

# Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus  
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## Hinduism and Imperial Interventions in Victorian Literature:

### Colonizing, Fetishizing, Otherizing

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### Course Description

This course offers a historicist reading of long nineteenth-century literature in relation to Hinduism in the British Indian Empire. During the British Raj, colonizers used Hindu religious and cultural practices, such as the treatment of Hindu women, to justify colonial rule. This rationale not only impacted the representation of Hinduism in novels like Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) but also was reinforced and constructed by literature. In this course, we'll use postcolonial theory like Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to unpack the relationship between culture and colonialism. Anglo-Indian texts like Flora Annie Steel's *The Hosts of the Lord* (1900) illustrate the racial tensions inherent in the cultural clashes between Hindus and Christians in the British Raj. The course also focuses on colonial literature, especially the works of Indian women writers Krupabai Sathianadhan, Pandita Ramabai, and Rashsundari Devi, to widen the term "British" and to include literature of both the colony and the metropole. Assignments include weekly interactive discussions and written projects with the goal of nuancing the students' understanding of Hinduism in the context of British imperialism.

### Texts

(This syllabus supports financial accessibility, and, therefore, all assigned texts are available in the public domain.)

### **Primary Texts:**

#### 1. Novels:

- (i) *The Moonstone* (1868) - Wilkie Collins
- (ii) *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895) - Krupabai Sathianadhan
- (iii) *The Hosts of the Lord* (1900) - Flora Annie Steel

#### 2. Poems:

- (i) "The White Man's Burden" (1899) - Rudyard Kipling

- (ii) “The Ballad of the Last Suttee” (1890) - Rudyard Kipling
- (iii) “Long Sunk in Superstition’s Night” (1849) - Michael Madhusudan Dutt
- (iv) “The Hindu Convert to His Wife” (1870) - Govin Chunder Dutt
- (v) “The Pardah Nashin” (1918) - Sarojini Naidu

3. Non-fiction (essays, articles, speeches, etc.):

- (i) “Suttee: The Narrative of an Eye-Witness” (1843) - R. Hartley Kennedy
- (ii) “Minute on Indian Education” (1835) - Thomas Babington Macaulay
- (iii) “The High-Caste Hindu Woman” (1887) - Pandita Ramabai
- (iv) Selection from *Amar Jiban* [My Life] (1876) - Rashsundari Devi. Translated to English by Tanika Sarkar, 1999.
- (iv) “Nationalism in India” (1917) - Rabindranath Tagore
- (v) [Speech on women’s education](#) (1906) - Sarojini Naidu

4. Film:

- (i) *The Far Pavilions* miniseries (1984) - Peter Duffell (director)

**Secondary Sources:**

1. *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (2005) - Brian K. Pennington [Introduction, and Chapter 3: “Scarcely Less Bloody than Lascivious”]
2. *Orientalism* (1978) - Edward Said [Introduction]
3. *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (2000) - Meenakshi Mukherjee [Chapter 4: “Ambiguous Discourse: The Novels of Krupa Sathianadhan”]
4. *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (1979) - David Kopf [Chapter 7: “The Frustration of the Bhadrakok and the Making of the Revolutionary Nationalist: The West Desanctified”]
5. “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” (1989) - Partha Chatterjee

## **Assignments & Grades**

### **Attendance 10%**

### **Discussion Circle: Colonial Legacies 20%**

Students will watch *The Far Pavilions* six-part miniseries over the course of the semester and discuss the impacts of colonialism and orientalism on depictions of Hinduism in the present day. Each group will be assigned one episode on which they will lead discussion in class on the final day of each unit.

### **Debate: Representation vs Otherization 30% (10% x 3)**

Student groups will debate on the differences as well as blurred boundaries between representation and fetishism in the assigned novel in each unit (*The Moonstone* in Unit I, *Saguna* in Unit II, and *The Hosts of the Lord* in Unit III). The groups will analyze specific events/episodes from the novel and argue whether the text represents, otherizes, and/or fetishizes Hindus and Hinduism in the nineteenth century. Students will connect the novel to examples from current events to support their argument. There will be debate opportunities throughout each unit, and groups will sign up for specific days.

### **Quizzes 20% (5% x 4)**

The quizzes are unannounced but open-book and encourage students to keep up with the reading.

### **Final project 20%**

Students will write a 500-word reflection paper (on any text from the course) that discusses the connection between colonialism and the “religious other.” Students will complete a 5-minute multimedia (PowerPoint, video, infographic, or other medium of choice) presentation of their reflection on final exam day. If a student wishes to write on a subject related to the course topic but not covered in the course, they need to discuss it with the instructor.

## **Course Schedule**

### **UNIT 1: COLONIALISM AND ORIENTALISM: THE MAKING OF THE HINDU**

#### **“OTHER”**

*Note for UVC readers: This syllabus follows the historical trajectory of Hindu religious and cultural practices during the long nineteenth century. There was no single homogenous religion called “Hinduism” prior to British rule. Under British occupation of the Indian subcontinent, colonizers codified the numerous sects and belief systems as “Hinduism” based on what they perceived as loosely similar religious practices. Unit 1 explains why British colonizers created the idea of a single, unified “Hindu” religion and how that idea percolated into literature on both sides of the colonial divide.*

#### **Week 1: Intro to Hinduism**

- (i) *Was Hinduism Invented* - Introduction
- (ii) *Orientalism* - Introduction

#### **Week 2: Civilizing Mission**

- (i) “White Man’s Burden”
- (ii) “Suttee: The Narrative of an Eye-Witness”
- (iii) “The Ballad of the Last Suttee”

#### **Week 3: Representation of Hinduism in the Victorian Novel**

- (i) *The Moonstone*
- (ii) “The Pardah Nashin”

#### **Week 4: Representation of Hinduism in the Victorian Novel**

- (i) *The Moonstone* cont.

## **Week 5: Critical Analysis vs. Fetishism**

- (i) *The Moonstone* (final class)
- (ii) Discussion on episodes 1 & 2 of *The Far Pavilions* (groups 1 & 2)

## **UNIT 2: THE “OTHER” INSIDE: CONVERSION AND REFORMISM IN**

### **COLONIAL INDIA**

*Note for UVC readers: British colonization created a knowledge-power complex about Hinduism. First, the British projected their perception of Hinduism as the real or true concept of Hindu belief systems. Then, they cast Hinduism as a backwards and oppressive religion. And finally, they used this false knowledge and misrepresentation to exert political power over colonized people. Unit 2 shows how Hindus reacted to this political process in several ways: some English-educated Hindus converted to Christianity as they accepted the colonizer’s religion as more progressive, some criticized certain practices of Hinduism and tried to reform the religion, and others demanded a continuation of age-old traditions.*

## **Week 6: English Education and Christian Missionaries**

- (i) *Was Hinduism Invented?* - ch. 3
- (ii) “Minute on Indian Education”

## **Week 7: Criticism, Conformity, and Resistance**

- (i) “The High-Caste Hindu Woman”
- (ii) “Long Sunk in Superstition’s Night”

## **Week 8: Conversion Narrative**

- (i) Selection from *Amar Jiban*
- (ii) “The Hindu Convert to his Wife”

### **Week 9: Conversion and Colonialism**

- (i) *Saguna*
- (ii) “Ambiguous Discourse: The Novels of Krupa Sathianadhan”

### **Week 10: Conversion and Colonialism**

- (i) *Saguna* cont.
- (ii) Discussion on episodes 3 & 4 of *The Far Pavilions* (groups 3 & 4)

## **UNIT 3: HINDUISM, NATIONALISM, AND ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE**

*Note for UVC readers: The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century saw a surge of nationalist resistance to British colonization in India. Many nationalists, especially those from the educated middle class, viewed the reformed or modernized Hinduism as an instrument of anti-colonial resistance. British colonizers, on the other hand, persisted in their belief that Hinduism in the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century was exactly the same as it was a century before. Unit 3 illustrates how the nationalists rallied religion to the cause of anti-colonialism and the opposition they faced in their efforts to free India from British rule.*

### **Week 11: Hinduism and the Intellectual Nationalist**

- (i) “The Frustration of the Bhadrakok and the Making of the Revolutionary Nationalist: The West Desanctified”
- (ii) “Nationalism in India”

### **Week 12: Hindu Women and Nationalism**

- (i) “The Nationalist Resolution of the Woman Question”
- (ii) Sarojini Naidu’s speech on women’s education
- (iii) Brainstorming final project ideas

**Week 13: Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance: British Perspective**

(i) *The Hosts of the Lord*

(ii) Submit project idea

**Week 14: Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance: British Perspective**

(i) *The Hosts of the Lord* cont.

**Week 15: Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance: British Perspective**

(i) *The Hosts of the Lord* (final class)

(ii) Discussion on episodes 5 & 6 of *The Far Pavilions* (groups 5 & 6)

**Finals Week:**

(i) Submission of 500-word essay and presentation of multimedia project