

The Ramayana

as Literature, Performance, Ideology

nana BaÅit ram åvtara ≥ Ram
incarnates in countless ways
ramayn st koiq åpara ≥≥ and there are tens
of millions of Ramayans.
(tulsidas, ramcirtmans, 1.33.6)
(Tulsidas, *Ramcaritmanas* 1.33.6)

(Indian Literature in Translation, fall 2000, 39:136/32:177)
1:05 - 2:20 T/Th, 468 Phillips Hall, 3 sh

Instructor: Philip Lutgendorf
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Note: Students with disabilities that may affect their participation in this course are encouraged to see the instructor privately to discuss their needs. He will make every effort to accommodate them.

Required texts for purchase (IMU Bookstore, Textbook Dept.):

Robert P. Goldman (ed. and trans.), *The Ramayana of Valmiki, Vol. 1, Balakanda*

Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas*

Paula Richman (ed.), *Questioning Ramayanas* (on order; expected in Sept.)

Required texts on reserve at Main Library Reserve, main floor:

“Ramayana as Literature, Performance, Ideology” (photocopied course anthology in 2 parts, hereafter referred to as “Anthology”)

Course Requirements

Reading assignments should be completed by the Tuesday meeting of the week for which they are assigned (except the first week). “Recommended” readings are optional (and not expected) for undergraduates, but strongly recommended for graduate students.

Writing Assignments are of two kinds: a weekly "**reaction paper**," and a final research paper. The "reaction paper" (to be handed in at the Thursday session of each week beginning with week 3, through week 13) is to consist of 1-2 typed pages of reactions to the week's reading(s). They are meant primarily to help you formulate thoughts about the readings to bring up in class, but they should be written in full sentences—not fragmentary notes. They may include comments on the style or content of the readings, questions about cultural concepts or vocabulary, opinions and mini "reviews," etc. You have considerable freedom in what approach to take, but should aim for a serious and thoughtful piece. In weeks for which multiple readings are assigned, you may select several to focus on in your reaction paper.

A **research paper** is due at the end of week 15 (Nov. 30). It should consist (for undergraduates) of 5-10 pages of original analysis (15-20 pages for graduate students), with references to assigned readings or other sources to support your arguments. Papers may be based on the list of topics provided with this syllabus, or on another topic of interest to you that is approved by the instructor. Please feel free to discuss paper topics with the instructor at any time during the semester. Written assignments will represent approximately 50% of the course grade (25% for reaction papers, 25% for research paper).

(An undergraduate wishing to take the course for “Honors” credit may do so by fulfilling graduate requirements.)

Exam The final examination is scheduled for Monday, Dec. 11th at 2:15 PM. It will be a two-hour exam consisting of short-answer and mini-essay questions, and will be worth approximately 30% of the course grade.

Attendance, Participation, and Oral Presentations Regular attendance, except in the case of excused absence, is a basic requirement of this course. Frequent absence will result in a significantly lowered final grade, irrespective of other course criteria. Class sessions will combine lecture and discussion, and students are expected to be prepared to participate in discussion of assigned readings. In addition, each student will be required to give **one oral presentation** during the semester. An oral presentation should last at least 10 minutes and should be based on one or more of the readings for that week. A sign-up sheet will be passed around early in the semester for this purpose. Attendance, participation, and the oral presentation collectively will be worth approximately 20% of the course grade.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 Introduction Aug. 22, 24

Reading: **Anthology, Selection 1**

V. Raghavan, "The Ramayana," (prose synopsis of Valmiki *Ramayana*), pp. 150-212

Week 2 Overview of Ramayana Tradition Aug. 29. 31

Reading: **Anthology, Selection 1, cont.**

V Raghavan, "The Ramayana," pp. 212-292.

Richman, *Many Ramayanas*, pp. 3-21.

Recommended: Goldman, *Ramayana, Vol. 1*, pp. 3-29, 41-81.

Week 3 Getting into *Balakanda* Sept. 5, 7

Reading: Goldman, *Ramayana, Vol. 1*, pp. , 121-183.

Week 4 Making sense of *Balakanda* Sept. 12, 14

Reading: Goldman, *Ramayana, Vol. 1*, pp. 184-269.

Richman, *Many Ramayanas*: Rao, "A Ramayana of Their Own," pp. 114-136.

Week 5 Intrigue and exile: *Ayodhyakanda* Sept. 19, 21

Reading: **Anthology, Selection 2**

Pollock, *Ramayana, Vol. 2*, pp. 79-183.

Recommended: Pollock, *Ramayana, Vol. 2*, "Introduction," pp. 9-24, 33-47 (on reserve).

Week 6 Bharata and Rama Sept. 26, 28

Reading: **Anthology, Selection 2, cont.**

Pollock, *Ramayana, Vol. 2*, pp. 184-222, 266-311.

Nabaneeta Sen, "Lady Sings the Blues: When Women Retell the Ramayana"
 Thomas Coburn, "Sita Fights While Ram Swoons"

Richman, *Questioning Ramayanas*: Nilsson, "Grinding Millet But Singing of Sita";
 Agarwal, "Two Poems on Sita"; Kishwar, "Yes to Sita, No to Ram."

Week 11 Performing the Ramayan: Ramlila Oct. 31, Nov.
 2

Reading: **Anthology, Selection 7**

Richard Schechner, "Ramlila of Ramnagar, an Introduction"

Linda Hess, "Ramlila: The Audience Experience."

Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, "Words Made Flesh," pp. 248-253, 267-282, 322-339

Recommended: Richman, *Questioning Ramayanas*: Richman, "The Ramlila Migrates to Southall."

special events: Nov. 2, slide lecture in class by Richard Schechner

Thurs. Nov. 2, Dinner for class and Prof. Schechner, 911 Iowa Ave. 7:00 PM

Week 12 Performing the Ramayana: Devotion, Pilgrimage, Video Nov. 7, 9

Reading: Richman, *Many Ramayanas*: Mumme, "Ramayana Exegesis in Tenkalai Srivaisnavism" pp. 202-234;

Lutgendorf, "The Secret Life of Ramacandra of Ayodhya," pp. 217-234

Richman, *Questioning Ramayanas*: Hess, "Lovers' Doubts: Questioning the Tulsi Ramayan."

Anthology, Selection 8

Peter van der Veer, "Ayodhya: Time and Place"

Lutgendorf, "All in the (Raghu) Family"

Week 13 More alternative readings and dissenting voices Nov. 14, 16

Reading: Richman, *Many Ramayanas*: Seeley, "The Raja's New Clothes," pp. 137-155;

Richman, "E. V. Ramasami's Reading of the *Ramayana*," pp. 175-201;

Lamb, "Personalizing the *Ramayan*," pp. 235-255.

Richman, *Questioning Ramayanas*: Lutgendorf, "Dining Out at Lake Pampa";

Narayanan, "The Tamil Ramayana and its Muslim Interpreters."

Recommended: Richman, *Questioning Ramayanas*: Rao, "The Politics of Telugu Ramayanas";
Stewart and Dimock, "Krittibasa's Apophatic Critique of Rama's Kingship."

Thanksgiving Recess (no class on Nov. 21)

Week 14 Performing the Ramayana: Nationalism and Politics Nov.
28, 30

Reading: **Anthology, Selection 9**

Richard Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot,"

Philip Lutgendorf, "Interpreting Ramraj,"

Madhu Kishwar, "In Defense of Our Dharma."

Recommended: Sarvepalli Gopal (editor) *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi Issue*. Introduction, and K. N. Pannikar, "A Historical Overview," pp. 11-37.

Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52 (May 1993), pp. 261-297.

Nov. 28: screening of Anand Patwardhan's documentary film, "*Ram ke nam*" ("In the Name of God")

Recommended feature film: HEY! RAM (Kamal Haasan, 2000, Hindi with English subtitles). Screening on Nov. 27 at 7:00 in 221 Chemistry Building

Week 15 Concluding thoughts Dec. 5, 7

Reading: Richman, *Many Ramayanas*: Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Ramayanas," pp. 22-49.

Some possible topics for research papers

In addition to these, many other topics are possible. Please meet with the instructor to discuss your interests. He will be happy to help you develop a paper topic and will suggest additional sources, if appropriate.

1. Select a single episode from the *Ramayana* and compare its treatment in two or more literary versions of the story; e.g., Valmiki, Tulsidas, Kamban, *Adhyatma ramayana*, etc. What similarities and differences do you find? What do the different storytellers choose to highlight or ignore? What attitudes and interpretations do they reveal?
2. Select a single character or pair of characters and compare her/his/their portrayal in two or more literary versions of the story. What do the different storytellers choose to highlight or ignore? What attitudes and interpretations do they reveal? Do the portrayals show change across time and geographical regions?
3. The *Ramayana* story has sometimes been called a *dharma shastra*—a "textbook on dharma." What does it teach about this central concept in Hindu culture? What is the nature of dharma as revealed in the *Ramayana*? Do characters (or storytellers) ever disagree about its nature?
4. Modern academic scholarship largely maintains that Rama "grew" through the centuries as a religious figure, changing from an essentially human hero to a god. Traditional Indian scholarship has never favored such an idea, arguing instead that Rama's divinity was understood and expressed in different ways by different tellers. Which position do you find more persuasive? Defend it with specific examples from *Ramayana* texts.
5. Select one or more of the following labels and use it as the basis for an analysis of the *Ramayana*. You may argue that the epic either is or is not (or *both* is and is not) what the label implies (be sure to define the label carefully):

liberal/progressive	conservative/repressive	devotional
patriarchal		
feminist	historical	mythological
fatalistic		realistic
6. Three important categories of forest-dwelling beings whom Rama encounters are sages, rakshasas ("demons"), and monkeys. Select one or more of these "species" and describe its characteristics in detail, using specific examples from *Ramayana* texts. Are all the members of a single category alike? What qualities do they seem to share, or what individual differences do they display? Are "good" and "bad" characters found in each category?
7. "The *Ramayana* presents a 'black and white' picture of the world, in which good and evil are clearly defined, and there is little moral ambiguity." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Defend your point of view with specific examples drawn from at least two *Ramayana* texts.

8. How are central themes of the Ramayana reinterpreted through popular performance? Examine this question by focusing on one of the realms of "cultural performance" studied in the course: devotional traditions; pilgrimage; storytelling and folk plays; television; socio-political movements and Hindu nationalism.

Additional Resources on Reserve

The library catalogue contains hundreds of titles related to many aspects of the *Ramayana* tradition. Many of these works may be useful as resources for additional research outside the course readings, though some are of poor quality (if in doubt, consult instructor). The following texts are highly recommended as possible aids in researching paper topics. Since more than one student may wish to use them, they are being placed on reserve in the Main Library, at the Reserve Desk (south end of main floor):

F. S. Growse (translator), *The Ramayana of Tulasidasa* (a complete translation of the Hindi epic *Ramcaritmanas*; Victorian English, but readable), PK1947.9.T83 R313 1978

George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz (translators), *The Forest Book of the Ramayana of Kampan* (Book three of the classical Tamil epic) PL4758.9.K27R35213 1988

W. D. P. Hill (translator), *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama* (a modern translation of the *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulsidas), PK2095.T8 R313

Sheldon I. Pollock (translator), *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. 2, *Ayodhyakanda*. BL1139.22.E54 vol. 2

Sheldon I. Pollock (translator), *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. 3, *Aranyakanda*. BL1139.22.E54 vol. 3

Rosalind Lefeber, *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. 4: *Kiskindhakanda*. BL1139.22.E54 vol. 4

Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (translators), *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. 5, *Sundarakanda*. BL1139.22.E54 vol. 5

N. Raghunathan (translator), *Srimad Valmiki Ramayanam*, Vol. III. (*Yuddha* and *Uttara kandas*) BL1139.22.E54 1981 vol. 3

Swami Tapasyananda (translator), *Adhyatma Ramayana* (a complete Indian-English translation of this influential devotional-philosophical retelling), BL1140.4.B7342 A3413 1985

The Ramayana is one of the largest ancient epics in world literature. It consists of nearly 24,000 verses (mostly set in the Shloka meter), divided into seven Kandas (books) and about 500 sargas (chapters). In Hindu tradition, it is considered to be the adi-kavya (first poem). It depicts the duties of relationships, portraying ideal characters like the ideal father, the ideal servant, the ideal brother, the ideal wife and the ideal king. Ramayana was an important influence on later Sanskrit poetry and Hindu life and culture. The Ramayana is an ancient Indian epic, composed some time in the 5th century BCE, about the exile and then return of Rama, prince of Ayodhya. It was composed in Sanskrit by the sage Valmiki, who taught it to Rama's sons, the twins Lava and Kush. At about 24000 verses, it is a rather long poem and, by tradition, is known as the Adi Kavya (adi = original, first; kavya = poem). Rama, hero of the Ramayana, is the ideal son & king, Sita the ideal wife. Rama marries Sita. When the princes had grown up some, the sage