KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES AT
RANGJUNG YESHE INSTITUTE

Web Syllabus

Course Code	BSTD 101
Course Title	Buddhist Traditions: History & Culture I
Course Topic	Buddhist Traditions: History & Culture I
Credit	3
Semester, Year	Fall 2027
Schedule: class day & time	Please consult F27 course schedule
Class Location	Please consult F27 course schedule
Course Delivery Mode	Lecture
Required text(s)	1. Peter Harvey, An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 2nd Edition, (available as Kindle edition or as a PDF here) 2. Course reader (CR)
Optional Readings	Will be supplied through Teams

Course Description

This course takes a global and inclusive approach to exploring the origins of Buddhism in India and its expansion across South and Southeast Asia. Structured around the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—it examines how foundational Buddhist ideas evolved and were carried forward by a diverse cast of historical actors: renunciants, scholars, kings, and mystics alike.

We begin by critically reflecting on Buddhist Modernism and self-location, asking: *What do I think Buddhism is, and why?* This sets the stage for a deeper inquiry into the Buddha's life and legend, early Buddhist teachings, and the formation of the monastic and lay communities that sustained and transformed the tradition. From there, we trace the connections between figures such as Ashoka, the Abhidharma scholars, and the textual and artistic traditions of Gandhara, leading up to the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its major philosophical schools—Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.

Through a combination of scriptural and academic readings, alongside the study of Buddhist art, pilgrimage, and devotional practices, students will critically engage with both insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives on Buddhist traditions. By the end of the course, they will have developed both a historical foundation and the analytical tools to navigate the diversity of Buddhist thought and practice.
The second half of this course (BSTD 102, offered in Spring 2025) will extend this journey to the Himalayan region, East Asia, and beyond, examining how Buddhism has shaped and been shaped by institutions of family, politics, and commerce.

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will have acquired hands-on experience of the basic skills required of a researcher in the field of Buddhist studies, namely

1) critical reading and evaluation of different kinds of textual and visual sources;
2) persuasive writing (constructing a bibliography and proper source citation, as well as composing an original academic essay)
3) discussing your views with your peers in a peer-review process (Learning Cell), and
4) working synergistically in a small diverse, cross-cultural team to research a given topic and share this with a larger peer group (Group Presentation).

Course Requirements	
How do I succeed in the course?	• The topics of this class allow for ample class discussion in which you learn to develop an evidence-based evaluation of academic and traditional sources. • Firstly, be prepared to read a fair bit (about 50 pages a week) and annotate these as you read, as the material in the readings will be tested in the final exam. • Lectures will supplement the class readings. You are responsible for keeping up with all the materials covered in the lectures and in the readings. • Occasional quizzes and reflections will ensure that you grasp the key points of the material we cover. (Counted under Class Participation) • Active class participation and supporting of your classmates in discussions and groupwork is also an essential component of learning in this class.

Assessments	**Weight**
1. Class participation & Group work	15%
2. Bibliography exercise	5%
3. Learning Cell 1	10%
4. Final Assessment • Consisting of Learning Cell 2 and Exam	50% • 25% each