

“Mahatma Gandhi's Religious and Political World”

BLHV 450-40

Wednesday 6:00-9:35; Car Barn 316

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Introduction:

The course will survey the philosophical and cultural foundations of Gandhi's work and his political and social action. It will situate Gandhi in the explosive context of the national upheaval and social (including religious-sectarian) unrest that characterized the middle years of the twentieth century, and continues today. We will look at the way that Hinduism and Buddhism have treated conflict and the possibility of peacefully confronting differences in the world they knew in ancient and modern India. Particular focus will be given to issues involving class, gender and sectarian differences. Students will read some of the sacred texts that influenced the thought of Gandhi and explore Hindu ethics in some detail. Through texts, films, lectures and discussion, members of the class will develop an appreciation for Gandhi's unique intellectual synthesis and creativity, and will learn to look at contemporary South Asian issues through the lens of Gandhian ethics.

Books for Purchase:

M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* Beacon ISBN 0807059099

David Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Encounter* Prentice Hall ISBN 0133957327

Ritu Menon, *Borders and Boundaries Kali for Women* ISBN 8186706356

Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* Vintage ISBN 140003065x

R.K. Narayan, *The Ramayana* Penguin Classics ISBN 0143039679

Packet: A collection of readings available on blackboard

Grading:

Grading will be based on three elements: two 7-page papers (due July 13 and August 10) and participation in presenting a case study of conflict resolution (August 3, 10). For more on papers, see below. Each of the three assignments will be 30% of the grade and the remaining 10% is for class participation. Grading is based on the letter system (A, A-, B+, B, etc.) All assignments are due on the date indicated unless I receive notification in advance by your dean due to special circumstances. Note on attendance: Attendance is required. If absolutely necessary, I request that you notify me in advance of an absence so we can arrange for the makeup of missed material.

Disabilities: Students with disabilities or special needs can receive information about special accommodation by contacting the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354.

Honor Code: Please make sure that you have read the honor code, which is available at www.georgetown.edu/honor. As this class does not have exams the relevant material touches on the subject of plagiarism and on making sure that all documentation is properly executed.

Grading Rubric (Dr. Sophia McLennan
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/s/a/sam50/rubric.htm>) :

The Superior Paper (A/A-)

Thesis: Easily identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear. Connects well with paper title.

Structure: Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Primary source information used to buttress every point with at least one example. Examples support mini-thesis and fit within paragraph. Excellent integration of quoted material into sentences. Demonstrates an in depth understanding of the ideas in the assigned reading and critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in an analytical, persuasive manner.

Analysis: Author clearly relates evidence to "mini-thesis" (topic sentence); analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think of the material. Work displays critical thinking and avoids simplistic description or summary of information.

Logic and argumentation: All ideas in the paper flow logically; the argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes novel connections to outside material (from other parts of the class, or other classes), which illuminate thesis. Creates appropriate college level, academic tone.

Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction excellent; correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run-on sentences or comma splices. Conforms in every way to format requirements.

The Good Paper (B+/B)

Thesis: Promising, but may be slightly unclear, or lacking in insight or originality. Paper title does not connect as well with thesis or is not as interesting.

Structure: Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Examples used to support most points. Some evidence does not support point, or may appear where inappropriate. Quotes well integrated into sentences. Demonstrates a solid understanding of the ideas in the assigned reading and critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in an analytical, persuasive manner.

Analysis: Evidence often related to mini-thesis, though links perhaps not very clear. Some description, but more critical thinking.

Logic and argumentation: Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Occasional insightful connections to outside material made. Mostly creates appropriate college level, academic tone.

Mechanics: Sentence structure, grammar, and diction strong despite occasional lapses; punctuation and citation style often used correctly. Some (minor) spelling errors; may have one run-on sentence or comma splice. Conforms in every way to format requirements.

The Borderline Paper (B-/C+)

Thesis: May be unclear (contain many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new; provides little around which to structure the paper. Paper title and thesis do not connect well or title is unimaginative.

Structure: Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Examples used to support some points. Points often lack supporting evidence, or evidence used where inappropriate (often because there

may be no clear point). Quotes may be poorly integrated into sentences. Demonstrates a general understanding of the ideas in the assigned reading and only occasionally critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in an analytical, persuasive manner.

Analysis: Quotes appear often without analysis relating them to mini-thesis (or there is a weak mini-thesis to support), or analysis offers nothing beyond the quote. Even balance between critical thinking and description.

Logic and argumentation: Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections. Occasionally creates appropriate college level, academic tone, but has some informal language or inappropriate slang.

Mechanics: Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction (usually not major). Some errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have some run-on sentences or comma splices. Conforms in almost every way to format requirements.

The "Needs Help" Paper (C/C-)

Thesis: Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point.

Structure: Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent. Transitions confusing and unclear. Few topic sentences.

Use of evidence: Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence seems to support no statement. Quotes not integrated into sentences; "plopped in" in improper manner. Demonstrates a little understanding of (or occasionally misreads) the ideas in the assigned reading and does not critically evaluate/responds to those ideas in an analytical, persuasive manner.

Analysis: Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to argument; may be no identifiable argument, or no evidence to relate it to. More description than critical thinking.

Logic and argumentation: Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp possible alternative views. Does not create appropriate college level, academic tone, and has informal language or inappropriate slang.

Mechanics: Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices. Does not conform to format

requirements.

The "Really Needs Help" Paper (D+/D)

Is like The "Needs Help" Paper but the problems are more serious or more frequent.

Letter grades are calculated in the following manner:

93%to100%=A, 90%to92%=A- ; 87%to89%=B+, 83%to86%=B, 80%to82%=B- ;
77%to79%=C+, 72%to76%=C, 68%to71%=C- ; 57%to67%=D, Below 57%=F

Your final grade will be based on the three assignments and class participation, as indicated.

The Failing Paper

Shows obviously minimal lack of effort or comprehension of the assignment. Very difficult to understand owing to major problems with mechanics, structure, and analysis. Has no identifiable thesis, or utterly incompetent thesis. Does not follow paper guidelines for length and format. Plagiarizes.

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Learning Objectives:

1. Develop an academic-level understanding of Hinduism and religion
2. Conduct original library research in academic and media sources
3. Write relatively short but sophisticated paper-arguments
4. Learn proper documentation of research
5. Work in groups on innovative application of class data
6. Analyze scriptural sources by means of theoretical tools
7. Develop tools for analyzing moral issues of religious violence today
8. Evaluate a variety of approaches to conflict resolution

Schedule:

5/23—Introduction to the class: R. Attenborough’s “Gandhi”: Reality or Myth?

Background:

5/30—A Brief Introduction to Hinduism

Kim Knott, Hinduism

6/6—Religion and violence in ancient India

Packet: Vedas, Hindu Myths, Devi Mahatmya; The Laws of Manu

6/13—What is a righteous war? The Ramayana

Narayan’s Ramayana

Film: “Fire”

6/20—The limits of religious violence and the birth of non-violence in India

Packet: Upanishads, Buddhist Scriptures; The Bhagavad Gita

Film: “Sadhus”

Gandhi (Women, Caste, Muslims):

6/27—Modern Indian history: From Islamic synthesis to the end of colonialism

Packet: Kulke, A History; G. Richards, A Sourcebook

The Early life of Gandhi

An Autobiography, Part I; “Gandhi” documentary

7/4— The partition of India: violence against women

Borders and Boundaries; “Partition” documentary

7/11— Gandhi, Women and Caste in India

Borders and Boundaries; Film: “Bandit Queen”

7/18— Religion and society in India in light of Gandhi: The Dalits

Packet: P. Ashby, Modern Trends; J. Webster, Religion and Dalit Liberation;

Film: “Caste at Birth”; untouchability in India today.

7/25—Gandhi’s later life and thought

An Autobiography. Parts II, III

Applying the Gandhian method (class exercise A--violence)

8/1—Evaluating the life and thought of Gandhi

An Autobiography, Part IV, V; Packet: S. Wolpert, Gandhi’s Passion

Applying the Gandhian method (class exercise B—economic injustice)

8/8— Conclusion to class: Gandhi, India and the West.

Applying the Gandhian method to international conflict.

Assignments:

Students will have to write two papers of six pages. The papers will be evaluated on form as well as content, so MLA or other style manuals have to be strictly used. All papers must be turned in on the dates indicated. More specific research and writing guidelines will be given separately in class. I am also willing to look at drafts for the first paper.

Paper 1 (due 7/13) Does Gandhian political and ethical thinking represent a complete innovation in Indian philosophy, or is it a natural outcome of traditional Hindu and Buddhist elements? Explain and give detailed examples.

Paper 2 (due for the last class meeting): Discuss the conditions of Muslims, women or untouchables in India and explain how Gandhi would regard their situation today. Does his philosophy work today and can it be applied to help their situation?

Conflict Resolution Assignment (Group): TBA