

World Religions in Greater Indianapolis Teaching Module

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World Religion: Hinduism **Teaching Module Title:** Hindu Music

- Note: This module is intended as one lesson in a multi-lesson, auto-instructional unit on Religion & Music. The unit is one of several Term Assignment options; others include Concert Report, Term Paper, and Global Perspectives.

Teaching Module Goals:

1. The student will explore several expression of music created for or influenced by Hinduism, including Vedic chant, *bhajans*, *periya melam* performance, and Indian classical music.
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of Indian *raga* music, the *sitar* (instrument), and the structure of the melody, basic scales, importance of improvisation, construction of phrases with simple notes, and the absence of major harmony in Indian classical music.

Assigned Readings and/or Websites:

HUMA 118 Music Appreciation required textbooks:

- Joseph Kerman and Gary Tomlinson, *Listen*, 8e
 - pp381-409 (Chapter 24: “Music in America: Jazz and Beyond”)

Other books / websites:

1. John Bowker, *World Religions: The Great Faiths Explored & Explained*, pp 20-43 (“Hinduism”)
2. *YouTube*: [The Tradition of Vedic Chanting](#)
3. *YouTube*: [Periya Melam performance](#)
4. *YouTube*: [Understanding the Basics of Indian Raga Music](#)
5. *YouTube*: Anoushka Shankar – [Indian classical raga](#)

Reading Quiz Questions:

1. **Fill-in-multiple-blanks:** According to Bowker (p 41), “the three main kinds of music used in Hindu festivals are
 - a. the chanting of a [ANSWER: Veda] that ritually relates to the festival;
 - b. the singing of communal [ANSWER: bhajans] (devotional songs); and
 - c. music made by a double reed instrument known as a [ANSWER: Shehnai] or a [ANSWER: Nagasvara].”
2. **Essay:** Besides the rich content of its oral literature, what is an important value of [The Tradition of Vedic Chanting](#)?
ANSWER: The Brahmin priests use the tradition as a means of preserving the texts intact over thousands of years. To ensure that the sound of each word remains unaltered, practitioners are taught from childhood complex recitation techniques that are based on tonal accents, a unique manner of pronouncing each letter and specific speech combinations.
3. **Essay:** Do an Internet search on *bhajans* videos. Sample a few (at least three) of these Hindu devotional songs. (Try to get a variety—i.e. male and female singers, recent and not-so-recent performances, etc.) Write down your impressions of these pieces.
4. **Essay:** View [Understanding the Basics of Indian Raga Music](#). Compare its elements with comparable features of Western art music, such as scales, 12-tone serialism, and functional harmony (to name a few possibilities).

5. **Multiple answer:** In the [Periya Melam performance](#), a *periya melam* ('major ensemble') is used in temple worship. Watch the first 2:15 of this performance, and identify the musical elements you see/hear.
- ottu* (drone) [CORRECT]
 - double-reed *nāgasvaram* (oboe) [CORRECT]
 - tavil* (drum) [CORRECT]
 - tālam* (cymbals) [CORRECT]
 - blowing of the conch-shell (*śaṅkha*)
 - 8-beat cycle [CORRECT]
 - fast tempo [CORRECT]
 - functional harmony
 - polyphonic texture
 - triple meter
 - dynamic variation (i.e. changes in volume)
6. **Essay:** Traditionally, *bhajans* have been played to [Indian classical raga](#) (five- to nine-note melodic modes) and *tala* (rhythmic beat patterns). As you listen to this performance by Anoushka Shankar, note the improvisational sections that occur (e.g. violin, *shehnai*). How is this similar to jazz?
7. **Matching:** In Hinduism there are four *yogas* (deeds, or works, or ways of life), each of which has its own moral code, and each code is similar—purification from all kinds of evil and impurity and selfishness—but the psychological emphases differ. Match each yoga with its description. [CORRECT ANSWERS are shown]
- a. [Jnana yoga](#) – Mental, intellectual path by which you learn to understand yourself differently and learn to detach your thoughts from your body and your ego and its desires.
 - b. [Karma yoga](#) – Path to Brahman through ordinary daily work and fulfilling your duties with a new motive, sheer obedience to your Karma or fate.
 - c. [Bhatki yoga](#) – Personal, emotional path of love and attachment to Brahman instead of yourself.
 - d. [Raja yoga](#) – A careful, difficult, experimental and detailed path that combines elements of all the others.
8. **Short answer:** What essential goal do all of the yoga paths have in common? [ANSWER: Detachment from ordinary selfishness and self-consciousness and attainment of unselfishness and un-self-consciousness]
9. **Fill-in-the-blank:** The major specific difference between Hindu ethics and most Western ethics concerns the value of individual human life. This difference is based on the Hindu belief in [ANSWER: [reincarnation](#)].
10. **Multiple choice:** To which Christian biblical concept does [karma](#) best compare?
- a. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart ..."
 - b. "By grace you are saved ..."
 - c. "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." [CORRECT ANSWER]
 - d. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment ..."
11. **Essay:** What are the primary differences between the Christian idea of the Incarnation and the Hindu idea of Reincarnation?
12. **Essay:** What is [the caste system](#)? How does Hinduism justify it? How has India's government tried to improve the condition of outcastes and untouchables? Explore some of the articles on the *Opposing Viewpoints in Context* website, and comment on your impressions of this issue.