HINDUISM 101
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A Brief Course On Indian And Hindu Studies in American Universities; PART ONE

EVER BEFORE HAVE HINDU AND INDIAN STUDIES BEEN SO EAGERLY AND INSIGHTFULLY PURSUED IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES, MUSEUMS AND CENTERS OF LEARNING. AT HARVARD, SMITH SYRACUSE, MICHIGAN, SANTA BARBARA, BERKELEY, CHICAGO, and a hundred other places, men and women of exceptional abilities have dedicated a lifetime of research that is revealing dimensions of the Hindu tradition previously veiled from Western (and even Eastern) eyes. These inquiries delve into Hindu humor, sexuality, art, mythology, language, poetry, philosophy and much, much more. There is an elite corp of explorers undertaking these studies and teaching them to thousands of college students. Leaning heavily toward the humanities, "Hinduism Today" interviewed 15 of the most prominent academics from Massachusetts to Hawaii, those whose field studies, books and exhibits are the bedrock of modern scholastic understanding of Indian culture. Their love of the Sanatana Dharma and a distinct kind of personal (not necessarily Hindu) spirituality surprised us. Some have embraced Hinduism as seekers; others were seduced by its sumptuous culture. Their effectiveness as interpreters and advocates of the Sanatana Dharma is in part due to their ability to stand astride East and West, and to live in the cracks between traditions. We hope the stories of what Hinduism has meant to them and what they have done for it will capture your imagination.

"Hindu myths are the most complex and intriguing in the world, extremely imaginative and not flowing in a doctrinal rut."

Wendy O'Flaherty is the University of Chicago's master mythologist and history of religions professor, a much-loved author of books on India's great mythic themes - among them works on Siva, Evil Folklore, Women and Dreams, Illusions and Other Realities (one she considers her best). She is working now on a Mahabharata translation and an exploration of the horse image in Indian literature. Asked how she became so deeply involved in things Indian, Ms. O'Flaherty said, "People in the West can discover their own myths by reading Indian myths. You have an

alternative other than the one dictated by birth and family connections. I find Hindu myths best answer the questions man asks, making it a great mythology. They are rich, enormously full of life - passion, humor, food, animal and sex." Of her own relationship to Hinduism: "I don't think an American can become a Hindu. I do think you can take over into your own life Hindu ideas. It's possible to remain an American - a Christian can remain a Christian or a Jew can remain a Jew - and still start thinking in tune with these [Hindu] formulations which are in some ways perhaps more compatible to you than the formulations of the systems with whose rituals you are stuck...I find the Hindu idea of reincarnation after death more convincing than the idea of heaven and hell, more satisfying than the idea that you go out completely. I think it's a more beautiful way to think about death. Also, the idea that there are many gods and not just one makes sense to me. And the idea that some of those gods are malevolent rather than benevolent is convincing, a better explicatory model. That there is a one god that is benevolent is a very nice idea, but it seems contradicted by what we know of human experience." On her future work: "Who really knows? Probably more of the same. I'm translating a big French Encyclopedia. I'd like to relearn Tamil and study Hebrew & Telegu."

"Just grasping Hinduism I've always found hard and elusive, spelled with an "e" - yet always tantalizing, always beckoning."

H. Daniel Smith considers himself fortunate to be one of the very few men in America who teaches exclusively the Hindu tradition. He takes "a visual approach" to this at Syracuse University in New York, where such undergraduate courses such as Introduction to Hinduism and Looking at Hindu Mythology are filled with iconographical slide shows that depict Hindu gods and goddesses as well as saints. He has a serious collection of Hindu posters and has presented them many times, weaving image and meaning together for attentive audiences. "Our effort is to take seriously the fact that so much of the Indian population is subliterate, not illiterate, and that very sophisticated doctrines and teachings are passed on in other ways - one being the oral code. But I'm taking the visual approach...I also give a course on Valmiki's Ramayana, which is a lot of fun. I'm teaching that right now. Graduate seminars range from textual studies to iconographic to cultic studies, of which our Religious Classics of Asia in the Spring will take up the Upanishads, Gita and the usual materials...I seem to be best known for having made some 11 movies in the Madras area maybe 15 years ago - a series of documentary films on Hindu rituals and celebrations called 'Image India: The Hindu Way.' But most of my 25 years of effort has been spent on Pancharatra Agama texts, which are medieval Sanskrit liturgical texts, from which I published two volumes of an Oriental Series. Then a couple of years back I returned to Ramayana studies, which I'm working on now." On his assessment of Hinduism today, as opposed to a decade or two back: "Years ago students seemed more ready for Hindu studies. Even the many movies - with

the possible exception of Gandhi - haven't made any lasting impression, certainly have not spilled over as I anticipated they might And the Festival of India is isolated in a few major centers, but Syracuse isn't seeing much of it Classes seem to be growing smaller, students seem more career oriented, more interested in their Walkman radios than in the world around them. Yet there are always a few exceptions, and the leaders in the classrooms are better trained than ever before."

"Indian religion covers every nutty, crazy type of thing, as well as the contemplative. No matter what you expect, you get something else"

Lee Siegel himself is a messenger of the unexpected - a nine-year veteran in the Department of Religion at the University of Hawaii who undertook a massive study of comedy in India. Dr. Siegel's several years in a heretofore neglected sphere will soon culminate in his serious book A Way of Laughter: Satire and Humor in Indian Culture. With a background in Indian religion and literature, he helps 400 undergraduates "meet their world religions requirement" but is really inspired by tiny graduate projects (such as one student's research on Mirabai). Asked about recent developments in his field. Dr. Siegel noted, "There are so many good people these days. Our [Indian studies] people used to be kind of flakey. But now they are extremely literate and rigorous. Nice, high-powered folks, with few real bastards. And a surprising number of really good women." He has published Vivisections, Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love and Fires of Love/Waters of Peace. This self-proclaimed Gauguin of Indian Studies (a reference to his island abode) told us, "India is the least of what I am, being ever exotic. I like it because it remains dazzling and not because I'm trying to find myself. My fourth grade teacher said 'Siegel you do India' when projects were assigned. I can still vividly see the pictures I had to paste up. 'Wow!', I thought, 'Look at those people all bathing in that river.' Then in high school I got hold of a copy of the Gita with its description of Krishna's million eyes. 'Wow,' I said again. In college it was fashionable and I got seduced." On Indian humor "My Indian friends have a great sense of humor, but no outlets except very privately. Humor is such a sensitive thing, and they worry about how it will be viewed by foreigners...I have met every cartoonist in India (all six of them). But humor is not taken seriously there, not idealized, so there it has no validity. Once in a bookstore I inquired about humor and satire, and was assured they did have books on Hume and Sartre!...Such a hierarchical society doesn't lend itself to public joking, since you can't speak as an equal but must be respectful to everyone. Of course, humor does happen privately, and I have found a wealth of never translated materials, classics. These give the underbelly of society, making fun of holy men or the Kama Sutra. Sikhs are the Pollacks or Portuguese of India. But the Punjabis are the only good joke tellers, the ones willing to talk dirty, something others suppress." Asked for an Indian joke: "You always hear the one about how to get Indian people to respect you: All you have to do is go around

muttering 'All is Brahma. All is Brahma.'" On what lies ahead: "I'm interested in Indian rope magic, so is my 11-year old son. It's a powerful metaphor. Maybe I'll go to India and do a history of that metaphor. The word there is maya, and the magician in India is he who has mastery over maya."

"I was sure I would never get bored with India, that there would always be something there to surprise and fascinate me, attract me and perhaps revolt me from time to time."

John Stratton Hawley divides his time between the East and the West - that is, between the East Coast (Columbia University) and the West Coast (University of Washington). Usually, he teaches comparative religion and Asian languages, but he is now on sabbatical and working for the National Endowment for the Humanities. Dr. Hawley (whose wife is a dance critic for Newsweek) is considered an American authority on Krishna, and many of his books over the years reflect this focus, including Krishna, the Butter Thief and At Play with Krishna. Current projects include a collaborated work (with Mark Juergensmeyer at Berkeley) called "Songs of the Saints of India," a critical edition and translation (following ten years of study and collaboration with Kenneth Bryant at Berkeley) called The Poems of Sur Das, and "Saints and Virtues." He describes this last work as, "A general volume on the relationship between sainthood and morality, virtue, a learning of values. It's interesting stuff, and I hope to have it to the publisher soon...In the Songs I'm interested in the shape of the poet-saints' life as remembered in the hagiographical literature and the impact these saints have made in the present day. For instance, in the case of Kabir, it's important for a Western reader to know that this is not just a 15th century figure whose poems are held in esteem in the same way that Shakespeare is, but that he becomes the focus of a rather large religious community that he is today recited in temples and revered, in some cases, as a sort of representation in this world of the Godhead. So it's important to show how their poems and their legends still live today in the lives of modern Indians." For his very complex editorial homework (he notes three good scholars have died trying to produce a critical edition of Sur Das poems), Dr. Hawley has enlisted the aid of Amdol mainframes and Sanyo PCs to organize over 150,000 lines of text running galleys off his Xerox 9700 Laserwriter and rushing materials back and forth to colleagues in California by modem. All that gee-whiz stuff has helped him to get through an "unusually prolific period following periods of incubation." Asked how he became involved in Hinduism: "I was always interested in religion, sort of part of the given machinery of my apparatus. My mother was a church organist and my father's father was a preacher. I had a hot/cold relationship [with Christianity], staying pretty faithful through high school But when I went away to college I never did darken the door of a church...I went to Union Theological Seminary on a fellowship, starting on languages again. Languages really change the way you

think...I came to a place that was genuinely culturally plural where my particular brand was no longer the majority brand. That was challenging. So when I went to Harvard I worked in comparative religion and since you had to specialize (and Diana Eck was telling me how wonderful India was), I started on Sanskrit and never looked back. It's been a wonderful involvement Also, I was fascinated with Vedanta in its various guises - that is, a theological tradition which didn't depend upon the notion of a personal divinity. The theology of the Self or of Brahma struck me as something to really be thought about I was attracted to India for those very intellectual reasons, but could see it was a culture with an enormously lively grassroots religion enveloping people's lives. I've ended up more interested in devotional religion than I might have anticipated when I first went" On the future: "I'm on my way to China soon. Want to get this edition of Sur done, to close that 10-year chapter of my life. One book I've toyed with writing would have to do with, how shall we call if 'complaining to God,' something important in the Hindu context."

"To me Hinduism has meant the challenge of clarifying to myself from day to day what Siva means".

Stella Kramrisch may be justly accused of doing more to promote the understanding of Indian art and culture in the West than just about any other person alive. Our interview with her touched such profoundly sensitive depths that the best parts should not be published. Born in Austria, young Stella moved to Vienna around age 12. A year later the avid reader found an open book on a table, one that "opened a gate to a new world." It was the Gita, translated into German by Schroeder, and it began a lifetime of devouring all things Hindu. At age 18 she became involved with the Theosophical and Anthroposophical Societies, and in college took to the study of Indian Art. She was a dancer at the time, and "the movements in Indian sculpture moved me so much." She was invited to Oxford in London to give her first public lectures in English (sponsors chided her for adding so many new words to the language). By chance, Rabindranath Tagore was in the audience, and it was he who took her first to India in 1922. Of her work: "It is based on monuments and the relevant Sanskrit texts, always supported by field studies and aiming at a definition of form and meaning of the sacred monuments of India. It has meant to me a clarification of creativity and religious experience." Her honors are beyond listing. Recent publications include Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village, The Presence of Siva, and The Great Cave Temple of Siva in Elephanta. Retirement from the University of Pennsylvania in 1969 only provided time to drive forward on creative (creativity is important to her) exhibitions, the most famous being her "Manifestations of Siva." On her current project as Curator of Indian Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art "I have been working frantically lately and am just finishing the catalog for 'Painted Delight,' an exhibition of about

140 Mughal and Rajput miniatures found in private and public collections. It's being shown January through April in 1986 in conjunction with the Festival of India." Here is a courageous and vivacious woman who continues to teach and publish with a vengence.

"The temple dancer embodies quintessentially a married woman's state, especially the auspiciousness of marriage. The study throws light on women as wives, not as daughters or sisters."

Frederique Apffel Marglin's love of Odissi dance-which she practiced and taught professionally in India lead her to know that little was known about traditional Indian temple dancers (Devadasis). And much of that was either conflicting or outright erroneous. So she spent 15 months of field work in and around the Jaganath Temple in Puri studying an institution that had been long misunderstood as sacred prostitution. Her book, Wifes of the God King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri will soon be published summarizing her study. "Devadasis danced in the temple dance-hall, not facing the Deity. Dancing behind closed doors, during the time of the food offering, which is considered sacred and cannot be watched, she would embody the Goddess, Devi...What is usually said about these women, namely that they used to be chaste and they fell under the influences of evil men and were forced into prostitution, is a neo-Hindu myth resulting from contact with the West...The Devadasis were made illegal in the South in 1947. It's very clear from the literature of the social reformers that they came to see these women as immoral. They use Christian language and Biblical images, seeing them as 'fallen women.' Of course the notion of the Fall is simply absent from Hinduism, so it is clearly Christian influence. This social reform movement was very effective, leading to legislation. But Puri was spared since the temple was headed by a Hindu king until 1963. The state government let it disappear, not by legislation but by benign neglect" Dr. Marglin noted that the temple dancers are still very much alive in Puri, carrying on the rituals today. As in earlier times, service, dedication and purity are prerequisites that are really more essential than the ability to dance. Devadasis must start before puberty, and may never marry or perform on a stage. In a wider context Dr. Marglin has done considerable work on the role of married women in Hindu culture: "At the marriage ceremony the bride is worshipped as Laxshmi or Shakti. Both bride and groom are worshipped- which is usually not mentioned due to bias...Fundamental to the understanding of the Devadasi as embodying the bride is her active sexuality, which is always there as part of her auspiciousness just as it is of the wife. The widow is not supposed to be sexually active, which would be inauspicious. Sexuality is itself auspicious, having to do with many things, including abundance, crops, harmony, prosperity and well-being. So, I argue that the Devadasis body is the power of the Goddess which is Shakti, female power, and that this is a shakta

ritual." Dr. Marglin teaches a course at Smith College, Massachusetts, in cultural anthropology, another on ritual and myth focusing on women (female initiations, birth and death) and another on Symbolic Reality of Women: Hindu and Western Traditions Contrasted. She has been instrumental in the production of "Given to Dance," a film on her work The future may bring a study of the cults of the Goddess in Orissa and, certainly, more on woman's true place in Hindu dharma.

"I find life richer all the time, and a great deal of that is due to the fine things I've discovered in the Indian tradition, which addresses the total being of man."

Troy Organ is 73 years old, and he's supposed to be retired. Instead he is, by his own admission, "a wild long distance runner. I call it my Dynamic Yoga and hold the national record for the senior marathon. I find running does something to one's consciousness." Dr. Organ speaks a lot of consciousness and other things both creative and profound. Oh yes, he is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Ohio University, has been five times to India, just finished two volumes of the Philosophy and the Self: East and West, just concluded a paper which asks "Suppose Plotinus Got to India," and is publishing a book titled Third-Eye Philosophy which includes a provocative essay on "Right Brain-Left Brain As a Clue to East-West Understanding" (India is on the right side). On his own encounter with Hinduism: "The reason I have been attracted to Hinduism for many, many years - and put off by Islam - is that the Hindu is willing to listen. Whereas in some other traditions I'm afraid the tendency has been to tell you the truth and you better listen I don't care for that approach…After finishing my doctorate on Aristotle and having had a little bit of existentialism, I had the feeling that something was still missing. One of the difficulties of Western philosophy is its concern with the human animal from the chin up, so intellectualistic, so essentialistic. I said to myself, surely there must be a philosophical tradition in which it wasn't necessary to have an outbreak of existentialism. I began thinking about Buddhism and studying it, particularly some work in Honolulu with D.T. Suzuki and the Zen approach. But I became increasingly disenchanted with Buddhism, especially its process approach. I then received a Fullbright to India and Saktiniketan for seven months near Calcutta… Later came across a book on the philosophy of Indian sadhana. This ma de such good sense to me. I was having great difficulty with my concept of a theistic god, finding what I wanted more in the concept of the integration of Being, Consciousness and Values - Satchidananda. I related this to Paul Tillich, of course, but found him unsatisfying. I was so impressed that in the Upanishads, especially the early ones, there was an amazing integration of Sat and Chid and Ananda. This made sense to me. As I moved out of theistic concepts, I still believed in the objectivity of values, that Truth, Reality and Value are inherent in this marvelous universe. Beauty and Goodness, I would say, are built into the world and it's too bad we often miss it Also, I'm very impressed with the way Hinduism has provided

for the four kinds of people through the four margas - jnana, bhakti, yoga and kriya. In other words the ways to Moksha are manifold. You don't have a straight and narrow one way. I like that very much...For me this way of life has held up under some trying experiences in my own life. Not every Western philosopher has been a great guy and I guess I'm enough of an American pragmatist to think that the kind of philosophy one holds ought to make a difference in one's life and one's attitudes and sense of values and joy of existence. And I see that in Hindus who know what they're doing."