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ENG 4850-001: Masterpieces of Indian Literature: A Thematic Study

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Course Description:
India is a land of diverse cultures, languages, religions, and civilizations. It is one of the world's oldest civilizations; its cultural heritage dates back to 3000 B.C. This course will introduce students to many of the major landmarks in the history of Indian literature. We will begin our journey by studying the Aryan ideology through (i) the Early Vedic literature, focusing on the hymns from the Rig Veda and selected verses from the Upanishads. From there we will move on to (ii) the Later Vedic literature or the Puranic literature. In this segment we will study selections from the two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. We will conclude the Vedic segment by reading selected chapters from the Bhagavad Gita.

From the Vedic, we will move onto the Classical period (also known as the 'Golden Age'), around 5th century A.D., when the tenets of Hinduism had got firmly established in India. From this period, we will study the dramatist, Kalidasa's, masterpiece Shakuntala.

Beside Sanskrit, the language of Vedic and Classical Literature, Indian Literature also found expression in several regional languages and dialects during the Medieval period (12th-17th cent. A.D.). This period was colored by attitudes to life expressed in Bhakti poetry. The characteristic feature of 'bhakti' is the depiction of an intense and passionate relationship with the divine. From this period, we will read the poems of Kabir, Mirabai, and Surdas.

The British rule in India (starting late 18th cent., early 19th cent.) ushered in the period of Indian Renaissance, which, in a way, was a period of response, both to western and Indian (native) traditions. Themes depicting the conflicts between Individualism and Reality, Realism and Reality, East and West, notions of 'Home' and the 'World', play a dominant role. From this period, we will read the writings of the noble laureate, Rabindranath Tagore and Premchand. Finally, we will conclude the course by reading the shorter fiction of some noted Post-colonial writers like, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai and others.

Course Requirements:
One class presentation on a single topic or work- 10%
One mid-term paper, 8-10 pages- 30%
One final paper, 12-15 pages: 50%
Active Preparation and Class Participation- 10%

Texts Required:
Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita. Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists.
Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Transl). The Song Of God: Bhagavad-Gita
Kalidasa. The Loom of Time.
Rabindranath Tagore. Gitanjali
---, Binodini.
Premchand. Deliverance and other Stories.
Mulk Raj Anand: Selected Short Stories.
Course Policies:
Discussion (participation) is an important component of this course. Your presence in class is important for everyone, but especially for you. More than three unexcused absences will affect your final grade. Three late appearances equal one unexcused absence.

Papers are due at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. For each day that the paper is late, the letter grade will fall by one full grade: an 'A' essay due on Friday will be a 'F' by next Thursday. ALWAYS MAKE COPIES AND BACK UP YOUR WORK!

Plagiarism Policy (English Department)
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism -- "The appropriation or imitation of the language, of ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) -- has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Information for Students with Disabilities
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accomodations, please contact the Co-ordinator of the office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Tentative Syllabus.

Week 1
1/14- Introduction to the Course
1/16- Introduction to the Aryan Ideology and Early Vedic Literature

Week 2
1/21- Selections from the Rig Veda
1/23- Upanishads--Selected verses from the Katha-Upanishad

Week 3
1/27- Introduction to the Later Vedic Literature
1/30- Ramayana from Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists

Week 4
2/4- Ramayana (continued)
2/6- Mahabharata from Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists

Week 5
2/11- Mahabharata (continued)
2/13- Bhagavad-Gita

Week 6
2/18- Bhagavad-Gita (continued)
2/20- Movie: India and the Infinite: The Soul of the People

Week 7
2/25 - Abhijnanasakuntalam from Kalidasa's The Loom of Time
2/27 - continued

Week 8

3/4 - Paper 1 due at the beginning of the class. Introduction to Mediaeval period and Bhakti Poetry.
3/6 - Bhakti Poetry continued

Week 9

3/11 - Introduction to Indian Renaissance and Rabindranath Tagore
3/13 - Tagore's Gitanjali

Week 10

3/25 - Tagore's Binodini
3/27 - continued

Week 11
4/1 - Premchand's Short Stories
4/3 - continued

Week 12

4/8 - Introduction to Indian Postcolonialism, Selected Short Stories of Mulk Raj Anand
4/10 - Modern Indian Short Stories by Anita Desai, Raja Rao

Week 13

4/17 - continued

Week 14

4/22 - Student Presentations
4/24 - continued

Week 15

4/29 - Student Presentations
5/1 Paper 2 due, Review