

Hindu Ethics, Social Justice, and Human Rights in India

REL 6176 (Seminar in Ethics and Politics), Spring 2002
Tuesday 2:00-4:45 in Dodd 207

Professor Kathleen M. Erndl
Phone: 644-0207, Fax: 644-7225
Email: kerndl@mailier.fsu.edu

Office: 313 Dodd Hall
Office Hours: M&Th 1:00-2:30
& by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

This seminar will focus on the continuities and discontinuities between traditional texts and practices in the Hindu tradition and contemporary social justice and human rights issues in India. To what extent is the category of Dharma compatible with contemporary understandings of human rights? Readings include such ancient scriptures as the *Laws of Manu*, early 20th century writings by reformers such as M.K. Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar, and contemporary writings by activists such as Amartya Sen and Madhu Kishwar, as well as analytical studies by Western and Indian scholars. In addition to common readings, students prepare and present individual research projects. Examples of issues to be considered include the caste system and discrimination against Dalits (formerly called Untouchables), women's family and property rights, *sati* (widow-burning) and dowry-related deaths, child labor, religious communalism, refugees, environmentalism, and globalization. Some attention will also be given to Hindu ethics in a contemporary North American context. This seminar is geared toward both students specializing in Western philosophy and ethics and those specializing in Asian religions and cultures

Readings

Virtue, Success, Pleasure, & Liberation : The Four Aims of Life in the Tradition of Ancient India, by Alain Danielou. Inner Traditions Int'l., 1993.

The Laws of Manu, trans. by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith. Penguin, 1992.

The Penguin Gandhi Reader, ed. by Rudrangshu Mukherjee. Penguin USA, 1995.

Human Rights and Asian Values by Amartya Sen. Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1997.

Hindu Ethics : Purity, Abortion, and Euthanasia, by Harold G. Coward, Julius Lipner, and Katherine Young. SUNY Press, 1989.

Off the Beaten Track : Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women by Madhu Kishwar. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Dilemmas of Life and Death: Hindu Ethics in North American Context by S. Cronwell Crawford. SUNY Press, 1995.

Articles on reserve or handout.

Schedule

Part I: Classical Indian Values

1. Jan. 8. Introduction to the seminar; overview of topics and issues.
2. Jan. 15. The four aims of life.
Daniélou, *Virtue, Success, Pleasure and Liberation*, all.
Essay question: Daniélou has a very distinct point of view regarding the traditional Hindu value system. What is that point of view, and what are some possible critiques which could be leveled against it?
3. Jan. 22. Laws of Manu.
Laws of Manu, intro. , Chs. 1-5.
Essay question: Discuss Manu's relativistic context-sensitive approach to "doing ethics" (see Dongier's introduction pp. liv-lxi and *passim*) and give examples of how he has applied this method with regard to specific injunctions in Chs. 1-5.
4. Jan. 29. Laws of Manu cont'd.
Laws of Manu, Chs. 6-12.
Essay question: Discuss Manus' view of gender and caste roles in Chapters 9 and 10 in light of his general understanding of dharma.
5. Feb. 5. I will be out of town today. The seminar will meet to view and discuss films.
Films: *The Wages of Action*
In the Name of God
Peter van der Veer, "Religious Nationalism in India and Global Fundamentalism."
(reserve or handout)
Start on next week's reading.
Essay question (informal, to be done in class and turned into Erndl's mailbox):
What continuities and discontinuities do you see between the themes presented in these two films and the readings on dharma we have done so far?

Part II: Reform Movements

6. Feb. 12. Gandhi, independence, non-violence, and the critique of modern civilization.
Gandhi Reader, pp. 1-176.
Essay question: Swadeshi, Swaraj, and Satyagraha are the key terms associated with Gandhi's thought. To what extent are these concepts consistent with traditional ideas of *varn__ramadharmā*, and to what extent are they a departure?
7. Feb. 19. Gandhi's views on women, caste, socialism, Hindu-Muslim unity.
Gandhi Reader, pp. 177-283.

Essay question: Comment on Gandhi's views concerning caste and/or women.

8. Feb. 26. Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi.

Selections from B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* and *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*. (handout).

<http://www.ambedkar.org/> Read biographical sections on Ambedkar and browse site.

Essay question: How did Gandhi and Ambedkar differ in their understanding of human rights in general and rights of Untouchables specifically?

9. Mar. 5. Untouchability and caste. Liberation movements after Ambedkar.

Barbara R. Joshi, "Human Rights as Dynamic Process: The Case of India's Untouchables," in *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*, ed. By Claude E. Welch, Jr. and Virginia A. Leary. Westview Press, 1990, pp. 162-185. (handout)

Jack Donnelly, "Traditional values and Universal Human Rights: Caste in India," in *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*, pp. 55-90.

Explore these web sites and their links, reading as much as you can:

<http://www.ambedkar.org/> and <http://saxakali.com/southasia/dalits.htm>

Essay question: Choose a relevant article or essay from one of the sites above (or a linked site) and summarize and respond to it. Be prepared to give a brief presentation on it in class.

Prospectus for research paper due March 5 in class.

March 11-15. Spring Break—No class

Part III: Contemporary and Comparative Issues

10. Mar. 19. Human rights and Hindu values.

Hindu Ethics, selections. (divided up in class.)

Arti Dhand, "The Dharma of Ethics, the Ethics of Dharma: Quizzing the Ideals of Hinduism" (manuscript, handout)

Amartya Sen, *Human Rights and Asian Values*.

Basant Lal, "Hindu Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science," in *Animal Sacrifices: Religious perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science*, ed. Tom Reagan. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986. (handout)

John Carman, "Duties and Rights in Hindu Society" in *Human Rights and the World's Religions*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, pp. 113-128. (handout)

Towards a Hindu Declaration of Universal Human Rights, based on the Sanskrit text entitled "Twenty-five Verses on Human Rights"

<http://www.csuchico.edu/rs/hsr/english.html>

Essay question: Write your own.

11. Mar. 26. Women's rights.

Madhu Kishwar, *Off the Beaten Track*, selections. (or articles from *Manushi*, xerox or web site)

Nivedita Menon, "State, community, and the debate on the uniform civil code in India," in *Beyond Rights and Culture Talk: Comparative Essays on the Politics of Rights and Culture*, ed. Mahmood Mamdani. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. (handout)

John Hawley, "Sati and Its Defenders," in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, ed. John Stratton Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 79-110.

Essay question: Write your own.

12. Apr. 2. Hindu ethics in a North American context.

Dilemmas of Life and Death, selections.

Essay question: Write your own.

13. Apr. 9. Presentations of individual research papers.

14. Apr. 16. Presentations of individual research papers.

Meeting TBA during final exam period for presentations of individual research papers.

Research paper due Tues. April 23.

Requirements and Assignments

Grading : There are 100 possible points. 93-100 A, 90-92 A-, 88-89 B+, 83-87 B, 80-82 B-, 78-79 C+, 73-77 C, 70-72 C-, 68-69 D+, 63-67 D, 60-62 D-, 59 & below F.

Attendance, participation, discussion leading: Attendance at all sessions and active participation are required for successful completion of this seminar. (In case of dire circumstance, contact the instructor as soon as possible). Each student will be required to lead a discussion at least once during the semester. Logistics will be discussed and a sign-up sheet passed around early in the semester.

Weekly Essays: 50% of the grade. Each week, except for the first week and last two weeks, students submit a 2-3 page minimum (longer if desired) essay on the readings for that week. The essay question or topic for each week will be specified. Each essay is worth up to 5 points. (5 is excellent; 0 is not turned in). There are 11 essays, but you may drop the lowest grade, except for a 0, for a total of 10 essays with a maximum of 50 points.

Research Paper: 50% of the grade. A 25-30 page research paper of publishable quality on an approved topic concerning Hinduism and ethics. The paper may be comparative, in part.

Consult the instructor early in the semester for approval of your topic. Suggestions and guidelines will be discussed in class. A one-page prospectus with preliminary bibliography is due **March 5**. The final paper is due **Tues. April 23**. Oral presentations of all papers will be scheduled during the last two weeks of class and at a meeting TBA during the final exam week.

Please review the university regulations on plagiarism. Any violations will be severely penalized.

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should consult the instructor ASAP.

