

# What is Hinduism? Part 2

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hindu, hinduism, religion, hindus, ramayana, ram, caste, dalit, practices, hindu traditions, people, nerds, india, religious, hindu nationalism, folks, contemporary, sanskrit, frankly, traditions

## SPEAKERS

If You Don't Know, Now You Know, Megan Goodwin, Dr. Dheepa Sundaram, Dr. Shreena Gandhi, Bonus Ending, Simpsons, A Little Bit Leave It, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst

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Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

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Megan Goodwin 00:40

What's up, nerds? Hi, hello! I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, and gender!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:47

Hi, hello! I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia. Hi, helloooo, Megan!



Megan Goodwin 00:57

\*giggles\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:58

Are you ready for another episode on Hinduism in this EPIC season of: HISTORY OF THE WORLD, RELIGIONS PART ONE?



Megan Goodwin 01:07

I am! I think... I think? No, I am, I am. I am. Yes. I can maybe do with a semi-review and then like, a sense of what comes next? It has been a REALLY long semester, and it's not over yet??



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:17

As-As as you wish.



Megan Goodwin 01:21

Oh, my sweet Weslie.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:22

\*laughs\*



Megan Goodwin 01:23

What have we done?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:26

Well, last time, we tried... not to get through any forests, but to answer "What is Hinduism?" by talking about plurality of Hindu traditions, how caste affects definitions of Hinduism, the practice of Hinduism, and more, and I did a little bit on the Ramayana, one of the major Sanskrit epics to show that plurality just-just a wee little bit! Is that-- Is that enough of a tiny little semi-review for now?



Megan Goodwin 01:54

Yes, but now I want to know if there are any rodents of unusual size in the Rama... Ma? Ramayana? Ramayana?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:01

Yeah. Rodents of unusual size?



Megan Goodwin 02:04

\*laughs\* Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:04

I don't... I don't think so. There ARE bears that talk.



Megan Goodwin 02:08

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:09

And there is obviously a monkey army. I mean, duh.



Megan Goodwin 02:11

Yeah, duh!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:12

Can't go anywhere without a monkey army.



Megan Goodwin 02:14

\*giggles\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:14

But rodents of an unusual size? I don't think so. But I could be wrong. It's a super long epic!



Megan Goodwin 02:19

\*laughs\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:19

And lord knows I haven't read the whole thing in a long time.



Megan Goodwin 02:24

Okav! Fair enough. How many monkey armies were-- \*laughs\* -- will there be?

Okay. Fair enough. How many monkey armies were ... laughs ... will there be.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:29

Plenty. Plenty of monkey armies.



Megan Goodwin 02:32

Ilyse! You know that the answer is "one for now, but they'll train others--" come on, man.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:36

I know, but they were already trained and I couldn't make my Simpsons brain connect to my Sanskrit brain and I'm sorry.



Megan Goodwin 02:42

Fine, fine, I forgive you. I am satisfied! And more importantly, I assume that our listeners on this episode would maybe love it if we got to the point! If they want to hear the other episode, they could, like, listen to it?? Maybe pause this one and go back? Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:56

I love it when your firm but fair with our nerds, Goodwin.



Megan Goodwin 02:59

\*giggles\* Boundaries are love. I do what I do.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:03

Alright. So, on that note, let's get moving, since we have yet another jam packed episode.



Megan Goodwin 03:08

Monkey packed.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:08

\*laughs\*



Megan Goodwin 03:11

Alright! Wait, wait, no. Before we travel to whatever land of Hindu traditions that would no doubt shock and awe me, I want to tell the nerds about today's incredible guest experts. We will be joined in this episode by not one, but TWO incredible scholars, Drs Shreena Gandhi and Dheepa Sundaram. Dr. Gandhi is a Fixed Term assistant professor of religious studies at Michigan State University and is an expert on religion and race in the Americas, with a focus on Hindu communities. Her work often discusses race and yoga. Dr. Sundaram is Assistant Professor of Hindu Studies, Critical Theory, and Digital Religion at the University of Denver. Her work focuses on the formation of Hindu virtual religious public-- how the internet fashions new canon for Hindu religious practice. They are also both Sacred Writes alums, and smart, smart ladies, so they are both going to introduce themselves later on. But I am just so freakin' honored that they are lending their voices and their expertise to us today.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:10

Me too. In that case, we should see LESSON PLAN: on ICE!



Megan Goodwin 04:18

\*snickers\* So stupid. I love it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:19

Last time, we talked about Hindu traditions for two reasons. First, because Hindus comprise a major population in the world and yet, at least here in the States, few folks actually know what Hinduism is or what Hindus do. And second, we said, because Hindu traditions are a fascinating place to see how religion is what people do, how "religion," in scare quotes, is related to imperial projects, and how religious nationalism functions. Last time we did more history, fewer contemporary examples. I was-- You were so happy. -- so happy. Today... \*sighs\*



Megan Goodwin 04:53

\*laughs\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:02

We're going to focus more on the contemporary and less on the historic.



Megan Goodwin 05:06

Hooray!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:06

But I want to remind everyone from the jump, that Hindu traditions are vast, complex, and changing, even when folks claim the opposite. You see, those claims are themselves, well... they're claims that create change, and we're going to talk more on that in a minute. So today, our lesson plan (on ice) is relatively but deceptively simple. How do Hindus do what they do today, and where can we specifically see plurality (even when the world religions model asserts singularity or homogeneity)?



Megan Goodwin 05:41

So, Hinduism: what is it doing? What are they doing? What... How do Hindus do the Hinduism? In lots of different ways.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:52

That's basically it, yeah. Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 05:53

Cool. Cool, cool, cool. Alright! That brings us to the 101: on today-- \*clicks tongue\* --the section where we do professor work. IRMF, let me take up this script that you have beautifully written for us. I have taught about religion since 2008? I guess? In some capacity, I have several many degrees in religion or religious studies. And truly, I never had to take even one single class-- even, like, half a class on South Asian religions broadly, Hinduism specifically-- certainly not-- again, I have only that "The Problem of World Religions" class that I took in the theology school at Drew. So, I have-- well, I mean, I have a lot of questions, but two for today. One, why do we care about contemporary Hindu practices versus historical Hinduisms? And then two, how can we even talk about, like, Hinduism as A thing, given you keep saying how much plurality there is?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:51

Those are excellent questions, Megan!



Megan Goodwin 06:53

Thanks, you wrote them!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:55

And let me take them in order!



Megan Goodwin 06:57

\*laughs\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:57

First-- listen, you know I love historical facts and trends, and you-- like, literally you, Megan, and I assume our longtime listeners at this point-- also know that, frankly, my entire intellectual project is historical legacies in today's world. That's just how my brain works. The shin bone's connected to the knee bone, etc. So for me, one of our catchphrases at this point is actually a really good way to answer your question. Religion is what people do. This particular catchphrase is one that I borrowed for the pod from my classrooms. And I apply this-- religion is what people do-- in every single era we study, or **I** study, period. But listen, I'm not dumb. When we say that, when we say "religion is what people do," most of us, you know, listening right now, are bounded in time and space to, like, this moment right now?



Megan Goodwin 07:49

Allegedly.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:50

Our go-to thought isn't, therefore, like, 1546. So when I say religion is what people do, I assume our listeners, or my students, are imagining people doing something like, right here, right now. So thinking about contemporary practices is, like, frankly, just a useful way for us to get our nerds to SEE what people do, like, with video, or images, or in their mind's eye, since this is an audio medium.



Megan Goodwin 08:16

\*laughs\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:17

And more importantly, I assume, frankly, far more where your brain lives, Goodwin, contemporary practices actually impact all of us. And that might sound absurd-- how do Dalit, or uncastrated, or... ugh, untouchable (which we're going to get to that word in a hot second)... How do Dalit practices, for example, affect us, two white ladies, in the United States?



Megan Goodwin 08:40

Is this a butterfly effect scenario? Are you pitching a butterfly effect scenario? What... mm. What's happening? What?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:47

No, I mean, I'm not-- or am I? No, I'm not. I'm super not. There are not multiple timelines, we are not, like, rolling a multi-sided die, we are not butterfly effecting, but I AM trying to say that those Dalit ritual practices contribute to how Hindu traditions are lived, right now, and that IS political. That impacts economic systems, and that can tell us something about access to things like clean water, and toilets! It can tell us a lot about identity, fluidity of practice, even experiences of violence. So, like you and I have said a million times now, religion is never just religion, and so thinking about contemporary practices helps us understand not THE world, in some grand sense, but OUR world-- like, this literal place that we're sharing right now.



Megan Goodwin 09:36

Yes. Yes. All of that. Yes. As you know, I am really interested both in religious innovation and in how religion is politics and politics are religious. Obviously, that's definitely true in what's now the United States, but I also a little bit know that it's true in India, and we're going to be drawing a lot of our examples from India for folks who claim Indian heritage today, even though we know, nerds, that Hinduism is NOT limited to India, or even South Asia. Which I guess brings us back to my second question: can we even think about, like, Hinduism as A thing if there's SO much plurality in it?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:16

Well, I mean, \*sighs\* this is a big question for scholars of South Asia-- all of it, NOT just India. And scholars of religion AND scholars of Hindu traditions--



Megan Goodwin 10:25

Hey, can I--



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:26

Yeah!



Megan Goodwin 10:27

Can I ask a question that's maybe a dumb question, but... I don't know, help a sister out. When we're talking about, say, South Asia, where are we talking about?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:34


Oh, boy. Okay. My insides hurt. But you are correct. South Asia is comprised of many nation-



states. If you can imagine a map-- since, again, audio medium--

 M Megan Goodwin 10:44


Yep, yep.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:45


--we are thinking about what looks like the subcontinent of India. So, that peninsula that juts out into the Indian Ocean. But it's not just India! So, Pakistan is there, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives-- like, all of those places, and then, depending on who's in charge of deciding what counts as Asia, as compared to the Middle East, some folks would include Afghanistan. Other folks, when they're deciding between South Asia and Southeast Asia, might include Burma or Myanmar, and some of the countries that were historically connected to the subcontinent by rulership. So, it's flexible, but yeah. That's the region we're talking about.

 M Megan Goodwin 11:36

Okay! That's helpful, thanks!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:39


Yeah! Don't get me started, because we could talk about, for days, how like, depending on where we are at war, then the US classifies Pakistan as, like, "the Middle East," because like, Middle East equals Muslim. It's a whole thing, gang. Go Google what I've written before.  
\*laughs\*

 M Megan Goodwin 11:54

\*laughs\* Please see my published works. Anyway!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:57

But I will say that lots of people use South Asia and India interchangeably, like, mistaking one nation-state for the whole region, which is just, it's just bad. It's bad geography, it's bad history, it's bad politics.

 M Megan Goodwin 12:08

Good! Let's not do that.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:10

Cool. So there's a lot of folks-- including Hindus themselves-- who've used this argument of plurality, which you're citing here, to argue that their specific lineage, like, their particular neck of the Hindu woods, is actually its own thing and its own religion. So there have been, like, lawsuits about this.



Megan Goodwin 12:29

Huh!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:29

And the reason for THAT has usually been, like I just said, about legal definition, which, you know, in a nation-state, usually means access to more freedoms, or legitimacy in the eyes of various state authorities, like, the courts are, like-- and providing all sorts of things, like access to divorce, or property rights, or whatever.



Megan Goodwin 12:48

Okay, A.) I'm super excited about that, because you know that is my entire jam and B.) I see you teasing our next episode on religion and law. Well played.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:57

Uh, yeah, yeah. You know how I do. But I think we are meant to follow the naming here. So, we take seriously folks who call themselves Hindu to be Hindu, period, the end.



Megan Goodwin 13:07

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:07

So I want to be clear that even when some Hindus, out loud, say that other Hindus don't count, that they are "not Hindu," if those Hindus say "Wait a minute," we... like, our response, you and my response, is "neat! This is an internal debate between Hindus."



Megan Goodwin 13:26

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:26

Our response is NOT, for example, that one side of this argument is correct.



Megan Goodwin 13:32

Yeah, no, no.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:33

That's big British and, frankly, German Orientalist energy, which I like to avoid like the plague, or the Coronavirus.



Megan Goodwin 13:40

Yeah, fair enough. Let's mask up. Word. We wash our hands, literally and figuratively, of that nonsense. Okay!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:47

Totally.



Megan Goodwin 13:47

So, we call people what they want to be called! Forever and ever, the end. We also recognize the imperialist history that lumped all of these practices into one thing and only one thing, AND we recognize how actual Hindus, among other actors, also argue, agitate, and create definitions within and beyond the system. Because like, while there's obviously so very much imperialism here, there is never a moment when Hindus lack full agency. Hindus are acting, defining, and redefining all the time.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:18

Infinity percent, yes. Yes. And like, I'm really interested in the relationship between power systems-- so how did Brahmins, at the very top of the caste system, and British officials, famously NOT Hindus, at the very top of their particular political system-- how did those two systems BOTH come to influence how Hindu traditions evolve? Right? Like, that's a question I'm super excited about. But that's not the only way to think about religious practice, even if that question is part of my expertise. There are other experts thinking about this question of power systems and definitions differently than I do.



Megan Goodwin 14:56

—  
Alright, alright. Noted. Also, like duh. You can't do all the things. What does this mean practically, though? Like I have been told, I have, in fact, witnessed with mine own eyes, that you cannot handle a theory if it does not have a case study, so like, I'm gonna need you to, like, give me some... some case studies to ground this highfalutin theory.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:22

I would like for the record to call attention that I couldn't even write it in the script. Like there are-- there are-- there are footnotes in our script, which-- for whom?! We're not going to say them! Why did I do that?! Anyway.



Megan Goodwin 15:33

It's fine! You work it out.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:34

\*laughs\* I'm going to give our nerds a little consistency from last time. So instead of the footnotes that I made for us and us alone, apparently-- And for us, I mean me. For me. Like, I put them for ME. To give our nerds a little consistency-- so, if you happen to listen to episode 406, "What is Hinduism? Part 1," we're going to draw from those same examples so that, you know, there's like, a whole unit or something. Almost like we have experience with pedagogy! So those cases are going to be the contemporary Ramayana, or uses of Ram, to think about nationalism. And I also want to make sure we're talking about caste and caste practices, or casteism. So we're also going to talk about Dalit traditions for a hot minute. There's obviously infinity that could be said about any iteration of contemporary Hindu versions, which is why we'll stop with those and let our guest experts Dr. Gandhi and Sundaram take their own-- add their own takes.



Megan Goodwin 15:42

\*chuckles\* The invisible footnotes. Yeah. Yes. Great. I love this plan! So, from what I remember, the Ramay-- Ramayana? I can never do that-- is an epic text-- literally an epic, not like radical, tubular, epic man-- like it's, it is a massive story and it is composed in Sanskrit, but also popularized in song, in dance, in vernacular, spoken languages, not only in what's now India, but across South and Southeast Asia. And, from what I remember, the epic follows Ram, who is main dude, incarnation of Vishnu, an avatar, if you will-- -- as-- thank you-- as he has to do his religious duty, or dharma, as king, husband, son, and leader. And then his wife, Sita, gets kidnapped by a demon king, Ravana. Although, from what I understand, that's a little politically dicey, but we'll come back to that. And there's a monkey god I love because, hi hello, his name is Hanuman, and, so, you know, I love monkey, and you said that a lot of people really question how and if Ram is the hero or the anti-hero, good guy or the bad guy, and all of this. So like, I love an epic, and I love a monkey, so, truly, what's not to like about this story?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:14



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:14

You got it. Oh my god. Oh my god, you learned SO much and I am SO proud??



Megan Goodwin 17:57

Thank you, thank you!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 17:58

Yup, those are the basics. Good work. And from those basics, nerds, I'm going to spin out now into how this gets used contemporarily. And I'm going to do this in two ways! And you've noticed that I am really in the thick of it, because I think this is the third time I've given you a two-point list.



Megan Goodwin 18:13

Mhm!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:13

One is that we're going to think about nationalism and Hindutva specifically, and the other, number two, is to think about Dalit practices. Let's start with Dalits first, actually.



Megan Goodwin 18:23

Okay. This is another place where I would like to pause and say I'm pretty sure that I know what this word means, but what if you defined it for our nerds?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:32

You got it.



Megan Goodwin 18:33

Thanks!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:34

Dalit-- \*Secret Word of the Day\* -- and some people might say DAH-LEAT, because that's how it's spelled in English, but, you know-- Dalit is the name of folks from what, frankly, in the in the West and parts of South Asia, were known as untouchable, the lowest caste in the system. And for many folks who think about caste critically, you might even judge that so as to say not the

lowest caste, but really, a caste so low as to literally be outside the system. Unranked, unseen, unvalued. So formally, and then in the nation-state of India today, Dalits supposedly have some legal benefits as, quote, unquote, "scheduled castes." It's a protected legal group that acknowledges how horrific their systemic oppression has been. But that legal category is imperfect and often problematic for all sorts of reasons, and I'm not going to get into that now. But, in other places like the US, there are also movements to include caste and particularly Dalit caste folks among other kinds of social contracts for legal protection. So when we see, say, like, an equal opportunity hiring statement, there are movements afoot to add caste to that long list of things that we acknowledge are systemically part of oppression and oppressive histories.

 Megan Goodwin 20:02


Right. And if I'm understanding correctly, which I only know a teeny tiny bit about, but this is an issue, again, that's not just happening in India or in the region of South Asia, but has affects even in, like, American businesses. I know this is been an issue in, like, Silicon Valley.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:18

Yep. Absolutely. There are really, like, HUGE pushes right now to get caste recognized in the US as a legitimate form of oppression because low-- historically low caste folks, even after immigrating, and even after being here for quite a long time, are experiencing the effects of the system of oppression known as casteism.

 Megan Goodwin 20:42

Mm. Which \_\_\_\_\_, like, it's not helping.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 20:46

Yes. I would, I would-- yes, I would agree with that. Dalit, though is a confusing term, because I want to be clear, like, we're talking about Hinduism in this episode and while these folks are overwhelmingly Hindu, caste is not just a Hindu thing, particularly in the nation-state of India historically, because there are Muslims, and Christians, and Sikh Dalits, too. So Dalit--


 Megan Goodwin 21:09

Wait okay. I did not-- I did not know that. Oh! Seriously?


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:09

Yeah. \*laughs\* It's a system, right? So, when you-- when you have a system that exists in that way, even if your religion was specifically founded to be outside of the caste system, there are ways that you either still fit into the caste system, or you're assigned a caste, or you can't


convert out of that caste. It's super, super complicated and in the homework, I've got some good assignments for folks if they need to untangle how-how hard it is.

 Megan Goodwin 21:39

It is hard! Cause, like, in my class, we talked about Dalit folks converting to Buddhism, and that allows social mobility, but apparently it's more complicated than that. There's so much to know! Agh!

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:51


I know!

 Megan Goodwin 21:52

Sorry.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:52


The world is wondrous and impossible.

 Megan Goodwin 21:55

\*sighs\* Go.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:56

But I just want our listeners to know that Dalit activism, in many ways, centers on this term, right? It centers on the caste term, because it's connecting uncasted, oppressed groups, frankly, across religions, even if Hinduism is primary in that space. Right? So the too long, don't care of all this-- though you should fucking care because systemic oppression hurts all of us-- but the too long, didn't listen of this-- and again, I'm focusing on India because of nation-state laws-- in a Hindu hegemony, the caste system is ubiquitous, even if it is technically illegal, and the status of the lowest ranking group matters in every single way, but it also creates some interesting religious practices, nuances and traditions. And that's kind of where I want us to head.

 Megan Goodwin 22:43

Okay, I like that! Also, I'm gonna need you to give me an example, because, again, this sounds like a lot of theory with nothing to ground it, and how dare you, frankly.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 22:51

\*laughs\*



Megan Goodwin 22:53

So like, okay. Last time, you said that epic texts and the Ramayana exist in Sanskrit, which is a language that's often associated with high caste Hindus. So, how are Dalits part of these practices?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:06

Okay! A few ways. I'm going to pick the most obvious one because, you know, time, and because it's illustrative! Not singular, though, right?



Megan Goodwin 23:15

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:15

So I'm thinking-- immediately when you ask that question, I am thinking, here, of the Ramnamis, a movement of Hindus that began with the Chamar community in what is now Chhatisghar, India. So, Chamars are one of many scheduled castes. They are Dalits. This group is known for using "ram--" ramnami literally means the name of Ram, like, you hear the word nam, name, in there-- Ramnami, literally name of Ram, and by "using Ram," I mean ritually as well as physically. So they're focused on Ram! Avator of Vishnu.



Megan Goodwin 23:48

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:22

Name of the text, right?



Megan Goodwin 24:22

Mhm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 24:26





One of the reasons this is a better known movement, despite its small size, is because Ramnamis are known for their elaborate Ram tattoos. The Ram tattoos are becoming less and less popular due to economic factors, discrimination, etc., but for a very long time, Ramnamis were easily identifiable because the word Ram was written everywhere on Ramnamis' bodies, particularly elders. So faces, arms, legs, you name it. We're talking, like, stick and poke tattoos, head to toe. Many Ramnamis also wear shawls that are similarly block printed with "Ram" over and over again with no spaces-- it's not like big in one part, small in another-- this is like, like a one size font kind of block printed all over a shawl that would be wrapped around a body, sometimes a sari, or a similar, like, salwar kameez kind of thing-- full clothed. So your whole body would be printed with this text, and then your clothing would also be printed with this text, particularly in these shawls. So, you're marking your identity, and then also, you're serving as a ritual object.



Megan Goodwin 25:00

Okay, this is fascinating for a number of reasons. First and foremost, for me, it is because it is a beautiful space to think both about religion and fonts, and I have so many questions. You know how I feel about fonts. I... I want it. I have so many thoughts. But okay. So, is it just about what they're wearing and what they're doing to their bodies with these tattoos and these shawls? What do the Ramnamis do? How does any of this, besides, like, the name Ram, relate to some of these, like, Brahmanic practices, or texts, that we tend to find in, like, the textbooks that tell us about the world religions? Cause I have a number of those textbooks, and I have not read about any of this at all.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:43

So for starters, this group specifically locates itself as a challenge to those traditions that would exclude them historically and contemporarily.



Megan Goodwin 25:52

Yeah, love that.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 25:53

So like, this is a movement of Dalit people who basically said, and I'm paraphrasing, fuck you.



Megan Goodwin 26:05

\*laughs\* I'm gonna put the name of God all over my body-- ALL over my body-- and do it better.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:12

Yeah, because listen, like... the groups that were uncasted or low casted were some cases

physically barred from even listening to Sanskrit be performed or recited. So like, the like, not only will I recite this, but I'm going to make my whole gig reciting the name of this god that you and your high-casted, priestly, Sanskritic, Brahmanic worldview would deny me-- often with physical violence-- I'm going to put it all over my body. How fucking dare you. It really is, like, a challenge in and of itself to who has access.



Megan Goodwin 26:53

So it's religion, and fonts, and spite. I like it. I like all of this.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:58

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 26:58

Rad.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:58

But there also is a way that Ramnamis use a vernacular version of the Ramayana of their-- as their central text.



Megan Goodwin 27:06

Okay, I don't know what any of that means. But--



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:07

Great. So Sanskrit is a language that few people spoke, and limited groups had access to, in terms of literacy.



Megan Goodwin 27:15

Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:15

That doesn't mean stories don't exist in the vernacular, which is to say, spoken, popular languages.



Megan Goodwin 27:22

Mhm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 27:22

So, the Ramayana is in Sanskrit, but, there is a version of the Ramayana, called the Ramcharitmanas, and it's a poem, a long poem, from the 16th century, and if you care about this, it's by a notable figure named Tulsidas. It's an Eastern dialect of Hindi, on purpose. Most of us nerdy historians agree that Tulsidas, who was very, very literate in Sanskrit and other languages, purposefully wrote the Ramcharitmanas, this vernacular dialect of Hindi, to make it accessible, specifically to the people that weren't supposed to have access to it.



Megan Goodwin 27:59

I love an OG, public scholar! That's amazing!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:02

I know! 16th century public scholar, what's up Tulsidas.



Megan Goodwin 28:05

Love it. Love it. Goals.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:07

Basically, it's.... the Ramcharitmanas is a Ramayana in a performable way. So the Ramnamis enter this scene--



Megan Goodwin 28:15

Is this a theater project?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:16

A little bit, yeah.



Megan Goodwin 28:17

YES!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:18

I know! I'm telling you, I'm bowling right down the middle for you, girl.



Megan Goodwin 28:20

\*chuckles\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:21

They enter the scene way later than the 16th century, right? So this vernacular text which is sung, and memorized, and performed, exists, and then, through that exposure, historians argue, comes this group, the Ramnamis. But they use this interpretation of the Sanskrit epic in a way-- an ALLOWED way-- to have access to the stories about this one divinity, Ram, and it's one way of interpreting Ram from the Ramayana! There is still an annual performance of the Ramcharitmanas in this community, there is still a community of Ramnamis, and while they're listed as Hindus in the Indian census (which is a whole other issue), there's a lot of top down debate about how legit these practices are, how authentically Hindu they are, how correct they might be.



Megan Goodwin 29:10

Hm. Okay, there's so much going on here.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:13

I know, I'm so sorry.



Megan Goodwin 29:14

No, no, no! It's okay. It's really interesting, it's just... there's SO much. I'm, like, picturing people being chased away from listening to Sanskrit and then getting access to these texts in Hindi, being like, "These are ours now, and we're going to do it up and better and in a bigger, more spectacular way." And I-- wow. Okay. Okay.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:32

Yeah! And the god who's named here is the upholder of the caste system, right? Ram is the upholder of Dharma and caste is a big part of that.



Megan Goodwin 29:40



Megan Goodwin 29:40

Holy shit.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:40

And they're like, "Guess who's ours? It's him. He's ours now."



Megan Goodwin 29:43

Holy crap.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:44

Yeah.



Megan Goodwin 29:44

Okay! Okay, so this is I mean, this...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 29:47

It's deep!



Megan Goodwin 29:47

It's... it's not just a troll, but it IS an epic troll-- a literally epic-- troll. Okay. So caste plays in here historically. Ramnamis come from an utterly oppressed caste, BUT, they still found this way to access these huge, canonical, like, gate-kept Hindu texts, AND despite having unique ritual practices, like tattoos, or printed shawls, or annual festivals, this is also what Hinduism is because this is part of what Hindus do! Okay, okay, okay! \*sound interlude\* Okay, that's enough stories and text, though. Uh, hands on hips. I'm ready. Now you tell me about politics. I waited long enough. It's my time.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:38

\*laughs\* Okay. We talked about Hindu nationalism in our SmartGrrl Summer religious nationalism episode.



Megan Goodwin 30:43

And I will never not love a call back.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 30:45

I know you do. But if we're talking Ramayana, we have to talk Hindu nationalism. As interesting as all this caste stuff is, and as much as I could talk Ramnamis 'til I'm blue in the face, we cannot talk Ramayana and we cannot talk Ram without talking Hindu nationalism. And I'm not sorry at all because this is hashtag facts. I do not want to drone on and on, so maybe we keep this shorterish? And you know what, Megan, I know that you're playing coy to my verbose in this episode--



Megan Goodwin 31:11

Whaaaa?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:11

--but can you teach some of this? Can you tell our nerds what YOU know, about, maybe not the Ramayana specifically, but Ram and Hindutva?



Megan Goodwin 31:20

I mean, it definitely won't take long, but you bet your sweet ass, I can! Put me in, coach! Alright. Finally! Finally, politics. This piece, I know. Alright, Hindutva \*Secret Word of the Day\* is a movement itself that means "Hinduness," and it articulates a sense of India (and sometimes all of South Asia) as inherently Hindu. We have seen this play out in really violent ways, against plurality within Hindu traditions, and especially against religious minorities like Muslims. And, ahhh, that ties, in part, to the Ramayana or Ram in this famous example of the Babri Masjid, or the Ram Janmabhoomi, the temple in Ayodhya, the site which held a mosque and a temple for literally hundreds and hundreds of years. Until religious nationalism. So Ayodhya, many Hindus say, is Rams birthplace. And that makes the site tied to text from the start. The "we don't have time for this version" is, in the 1980s and early 90s, Hindu nationalists led a campaign to rid the shared sacred historical site of its shared-ness, to basically evict and destroy the mosque. They did this in the name of religion, and Hinduism explicitly. In December 1992, this is exactly what happened-- a mob literally ripped down the 16th century mosque complex, and afterward, there were many, many, many lives lost (like over 2000 lives lost) in the violence that erupted. So yeah. This directly ties both to text and politics and interpretation, right? Like, the Sanskrit Ramayana says that Ram was born in Ayodhya, a real city in contemporary northern India. In the Ramayana. Ram is the rightful, dharmic ruler of what we now call India. Ram became a symbol of proper Indianness, Indianness being utterly and inextricably tied to Hinduness. And then political leaders literally called on citizens to do religious pilgrimage and service at a site they made controversial, which then (shocking no one who thinks about religion, or nationalism, or politics), rather quickly, turned into a scene of destruction and violence. What did I miss?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 31:27

You're in. Do it. Nothing. Except, I clearly missed that-- that those words are hard for you. So I am sorry. \*giggles\*



Megan Goodwin 33:44

I don't-- I don't do the language.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 33:46

I'm so sorry. But you got it! Well learned, maybe by osmosis, from being near me for all these years. I'm kidding. But that's really it! And the only thing I'd add for the sake of time-- and lord knows there's like, 50 kajillion things to say about this-- is that today, some 30 years after that particular incident of the tearing down of the Babri Masjid, we see the slogan/prayer/mantra, "jai shri ram" as a literal rallying cry for Hindutva supporters. And I'm going to link in homework to teachable articles on this, but in redro-- and, like, readable articles-- but in recent years, this phrase, which literally translates to "victory or glory to Lord Ram" is a straight up dog whistle. So anti-Muslim violence is at an all time high, around the world, frankly, but certainly in India, and there are alarming, frequent attacks on Muslims, where "jai shri ram" is the thing that someone is yelling, the chant of the mob, the comment-section post. This is a phrase that people are using, literally in moments of violence. So there have been reports of lynchings where the crowd is screaming "jai shri ram," "victory to lord ram," whilst murdering often a non... a non Hindu. So I don't-- that's a stone cold bummer. That's a stone cold bummer and I don't know how to get myself out of it.



Megan Goodwin 35:14

I mean, I-- it's-- religion is politics, politics is religion, religious nationalism is disgusting trash wherever it shows up.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:23

Yeah. That was good. You got it.



Megan Goodwin 35:25

Thanks.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:25

But you know what, okay. I centered our stuff on the Ramayana, in part because it's dear to my heart as one of the very first texts I read in Sanskrit and in Hindi, but mostly, because it's this complex, interesting place to see how a text gets interpreted in ways that maybe we wouldn't expect? And by groups of people we maybe wouldn't anticipate. I'm curious, though, what Dr. Shreena Gandhi would have to say about other issues in contemporary Hinduism.

D

Dr. Shreena Gandhi 35:54

My name is Shreena Gandhi, and I am an expert on religion in the Americas, white supremacy, cultural appropriation, and yoga. I care that folks, my students, my family, my fellow scholars know about what I study because I want them to understand how we all have privileges that can contribute to the oppression of all, even in the practice of-- or the innocuous practice of something like yoga. What I would say about contemporary Hindu traditions is, first, they're incredibly diverse... you know, different from village to village, community to community, state to state, all over South Asia, India, but then also globally. So what one Hindu does in Tamil Nadu might not make sense to what another Hindu does in Gujarat, or what another Hindu does in South Africa or Trinidad. The other thing I would say is that Hinduism always has been incredibly material, and it's imagined to be this like exotic, spiritual, mystical, religion, and all religions have that aspect to it, but it's not just that. And people kind of imagine it to be this, like, vat of spirituality, and then you actually look at what people are doing, and it's incredibly material, whether it's, you know, doing a daily puja in their own home and dressing their gods in, you know, custom made, silk clothes, or it's the exchange of money, the exchange of different fruits, and, you know, it's a, it's a very gift giving, material religion, and that is often missed. The other thing I would say is that it's always in formation. And this formation is often... always, I would say, impacted by the various cultural, political, social, economic forces around it. And so when you look at the study of any South Asian religion, but, you know, Hinduism, for the purposes of this, you have to look at how it's in formation with larger forces, like white supremacy and caste supremacy. And I think you cannot ignore that. So, I'm part of a collective that we call the "Feminist Critical Hindu Studies Collective," or FCHS (and you can edit that out if you would like). But the FCHS collective and I, we all wrote an article together, called "Feminist Critical Studies in Formation," and one of the things that we try to pull through the article is that Hindu practice and identity are in formation constantly, you know, and in a dialectic relationally with larger cultural forces, like I said in my previous answer, and specifically, we're looking at issues of caste, supremacy and white supremacy. And I think that when you start looking locationally at Hindu practice or identity in formation, you see one, that it's constantly changing, that there's nothing kind of static about it; two, it's not in a vacuum, right? And three, you know, the idea that there has been a fixed or even just, like... one idea, or one Hindu identity is really a false one. People like to imagine Hinduism as the oldest religion in the world that kind of started with the formation of, or the, you know, the writing, or the oral tradition, of the Vedas, and has kind of continued along this kind of, you know, linear path. But the idea of like, a Hindu community, or a Hindu identity is more of a relatively recent one. Like, I'll agree that there are threads that pull through the Vedas through today. But then there are other threads, let's say, like beef eating, that do not, right? And if you suggest to a Hindu (which I have often done) that, you know, the practice of beef eating was quite robust during the Vedic period, you know, they might not necessarily like me afterwards, or will roll their eyes, or just kind of dismiss what I'm saying. And so I think... that you have to look at the context. Always! I mean, I feel like I'm a broken record when I say this-- the context of what particular practice are you looking at, what particular identity, and if you're not contextualizing it regionally, historically, politically, socially, culturally, economically, then you're really not getting a good, robust, full idea or picture of what's going on. And I think that is actually very politically inconvenient at times, because people like to imagine one thing when the reality is often something else. And I would say this, not only just for practicing Hindus, but also anyone that teaches about or studies Hinduism has to really make caste central in their analysis and their studying and their scholarship.





Megan Goodwin 42:18

I just love learning from Dr. Gandhi. She is just the bee's knees.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:23

Me too! And we've got some stuff in the homework for you to read more, but you know what, nerds? We're gluttons for experts in this episode-- --because we also have Dr. Dheepa Sundaram to hear from. Her work focuses on networks, digital religion, and yes, Hindutva. So let's hear from her now!



Megan Goodwin 42:31

Yas! Yes, please!



Dr. Dheepa Sundaram 42:44

My name is Dheepa Sundaram, and I'm an expert on South Asian digital culture, religion, and media. I care that folks know about what I study because digital publics are real and powerful communities shaping our non-virtual lives in obvious and not so obvious ways. Hindu traditions are diverse, innovative, contradictory, and dynamic. And I think we have seen a push by particular Hindu groups in contemporary communities towards establishing an antiquity, a sense of timelessness, and a sense of cohesion that has muted this dynamism in particular, and effaced the sort of contradictory nature of this tradition. In general, representing deities in various media has long been accepted and indeed encouraged in Hindu traditions. The earliest Hindu ritual, or worship site, website is saranam.com, which was established in 1999. Since then, recent sites have popped up all over the place, like should puja.com, which was started by a London School of Economics grad, or epuja.co.in, which focuses on pujas for health, and wellness, and wealth, and marital success. All of these sites are focused on these material gains, like educational attainment, and of course, spiritual and religious obligations and enlightenment. Now there are also virtual reality applications for, quote unquote, "experiencing" or "participating" in a puja in a temple through virtual means, and do-it-yourself apps to help you conduct a puja without the need for a priest, or a pujari, or pandit. Brahmin priests I've interviewed say pujas conducted online are half power, and lack the efficacy of those conducted at a material temple. Despite this lack of endorsement from the caste privileged, while seemingly offering flexibility and accessibility, Hindu ritual websites often embed Savarna, or caste privileged groups values into the language used and the products advertised. So, digital technology is, on the one hand, offering more opportunity, and on the other, streamlining and, sort of, packaging a particular set of rituals, practices, and values as, quote unquote "Hinduism." I could focus on a number of festivals, but I'm going to choose Deepavali, or sometimes heard as Diwali, or the festival of lights, which just happened in early November. It also happens to be my namesake holiday, as my birthday is next week. This particular festival is a testament to how Hinduism is both elastic and rigidly hierarchical. The festival has a number of different meanings to communities depending on region. Some see it as the homecoming of the epic hero, Rama, with his wife, Sita, from the forest. Others see it as a time that the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi, visits one's home. And still, others see this as the time of the homecoming of the Mahabharata heroes, the Pandavas from Hastinapur. It is

generally seen as a triumph of light over darkness, or good over evil, and it's celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists in the subcontinent. Some anti-caste activists have shown that many of the narratives that characterize not only Deepavali, but other Hindu festivals are likely mythologized versions of history in which the darkness, or evil, was representing a marginalized caste or tribal community. Hindu holidays such as Onam and Durga Puja are directly viewed by Adivasi, or first dweller communities, as a time to mourn and speak out against casteism. Quick example is the Asura community in Bengal, which sees Durga Puja, which happens in late September and early October, as a time to mourn their revered ancestor, Mahishasura. In the Hindu tradition, that particular festival is seen as a time when Goddess Durga destroys the evil Mahishasutra, or buffalo demon, and saves the people. It's a triumph of good over evil. So these kinds of conflicting narratives also participate in how we see Deepavali and what is actually constituted as the darkness in this holiday, or who would be a better way of saying it. As we all-- or many of us-- think, world religions has been a contentious model for some time. And as a model that tends to hold a static vision of what constitutes a religion or tradition or culture, it reminds me a bit of the world literature's model as well, and as a comparative literature scholar, many of us found that equally problematic for the same reasons. It reminds me of James Clifford's critiques of anthropology as a discipline in that it had been trapped in the idea that we can go over there and study this place, as if communities, and people, and places are things for which clear boundaries and separations can be delineated. He points to the orientalism of anthropology, and how they can be better by looking at traveling cultures, as he puts it. I think a similar application can be made to world religions and would be more beneficial to understanding a tradition like Hinduism. World religions assumes Hinduism, or any other religion, for that matter, as a bonded, concrete thing. We need nomenclature that captures the dynamic nature of canons and traditions, the shifting moral and ethical frames, and, I think most importantly, the transnational, virtual, AND local roots of adherence. All religion is both local and global, and world religions doesn't really get at that. While we continue to struggle with the ongoing onslaught and illness and death of the pandemic, my field of digital religion has become bizarrely normal, rather than a sort of quirky, different way of engaging religious praxis. In some ways, you might call it a necessity if you're planning on attending a religious service in most places over the past 18 months. Before the pandemic, I hadn't really imagined a scenario in which nearly every sacred material space in the world would become inaccessible at the same time. With mixed feelings, I suggest that the pandemic has made my subfield of digital religion uniquely relevant within the broader, sort of, pantheon of religious studies. People want to know whether conducting rituals and prayers online works, how it works, and lockdowns have spurred all kinds of innovation and rethinking of traditional concepts such as sacred space, particularly in the context of Hinduism. Digital access to Hindu ritual services has been around for over 20 years. But a sacred material space has always been required, until these recent innovations that forced us out of sacred spaces-- materials spaces, I should say. But what I'm learning from these innovations is that, while our lives have, for a long time now, intertwining with tech, the pandemic just sped up a process that was already happening, and it's perhaps not going to slow down. Material sacred spaces will continue to be the gold standard, I think, in Hinduism and other traditions. But I believe we will soon see attempts to fashion a virtual Hindu ritual site in which rituals can be conducted actually online, not just facilitated through an online portal. And I think we'll see it in the near future.

M

Megan Goodwin 51:40

Isn't it just the best to have these guest experts tell us what's what?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 51:43

Truly an embarrassment of riches. Thanks, professor ladies!



Megan Goodwin 51:46

Yay! Which brings us to... A Little Bit, Leave It!



A Little Bit Leave It 51:55

\*A Little Bit Leave It\*



Megan Goodwin 52:00

Where we're letting you know what we think the most important, most interesting, or most challenging part of this topic is! It is a little bit to leave you with. Alright, I'll go first, I guess. You have done a lot of chatting.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:14

\*laughs\* Is that a read?



Megan Goodwin 52:15

\*laughs\* It's not a read, just a fact. And facts are facts, America. Alright, my global religions class focuses-- this will not surprise you at all-- very, very, extremely heavily on contemporary politics. And because we spend so much time talking about contemporary politics, when we talk about Hinduism, and South Asia, we talk a lot about Hindu nationalism. And a piece that I keep needing to come back to over and over and over again is that Hinduism and Hindu nationalism are NOT the same thing. It is really important that my students know about how religious ethnonationalism-- again, call back to SmartGrrl summer, episode two-- is working in the world today, but it's equally important that my students understand there is so, so, so, so, SO much more to Hinduism than just the ways some folks want to use it as a cudgel to chill religious difference and silence dissenting voices. I'm gonna put this in the show notes, but I really like Kalpana Jain's piece on this point.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:14

Oooo, yeah, that's a really, that's a really good piece! Thank you!



Megan Goodwin 53:18

Kalpana's nice, and people should read her stuff. She's smart.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:22

Well, okay. So, you're-you're not wrong. I've done a lot of chatting this time.



Megan Goodwin 53:27

\*giggles\* I love your chats!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:29

For me, my little bit leave it, I guess, is that I care that our listeners know about Hindu traditions because they're big, they're messy, and they aren't monolithic, and frankly, far too many folks are out here in the world doing violence against each other, against scholars on the internet, against whole groups, legally, over who gets to count as Hindu, and who's allowed access to Hindu texts, and spaces, and opinions. And so, frankly, it's important. There's a whole genre of Hindutva trolls that, like, come for everybody that I've ever cared about. So, I care that you can acknowledge both that those Hindu trolls and Hindutva trolls are legitimate Hindus, AND that we need to address why and how this violence is persisting, particularly in digital spaces. Period, the end.



Megan Goodwin 54:20

Yeah. They can be legitimate interest and also legitimate assholes. They're both.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 54:24

Uh, huh, uh, huh. Venn diagrams are complicated.



Megan Goodwin 54:26

They are.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 54:28

Anyway, if you don't know, now you know!



If You Don't Know, Now You Know 54:31

\*If You Don't Know, Now You Know\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 54:33

The segment where we get one factoid each! Megan, I know you know things about Hindu traditions. You want to go first on this one?



Megan Goodwin 54:39

I mean, I definitely know way more about Hindu traditions NOW than I did when we started! But, yeah. And I'm gonna be obnoxious and bring it back to what's now the United States. You're welcome!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 54:48

You're not obnoxious, you're allowed! We said today's theme was contemporary, so you know what? That could be anywhere! Contemporary exists everywhere!



Megan Goodwin 54:57

It does, but for me, it exists in the US. So, former allegedly Democratic candidate for president, Tulsi Gabbard, was the first practicing Hindu elected to Congress. Her campaign, BT-dubs, was endorsed by-- her presidential campaign, I should say-- was endorsed by noted white nationalists, David Duke and Richard Spencer, because religioracialization is complicated.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 55:20

Sure is.



Megan Goodwin 55:21

Also, former Hindu, and former governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, apparently got his nickname, Bobby, because he really, really liked Bobby Brady from the Brady Bunch.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 55:31

Stop it right now.



Megan Goodwin 55:33

I mean it. Again, religioracialization is complicated. The end.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 55:40



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 55:16

Who likes Bobby Brady? Like, that's a serial killer's answer.



Megan Goodwin 55:45

Uh huh! Uh huh. I mean, if you're familiar with Bobby Jindal, I don't think that would be a surprise. Oh, also! Current VP, Kamala Harris, was raised by a Hindu mom, although she identifies as Baptist.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 55:59

Cool!



Megan Goodwin 56:00

And that-- those are the facts that I have about-- these are the Hindus in our government!  
\*singing\* In our government, in our government,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 56:04

We've really lost the plot, listeners. I want to put up one of those Simpsons cards, that's like, "We're experiencing technical difficulties!" And it's just, like, me, and I'm drunk. Anyway!



I If You Don't Know, Now You Know 56:17

\*If You Don't Know, Now You Know\*



Megan Goodwin 56:19

Don't pack up your stuff yet, nerds. It's time for homework.



Simpsons 56:22

\*Homework?!\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 56:24

Alright, nerds. Surprising no one, I've got a lot of things.



Megan Goodwin 56:26

What?! No.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 56:26

I talked a lot about the Ramayana, so I am going to rapid fire these. Go check out the show notes. I'm going to hide SO many things there that you have never heard me say on the air before because Megan doesn't check what I write so I could do whatever I want.



Megan Goodwin 56:41

It's true.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 56:42

Okay. On the Ramayana, you should definitely check out-- if you're interested in gender in particular-- Kishwar's classic, "Yes to Sita, No to Ram" in the classic, equally classic volume, Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition. It's an oldie but goodie at this point, but it's all about how women, like, are not interested in Ram as a character because of feminism. Then, Snigdha Poonam's "The Three Most Polarizing Words in India," which is about this "jai shri ram" issue. It's a Foreign Policy article from right as these anti-Muslim pogroms were erupting in early 2020. I would totally recommend this film that is free and available because the director wanted it to be free and available! It's called "Sita Sings the Blues," and it's--



Megan Goodwin 57:33

Oh, that's a cute one!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 57:34

--a four part modern and historic retelling of the Ramayana from Sita's perspective. Then there's Chandar's "How a 1980s TV soap did the spadework for Hindu nationalism." So it's all about thinking about how this Ramayana, which had been serialized as a soap opera, in the 80s, with, like, crazy effect-- how did that do, frankly, like, the legwork for the contemporary Hindu nationalism we see today? And then, I'll recommend Banaji's 2018 article-- sorry-- yeah, on--called "Vigilante Publics," where it's about orientalism, modernity, and Hindutva fascism. It's a heavy read, but also, I think, pretty mandatory. I also talked about the Ramnamis. The classic there is Ramdas Lamb's "Rapt in the Name." It's dated, but it's super solid and very readable, if you're interested in, like, accessible academia. And if you care about the Ramcharitmanas, this vernacular Ramayana, I've got a bit on the "Babri Mosque, Bollywood, and Gender" by Tiwari that I'll put up on the website. That's pretty recent. It's in "A Companion to World Literature." And then I've got-- I'm sorry, I'm, like, just doing a dump... I don't really care. Basu has some stuff on-- that is, like, mandatory-- so, this recent Duke book called "Hindutva as Political Monotheism" is, like, mind-blowingly good theory with quite a lot of casework! So...



Megan Goodwin 57:42

That sounds interesting for both of us!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 59:11

And listeners, I want to just both be apologetic and, again, tell you to check the show notes. There is SO much on Hinduism that exists outside of India and the US. We have focused there because... god, this is a long episode and we haven't even done the rest of the world?! I'm going to stash citations for things like Hinduism in the Caribbean, Hinduism in other parts of Asia, Hinduism in the Middle East. So, check those show notes. I've got tons of stuff for you if you're interested in globalizing your unit on Hinduism. I'll stop there. I will-- I really will stop.



Megan Goodwin 59:44

You sure?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 59:45

No, I'm not. But I'll stop and I'll just... I'll drink my beer! I'll drink my beer. You go.



Megan Goodwin 59:48

\*laughs\* Excellent. Okay! I have many fewer things to recommend because this is not my area of expertise. I will plug, again, Kalpana Jain's piece for the Nieman reports, where she makes very clear the stakes in the international press, particularly distinguishing between Hinduism and Hindu nationalism. I also use this Vox explainer video in my classes to think about the conflict in Kashmir, which we did not get into, but is absolutely a conflict around religious nationalism. Duh! I also think you should read our guest experts. I would start with Dheepa's awesome "Namaste Nationalism," which she wrote for Religion News Service, as she is a columnist for Religion News Service, it was also picked up by the Washington Post. Shreena's got a ton of great stuff, too. I really like her piece about yoga and the time of COVID, in part because it includes goat yoga, and I just really like baby goats. So, that was for the reveler. I also want to shout out the South Asian Scholar Activist Collective, of which our previous guest star, Dr. Simran Jeet Singh, and our current guest star, Dheepa Sandaram-- Dr. Dheepa Sandaram-- are apart. So, the South Asian Scholar Activist Collective has pulled together a bunch of resources, particularly in their Hindutva Harassment Field Manual, which is meant to be our guide, if and when public scholars come in contact with Hindutva harassment, which basically, if you're saying anything about Hinduism in public, you're pretty much guaranteed some Hindutva trolls at this point.





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:01:28


It's frankly a phenomenal resource.




 Megan Goodwin 1:01:30  
It really is super impressive.


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:01:32  
Truly. Like, even if you don't care, you should send that to your deans and your bosses because it's phenomenal.

 Megan Goodwin 1:01:36  
Very much so. And even if you-- Yeah, if you do not care about this issue of Hinduism, if you are anybody who is in any way interested in sharing your research with the public, this is an incredible resource just for responding to harassment, full stop, even as it is located in the South Asian context. Let's see. I really appreciated Hasan Minaj's reporting for Patriot Act (RIP) on the 2019 Indian elections and the role that Hindu nationalism played in those elections, so that's a two-parter. I've got YouTube clips for you. I also really liked his response to the Howdy Modi event, where the Indian Prime Minister visited the US and claimed Minaj as a very important Indian-- like, was part of the slideshow, but also would not let Hasan Minaj in the building to cover the event. So, he's got footage of him sitting out, like, basically tailgating in the parking lot, which was fun. And I like the, like, Temple Intrigue subplot for the Hindu character on Sens8. And that show is on Netflix.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:02:36  
I love that. I love that.

 Megan Goodwin 1:02:38  
It's great. She's also got a relationship Ganesh, and I love a Ganesh, and you know. Anyway.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:02:42  
I know you do. BIG THANKS to those of you writing reviews on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon, and Google. It really helps! Our nerds of the week-- very few we want to shout out this week and send some love directly to-- are: FIJKLM, FLIJK5 (who, I suspect, are my parents), and our personal favorite hater, lamBigDaddy69, who, you can tell from his name, probably sucks a lot.

 Megan Goodwin 1:03:10  
I also really, like, just to be specific, he said that our voices made him want to gouge out his eyeballs. And that is not how sound works. But it is helpful!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:03:22

It is! But if you want to be a nerd of the week, write us. Physically write us a review on Apple podcasts or Amazon, because if you just like us, or give us five stars, we can't see your screen name. But if you write a review, like, "Your voices make me want to gouge out my eyes," then we can see you, and we'll shout you out.



Megan Goodwin 1:03:44

I mean basically, don't let lamBigDaddy69 show y'all up. We know you're out there. We appreciate the love. Just let us see your screen name so that we know who we're appreciating. Join us next time for more HISTORY OF THE WORLD, RELIGIONS PART 1, when we chat about religion and law (because real world application is a crucial part of this syllabus).



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:04:05

Big ups to our research assistant, Alex Castellano, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible and therefore awesome. Need more religion nerderie? You know where to find us! It's Twitter. The answer is always Twitter, nerds.



Megan Goodwin 1:04:16

It's Twitter. You can find Megan (that's me!) on Twitter @mpgPhD, and Ilyse @ProfIRMF, or the show @KeepingIt\_101. Find the website at keepingit101.com. Peep the insta, if you wanna! Drop us a rating or review in your podcatcher of choice, and with that...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 1:04:37

Peace. Out. Nerds.



Megan Goodwin 1:04:39

Do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Bonus Ending 1:04:40

\*If Gandhi Took A Yoga Class\*