

Introducing World Religions

Student Essay Questions

Chapter 10 Hindu tradition

1. In bhakti worship two images for devotees are used: the cat and the monkey. The images suggest that salvation comes from God in two ways, as each mother carries her young. Kittens remain quiet and passive while being carried, whereas baby monkeys must hold their mothers while going from place to place. Discuss meaning of the "cat and monkey" analogy for God's salvation. Can you find some examples of cat or monkey types of religious practitioners in religious traditions other than the Hindu? Describe these examples in terms of the distinction between perfect surrender and active participation.
2. Research the sixteen Hindu saṃskāras (life cycle rituals). Compare and contrast them with the rites of passage in one of the Abrahamic traditions. How might assumptions about the nature of the person (viz. having rebirths or not) influence the life cycle rituals? Do you notice any aspects among the various rituals that appear to be universal, based on the human condition itself?
3. In a public correspondence published in *Young India* (January 1920) Tilak and Gāndhī exchanged words. Tilak said:

Politics is a game of worldly people and not of Sadhus" Gāndhī retorted, "With deference to Lokamanya [Tilak] I venture to say that it betrays mental laziness to think that the world is not for Sadhus. The epitome of all religions is ... nothing but a desperate attempt to become a Sadhu i.e. to become a gentleman in every sense of the term." (Gosavi, D. K. (1983) *Tilak, Gandhi and Gita*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 51-52)

What issue is at stake in the ethical debate between Tilak and Gāndhī? What implications for the use of violence in social activism are embedded in the respective views of the two men?

Chapter 11 Sikh tradition

1. How do you think the Sikh tradition managed to survive during periods of political adversity? What specific contributions of the various Gurūs and other Sikhs seem to have been the most effective at helping the Sikh tradition grow?
2. Nita Kumar voiced a concern of many South Asian scholars nowadays working in women's studies, saying they must "go beyond the positivist, orientalist, nationalist and other passé objectifying categorizations" that plague studies of subordinate groups. (Kumar, Nita (1994) *Women as Subjects: South Asian Histories*, Charlottesville, VA:

University of Virginia Press, 5.) Explain Kumar's objections to these various perspectives, and comment on why she might consider them to be outdated or "passé."

3. Compare and contrast the Sikh understanding of God (as presented in the Japjī prayer, for example) with the notion of God as defined in the Judaic, Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í traditions.

Chapter 12 Chinese traditions

1. What is involved in the Daoist practice of wu-wei? How have the notions of wu-wei and Dao impacted the Chinese attitude toward nature, politics, or the arts (including the martial arts)?

2. Name the *Five Classics* and *Four Books*, and discuss at least one key idea from each text that contributed to the formation of Confucian tradition.

3. The *Book of Changes* conveys an optimistic outlook on life. Discuss the hexagrams known as Limitations and Danger (see pages 317-18 in your textbook) in terms of this quote from Mencius about destiny (found on page 298 of your textbook):

Everything is destiny (*ming*). A man should accept obediently what is correct [in one's destiny]. Therefore, he who knows destiny does not stand beneath a precipitous wall. Death sustained in the course of carrying out the Way to the limit is due to correct destiny. But death under handcuffs and fetters is not due to correct destiny.