

# **Religion and Ecology: A Himalayan Perspective on Ethics and Diversity**



Spring 2021, ANTH 1798  
WEB Synchronous/Asynchronous  
Tuesday, 6 – 7 pm EST

**General Education Requirements:**  
Philosophical Thinking/Ethics,  
Cross-cultural Awareness

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Taking inspiration from the Himalayan environment and contextualizing religious experience in the mountains, this course will draw on broad ideas about the relationship between religion and ecology to understand how belief systems and ritual practices are shaped by and shape environmental consciousness. In the philosophical traditions of southern Asia, the Himalaya represent purity, transcendence, and deep introspection associated with ascetic ideals of ethical self-perfection. In the structure of the ritual activities of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, the mountains are a place of pilgrimage where individuals, families and whole communities go in order to experience divinity. As the designation in Sanskrit indicates the Himalaya are considered to be the “home of the gods,” and the intimacy of entering into the domestic space of this divine wilderness produces the coordinates of a profoundly moral and ethical life deeply embedded in the natural environment.

The Himalayas have inspired more religious thought, given rise to more forms of religious practice and are more distinctively featured in a spectrum of epic religious literature, than almost any other geographic region in the world, with the possible exception of a small parcel of relatively dry hilly ground between Jerusalem and Mecca. In any case, Siddhartha Gautama was born and taught in the shadow of the lower Himalayas, where Buddhism emerged in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Many specific mountains, lakes and rivers, as well as the broader geography of the Himalayas – most notably sacred rivers – define the landscape of Hindu mythology, pilgrimage and ritual. The practice of yoga as a metaphysical philosophy is intimately linked to the idea of mystical Himalayan masters. The western watershed of the Punjab, including the eponymous five rivers – Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej – is the heartland of Sikh cultural and religious identity. In addition to being a center of medieval Hindu literary learning, Kashmir and the western Himalayas, extending through the Hindu Kush, have defined routes of exchange, communication, conversion and confrontation between Greeks, Persians, Buddhist monks, and Mongol armies. More recently – in terms of centuries – Tibetan Buddhism has emerged out of a history of development in Lhasa – relocated to McLeod Ganj in the early 1960s -- that combines elements of Tantra from the southeastern Brahmaputra region with transmutations of Buddhism that have taken shape in Greater China. Although not inspired by the Himalayas per se, Islam in South Asia has been shaped by geography and the environment in specific ways, and the development of a particular interpretation of the Koran in a small center of learning in the town of Deoband – close to where the epic battle of the Bhagavad Gita is said to have been waged in Kurukshetra – implicates the geography and geopolitics of the Himalayas in the emergence of reform oriented, orthodox Islam.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

There are three interrelated **learning objectives**:

1. To develop an appreciation for the unique religious and philosophical significance of the Himalayas in the cross-cultural context of religious diversity in South Asia and Tibet.
2. To develop an understanding of the relationship between mythology, geology and an ethical life.

3. To develop a critical perspective on the way in which religion, ecology and social life come together in human experience.

There are three learning **outcomes**. After taking the course

1. students will develop cross-cultural awareness about how and why the Himalaya are understood to be “home of the gods”, source of insight on morality and ethical self-reflection, and a font of natural resources that sustain life in South Asia and Tibet.
2. students will be able to explain the interrelationship between religious institutions and practice, mythology and specific features of the Himalayan environment.
3. students will develop skills to produce multi-media learning modules based on a critical understanding of religion, philosophical thought and ecology in the Himalayas

## **SOURCE BOOKS**

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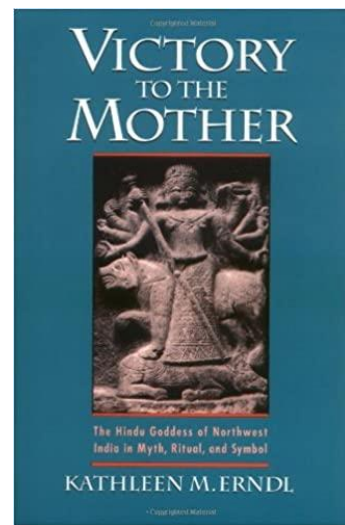
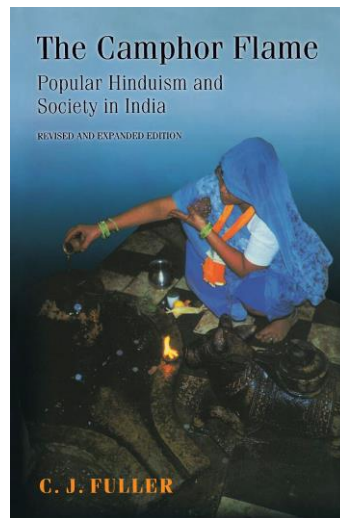
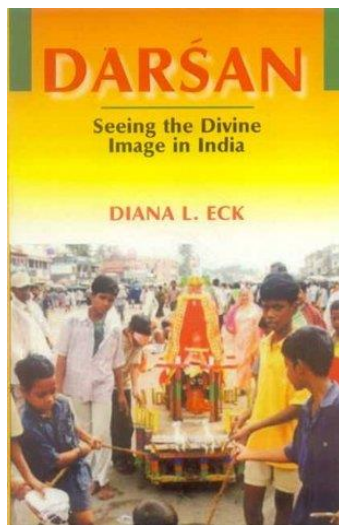
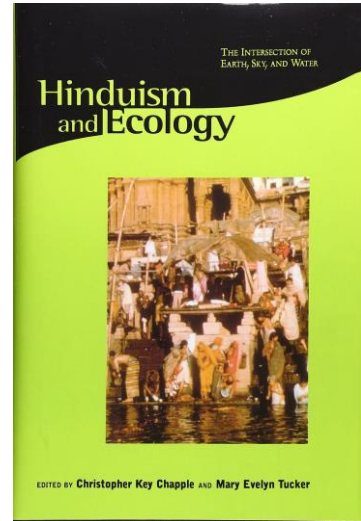
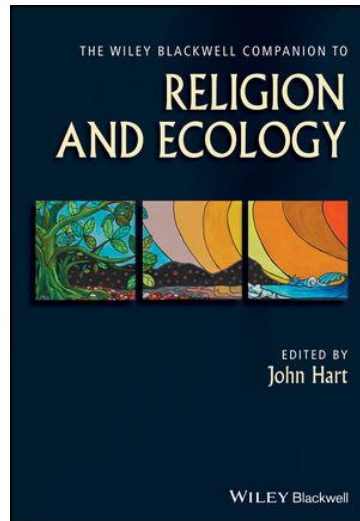
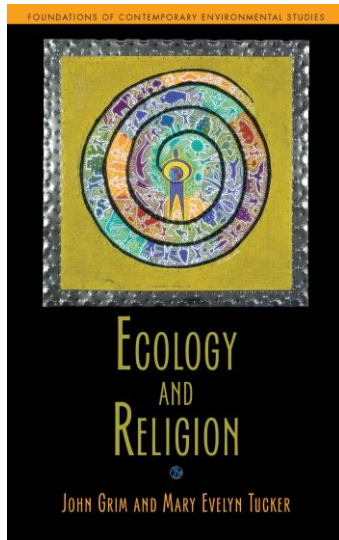
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F. J. Fuller (2004) *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eathleen M. Erndl (1993) *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual and Symbol*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kim Gutschow (2004) *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



## OFFICE HOURS

Given that students and the instructor will be in different time zones, office hours will be scheduled on an ad hoc basis by appointment. Please contact the instructor via email to make the necessary arrangements for a zoom meeting.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND FORMAT

The course is delivered in a hybrid synchronous/asynchronous mode. All students meet together with the instructor for one hour per week via zoom meetings: Tuesday, 6 – 7pm EST.

**Synchronous:** Weekly synchronous meetings provide a framework for structured seminar discussion led by the instructor and student working groups. Weekly meetings build on curated multi-media modules developed by the instructor. Each week students engage with a new module after completing reading assignments that highlight specific topics, issues, problems and

questions. After applying what has been learned through reading and to the mediated material in each module students will reflect on, analyze and interpret their virtual experiences through structured discussion and debate.

**Asynchronous:** Each week students will spend 1.5 self-scheduled hours working through a pre-recorded, online, multi-media module focused thematically on a specific topic, issue, question or problem. Modules are prepared by the instructor using content that is uniquely produced for the course incorporating a wealth of material that is available online. Each module contains recorded, onsite guided tours, commentaries, analyses and interpretations that build on reading assignments by taking students on virtual trips to specific locations in the mountains.

**Canvas Course Interface:** The course is delivered by the University of Pittsburgh's *Canvas* Learning Management System. Synchronous class meetings are scheduled and accessed via zoom meetings on the *Canvas* interface. The class syllabus and all other material including recorded modules are posted under the appropriate tab on the *Canvas* course page menu. All reading assignments that are not from the required texts (see above) are available as pdf copies. These are posted along with each module, as appropriate.

## **ASSIGNMENTS:**

There are two integrated assignments that will be scored, an essay and a multi-media module.

**Essay (40 points):** Write a 3000-word essay using at least ten academic sources. The essay must be on a question or problem that is relevant to the course. The essay will provide the academic foundation for the multi-media module project. **(Due Week 10)**

**Multi-Media Module (40 points):** Using the multi-media modules produced for this course as models and as examples of how media can be combined, collect resources and produce one of your own! The module you produce should build on the intellectual and academic foundation of the essay. **(Due Week 14)**

**Attendance and Participation: (20 points)**

**Total: 100 points**

## **GRADING:**

<b>A</b>	<b>95 – 100</b>
<b>A-</b>	<b>90 – 94</b>
<b>B+</b>	<b>85 – 89</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>80 – 84</b>
<b>B-</b>	<b>75 – 79</b>
<b>C+</b>	<b>70 – 74</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>65 – 69</b>
<b>C-</b>	<b>60 – 64</b>
<b>D+</b>	<b>55 – 59</b>

<b>D</b>	<b>50 – 54</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>49 or below</b>

## **Policies of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences:**

### **Disability Services**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

### **Academic Integrity**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the [University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators. To learn more about Academic Integrity, visit the [Academic Integrity Guide](#) for an overview of the topic. For hands-on practice, complete the [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism tutorial](#).

### **Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys**

Students in this class will be asked to complete a *Student Opinion of Teaching Survey*. Surveys will be sent via Pitt email and appear on your Canva landing page during the last three weeks of class meeting days. Your responses are anonymous. Please take time to thoughtfully respond, your feedback is important to me.

### **Classroom Recording**

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

### **Accessibility**

Canvas is ADA Compliant and has fully implemented the final accessibility standards for electronic and information technology covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Please note that, due to the flexibility provided in this product, it is possible for some material to inadvertently fall outside of these guidelines.

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## Email Communication Policy:

Each student is issued a University e-mail address (username@pitt.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the University for official communication with students. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to University communications in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. The University provides an e-mail forwarding service that allows students to read their e-mail via other service providers (e.g., Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, Yahoo). Students that choose to forward their e-mail from their pitt.edu address to another address do so at their own risk. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to official communications sent to their University e-mail address. To forward e-mail sent to your University account, go to <http://accounts.pitt.edu>, log into your account, click on *Edit Forwarding Addresses*, and follow the instructions on the page. Be sure to log out of your account when you have finished. (For the full E-mail Communication Policy, go to [www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html](http://www.bc.pitt.edu/policies/policy/09/09-10-01.html).)

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 – 1/18 – 1/22

**Synchronous:** Introduction and Orientation

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Religion, Ecology, and Geography: Home of the Gods

**Reading:** Fuller, Chapter 1

Week 2 – 1/25 – 1/29

**Synchronous:** Comparative Religions, Philosophy and Popular Religion

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** The Big Picture: Theology, Philosophy, Mythology, Ritual

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 1; Erndl, Chapter 1 and 2

Week 3 – 2/1 – 2/5

**Synchronous:** Buddhism in India and in Asia: Across the Himalayas

**Asynchronous/Expeditions** Pilgrimage in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century; Himalayan Monasteries;

Monks and Nuns; Embodying ethical principles.

**Reading:** Gutschow, Chapter 1, 2, 3

Week 4 – 2/8 – 2/12

**Synchronous:** World View and Ritual Practices

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Ritual, Belief and Everyday Experience

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 1; Fuller, Chapter

Week 5 – 2/15 – 2/19

**Synchronous:** Magic, Mystics and Mountains

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Geographies of the Mind: Shamans and Mountains

**Reading:** Erndl, Chapter 4 and 5

Week 6 – 2/22 – 2/26

**Synchronous:** Yoga, Philosophies of Transcendence and the Himalayan Masters

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Mountains, Mysticism and Transcendence

**Reading:** TBD

Week 7 – 3/1 – 3/5

**Synchronous:** Pilgrimage: Epic Journeys in Search of Truth

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Haridwar and Rishikesh: Priests, Pilgrims and Ritual

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 3; Erndl, Chapter 3

Week 8 – 3/8 – 3/12

**Synchronous:** Festivals and Music: Bringing the Gods to Earth

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Raj Jat, Epic Poetry and Performance of the Mahabharata

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 2; Fuller, Chapter 4

Week 9 – 3/15 – 3/19

**Synchronous:** Puja: Daily Worship and Ethical Practices

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Darshan: “Seeing God;” Arti: “Offering Fire.”

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 2; Fuller, Chapter 3

Week 10 – 3/22 – 3/26

**Synchronous:** Rites of Passage: Life Cycle Rituals., Ethics and Rebirth

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Sacred Threads, Marriage Vows and Funerals

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 2; Fuller, Chapter 6

**Essay Due**

Week 11 – 3/29 – 4/2

**Synchronous:** Pilgrimage to the River’s Source: Mythology, Philosophy and Geology.

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** *Chardham*: The Four Sacred Shrines

**Reading:** Eck, Chapter 3; Fuller, Chapter 9

Week 12 – 4/5 – 4/9

**Synchronous:** Gender, Devotion and Religious Life

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Priests, Power and Privilege

**Reading:** Fuller, Chapter 8

Week 13 4/12 – 4/16

**Synchronous:** Tibetan Buddhism in India and Nepal.

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Buddhism in Exile: The Dalai Lama

**Reading:** Gutschow, 7 and 8

Week 14 4/19 – 4/23

**Synchronous:** Religion, Ecology and Philosophy

**Asynchronous/Expeditions:** Environmental Activism as Moral Praxis

**Reading: TBD**

**Multi-media Module Project Due**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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