pdf>

“Our Racial Interior”: <https://prospect.org/culture/racial-interior/>

“What It Means to be an ‘Untouchable’ in 2017”: <https://elle.in/elle-old-site/article/still-i-rise/>

“Caste Privilege 101: A Primer for the Privileged”: <https://theaerogram.com/caste-privilege-101-primer-privileged/>

**April 26: *Bhagavad Gītā* and Spiritual Equality**

Readings: “Cows, Elephants, Dogs, and Other Lesser Embodiments of *Ātman*” and “Constructing a Hindu Black Theology”

**April 28: *Bhagavad Gītā* and Caste**

Readings: Caste and Devotion: A Casteless Framework for (Some) Forms of Hindu Devotionalism

**May 1: Constructive Conversation**

Readings: Handout on Caste Reservation Practices

**May 3: *Bhagavad Gītā* and LGBTQIA+**

Readings: LGBTQ in Hinduism

**May 5: *Bhagavad Gītā* and Eco-Theology**

Readings: “TheGreenGītā: Connecting Ontology, Soteriology, and Environmental Ethics”

**May 8: Review**

**REFLECTION PAPER #4 DUE**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE MAY 15TH**