Rel. 340: Topics in Asian Religions

Religion, Community, and Conflict in South Asia

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How do religious ideas and practices define social groups and communities? How can religious identity become the basis for a nationalist movement? What is the relationship between religion and social conflict? This course explores these questions by examining the religious dimensions of South Asia past and present, based on a survey of examples from India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

Course Requirements:

Students should carefully read and reflect on the assignments for each class, and be prepared to talk about them. Formal work for the course will be: a 5-page take-home midterm essay question (25%); a 15-page term paper (50%); and two presentations in class (one of which will concern the topic of the term paper) (together, 25%). Participation in class discussions can raise (and lack thereof may lower) the final grade. The aim is for the students to develop good analytical and expressive skills while exploring the subject.

Books for Purchase

Octavio Paz, In Light of India
Vasudha Dalmia and H. von Stietencron, eds., Representing Hinduism
Peter van der Veer, Religious Nationalism
Richard Gombrich, Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo
Stanley Tambiah, Buddhism Betrayed?
Course Reader

Schedule of Readings:

Week I: Overview
Octavio Paz, In Light of India, pp. 3-133.

Week II: Visions of the "Noble" Society
Gombrich, pp. 1-81.
CR: RV 10.90, BAU 1.4, Laws of Manu 2
Marriott, "Caste" (in Encyclopaedia Brittanica: Macropaedia)
Gita Dharampal-Frick, "Shifting Categories in the Discourse on Caste" in RH, 82-100

Week III: Good King, God-King
Gombrich, pp. 81-136.
CR: Edicts of Ashoka; Manu; Ramayana

Week IV: Us and Them
RN, chs. 1, 2
N. K. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra" in HR.
Robert E. Frykenberg, "The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution," in HR
Richard Burghart, "The Category 'Hindu' in the Political Discourse of Nepal" in RH.
Week V: Revival and Reform Movements
Anncharlott Eschmann, "Religion, Reaction and Change: The Role of Sects in Hinduism," in HR.

Week VI: Religious Status and the Law
Dieter Conrad, "The Personal Law Question and Hindu Nationalism" in RH.
Marc Galanter, "Hinduism, Secularism, and the Indian Judiciary," ch. 10 in Law and Society in Modern India.
Sudhir Chandra, "Whose Laws?--Notes on a Nineteenth Century Hindu Case of Conjugal Rights" in RH.

Week VII: Ritual
RN, chs. 3-4

Week VIII: The Uses of History
RN, ch. 5
Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism" in RH, pp. 103-128.

Week IX: Language and the Media
RN, ch. 6

Week X: The Monks' History of Ceylon
Gombrich, chs. 6-8.

Week XI: Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka
Tambiah, Buddhism Betrayed?

Week XII: Wrapping Up
student presentations.