

RES 342/AST 342 Religious Pluralism in Practice: Kerala, India
Spring Semester 2013

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students – intellectually and actually – to a unique part of our planet where religions live peacefully and interactively side-by-side. Students will learn about the ways south Indian culture influences Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu traditions through classroom readings and discussions as well as through a 14-day trip to various religious sites in Kerala. To help students navigate the Kerala landscape they will be given brief instruction in the regional traditions and its language, Malayalam, prior to the trip.

COURSE RATIONALE

The general public is largely unaware of Kerala's rich religious pluralism precisely because it is peacefully conducted and, as such, not of interest to our war-obsessed media. Knowledge about Kerala is, however, important for those striving to work for and maintain hope in the ethical foundations and implications of everyday interreligious co-existence. By learning about and visiting the lived pluralism of Kerala we discover important aspects of interfaith exchange and understanding, processes that are highly integrated into everyday life. Students can begin to appreciate the ethical impact and rich complexity of daily religious exchanges in Kerala by reading books and articles; nothing, however, can take the place of firsthand exposure to its various expressions, forms, and practitioners.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1) Students will have enriched their understanding of world religions, religious ethics, and interfaith dialogue by firsthand exposure to a community that lives out their convictions and connections productively and peacefully. Participants will gain in empathetic understanding of religions and their cultural diversity by firsthand experience with traditions practiced on the other side of the globe.
- 2) Students will use international exposure to apply and expand upon previously acquired academic knowledge about south Indian culture and language, diversity in religious practices and perspectives, and interreligious/interfaith relations. Students will increase their capacity to think critically about media and popular representations of Indian – and other non-Western – cultures.
- 3) Upon returning, students will demonstrate their educational experience by connecting learning experiences from their India travel with their classroom learning and beyond. Students will represent the evolution of their knowledge, values, and skills from this experience in a formal reflection paper, travel video, and through on and off-campus presentations.

- 4) Most generally, students who push beyond their local context to experience other cultures through international education and travel build a strong foundation and confidence in their ability to engage in new and challenging opportunities for personal and professional growth.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This course will include a 14-day intensive trip from December 28th through January 14th, 2013. Most days will be spent visiting various religious sites around central Kerala with Rajagiri College in Kochi as our “home base.” In India, students will stay in a variety of accommodations on Rajagiri campus, at ashrams, a pilgrimage site, and in hotels while traveling from Kochi to Bharananganam, Kottayam, Kollam, and back to Kochi.

Students will engage in pre-trip preparation, post-trip reflection and further education through traditional classes, a production of a final paper, and presentations geared toward college and community audiences.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Books

Amritaswarupananda, Swami. 1994. *Ammachi: A Biography of Mata Amritanandamayi*
Daniel, Ruby. 2001. *Ruby of Cochin: An Indian Jewish Woman Remembers*

Dempsey, Corinne. 2001. Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India. *******Only buy if you can get a cheap used copy!!! Otherwise I will post required chapters on Moodle.**

Articles and book chapters to be posted on Moodle

Dempsey, Corinne. 2006. “Lessons in Miracles from Kerala, South India.” In *Popular Christianity in India, Riting between the Lines*. Ed Selva Raja and Corinne Dempsey.

Menon, Shreedhara. 2011. *Kerala History and its Makers*. (Selected chapters)

Chandersekara, Achamma. 2004. *Daughters of Kerala*. (Selected short stories)

Additional Suggested Resource for learning Malayalam

See following websites for a downloadable first-year university course on Malayalam:

<http://coerll.utexas.edu/coerll/taxonomy/term/153>

<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/malayalam/index.html>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Written Assignments

- *Travel diary* – Students will be required to keep journals while traveling, spending at least one hour each day on entries. Entries will chronicle significant observations and experiences as well as personal reflections and analyses of these experiences. Diaries will be graded on general daily upkeep and thoughtfulness of entries and represent 25% of student’s grade.

- *Guided reflection paper* – This paper will ask students to reflect more formally on their experiences in Kerala, making specific note of how firsthand exposure a) challenged or affirmed previous understandings of religion and religious dynamics in general, b) challenged expectations about Kerala's religious and cultural influences and exchanges, and c) peaked an interest in a particular aspect of religion, culture, or interfaith dialogue, worthy of learning more. This paper, 5-6 pages in length, represents 15% of student's grade based on thoughtfulness, organization, and writing excellence. Due January 22nd, the first class meeting upon returning to campus.
- *Post-trip video*: While traveling, students will take video and still shots of their encounters. Upon returning we will, as a class, compile our favorite images and film clips and edit them in video form to air on various Nazareth websites and beyond. This video group project, based on full participation in various dimensions of the project, will be worth 10% of student's grade.
- *Presentations*: Students will prepare poster presentations for the end-of-year celebration of international programs. Students will also offer presentations to community alliances and donors upon returning (TBA). Presentations are worth 10% of student's grade.
- *Final research paper* – Students will write final research papers based on a topic encountered while in Kerala, related to south Indian culture and religion. Papers can be further explorations of Kerala religious dynamics or they can engage in a comparison with similar dynamics in another part of the globe. This paper, 8-10 pages in length, represents 25% of student's grade, based upon clear presentation and documentation of research material, development of a paper thesis or argument, and technically accurate writing style. Students need to discuss with me their paper topics by April 3rd and turn in outlines and bibliographies by February 5th, produce an outline and bibliography by March 5th. Final paper is due March 26th.

Participation and attendance

- Students will be responsible for leading discussion during the spring semester's class meetings. Those responsible for a particular day are asked to write discussion questions and a general summary of the readings' most important points. All students are expected to come prepared and ready to engage in class discussion and class activities. On the final class meeting, students will prepare short presentations of their final research papers to share with the class. This segment of the student's grade, based on well-organized discussion leadership and presentation as well as general preparedness during class will amount to 15% of the student's grade.
- Attendance is expected for this course.

COURSE CONTENT

Session	Date	Topic and Readings
I	Sept 2hrs	Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction - Syllabus and itinerary review • General presentation of Kerala religion and culture (guest speakers?) • Begin Malayalam instruction
II	Oct 2 hrs	Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Film – Darshan: The Embrace</i> • Discuss reading • Continue Malayalam instruction • Complete visa applications Reading: <i>Ammachi: A Biography of Mata Amritanandamayi</i>
III	Nov 2 hrs.	Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety Video from CIE • Discussion of trip readiness • Field trip to Hindu temple (if not done already) • Continue Malayalam instruction • Discuss reading Reading: <i>Kerala History and Its Makers</i> (selections)
V	Dec	Trip Preparation Meeting as needed Field trip to Indian Restaurant
VI	12/31	Arrival in Kochi Jan 2 early a.m. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light touring, getting bearings of Kochi by visiting shops, trying out Malayalam, • Travel to nearby Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva, visit to Marxist Center in downtown Kochi.
VII	1/1	Trip to Fort Cochin Island and beyond <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk around island to see various sights such as Chinese fishing nets, Jewish Synagogue, St. Francis Church. • Also visit Bolghaty Palace, Santa Cruz Basilica, Dutch Palace, Dutch Cemetery
VIII	1/2	Visit to other religious and cultural sites in Kochi, TBA
IX	1/3	Trip to Palai District <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kurusimala ashram in the mountains to see mixing of Hindu

		<p>and Christian rituals, ashram life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Alphonsa pilgrimage site, museum, shrine, in Bharananganam • Visit to Mosque • Stay over at ashram or shrine, TBA
X	1/4	<p>Travel to Kottayam Town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get bearings in town center, • Visit churches, and temples with “sibling” ties in vicinity • Evening meeting with interfaith gathering
XI	1/5	<p>Day 2 in Kottayam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service activity with Pentecostal community, trip to orphanage in Thekkady mountains.
XII	1/6	<p>Travel to Kollam by train</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive at Mata Amritanandamayi Ashram • Darshan with Amritanandamayi • Activities TBA (yoga, meditation, Ayurveda)
XIII	1/7	<p>Visit Amrita University</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School of Social Work • Ayurveda Center • Mosque (TBA)
XIV	1/8	<p>Social work activity (TBA)</p>
	1/9	<p>Return to Kochi via backwater boat (possibly stay another night and go for beach trip)</p>
XV	1/10	<p>S.O.S. village</p>
XVI	1/11	<p>Religious/Cultural/Historical activity (TBA)</p>
XVII	1/12	<p>Religious/Cultural/Historical activity (TBA)</p>
	1/13	<p>Return home</p>
XVIII	Jan 22	<p>Start of traditional classes for the course, held every two weeks</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trip de-briefing, post-trip discoveries • Guided reflection paper due • Discussion of final projects, trip video
IXX	Feb 5	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of different models of religious pluralism and inter-faith exchanges • Work on trip video <p>Reading: Dempsey, Chapter 2 from <i>Kerala Christian Sainthood</i> Dempsey, Lessons in Miracles from Kerala, South India</p>

XX	Feb 19	Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of Judaism in India • Discussion of religio-cultural interchange • Final project outlines and bibliographies due Reading: Daniels, <i>Ruby of Cochin</i>
XXI	Mar 3	Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of gender and sanctity across religious divides: Amritanandamayi and St. Alphonsa Reading: Dempsey, Chapter 4 from <i>Kerala Christian Sainthood</i> Chandersekara, <i>Daughters of Kerala</i> (selections)
XXII	Mar 12	Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final class presentations/discussion of written projects • Poster and community presentations (TBA) • Finalize trip video