

Religion 202. Question sheet 2: Classical and Modern Hinduism.

NOTE: Please answer with schematic overviews, NOT in full sentences. Please do not type, but hand-write your answer

Fact Questions to study for the exam (required)

1. Define, relate one myth and give a short characterization of the iconography for each of the following classical Hindu gods: Viṣṇu, Śrī, Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, Hanumān; Śiva, Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa; Durgā, Kālī.
2. Define briefly the *varṇāśrama* system, indicate in which text it was systematically codified (give approximate dates), and what it was designed to be an answer to.
3. Define briefly what is Tantrism. Outline major characteristics for philosophy and praxis; indicate when it arose and what are its probable origins.
4. Define briefly what is Bhakti. Outline major characteristics for philosophy and praxis, and illustrate wherever applicable with the examples of Bhakti literature from your text book; sketch broadly Bhakti's historical evolution.
5. Make a list of the major challenges from the West that modern Hinduism is most concerned to respond to and exemplify with one modern grouping of your choice.

Comparison questions to help you digest the material (optional)

1. Explain the tension between asceticism and eroticism inherent in the figure of Śiva with reference to one myth and one type of iconographical representation of the god.
2. List the major goddesses on a scale of "auspicious" and "inauspicious". Compare with their marital status. What conclusions would you draw?
3. What does *mokṣa* entail for the *bhakta* and how does that compare to *mokṣa* for Yoga?
4. Give a contrastive comparison of Bhakti and Tantrism (refer to philosophy and praxis).
5. Make a contrastive comparison between two Hindu reform movements of your choice.

Discussion questions (optional)

1. Why is the *varṇāśrama* system said to be successful in reconciling asceticism and this-worldly concerns? Would you consider it successful? In which ways yes and which no?
2. List and discuss the pros and cons of the caste system compared to Western ideal of "egalitarian" society. How do you think a Hindu would answer your objections?
3. One of the themes of Rāmāyaṇa is about the link between personal *dharma* of the ruler and the common good. Give some major examples of the story that illustrate that point. Is, in your view, moral integrity necessary for good ruler?
4. Why does the story of Sītā's fire ordeal raise so much controversy? Can you imagine a similar situation in your own culture: movies/ real life? (In how far holds the parallel with a rape victim? How would a contemporary Western rape victim react? How do you evaluate Sītā's reaction and that of Rāma?)
5. Discuss the position of women in Bhakti and Tantra. Which system do you evaluate to be more empowering and why? Do you think Hindu women share your view?
6. Bhakti is often said to be a social reform movement. To what extent does that statement hold good in your opinion? How would you counter it?
7. In your opinion, which of the reform or modern Hindu movements you know about has responded best/in the most interesting way to the challenges of the West? Explain why.