THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SOUTH ASIAN RELIGION

Instructor

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Institution

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

Course level and type

200-level; second-year undergraduate; mostly lecture.

Hours of Instruction

3 hrs/week over a 14 week term:

Enrollment and year last taught

95 students being taught right now, spring of 1999; about 1/3 of south Asian background – students belonging to most of the south Asian religions being taught are in the class.

Pedagogical Reflections

I've taught an Anthropology of south Asia course five or six times in the last decade, but have been dissatisfied with the breadth of the material I've felt I've had to cover – there's too much for real integration. So this time around I focussed it on historical and ethnographic studies of south Asian religions (I had also noted the students related to religious material in the general course with the most interest). I also tried to design it to get students ready for the diversity of south Asian religious institutions available for visits in New Jersey – in voluntary class trips, we've already visited an impressive, ritually elaborate branch of the Venkateswar temple, in Bridgewater, New Jersey; and we're hoping to visit a mosque with a south Asian congregation, a gurudwara, and another, very different temple (of the Swaminarayans, from Gujarat). I can't rate student reactions at this point, but I'm learning a lot from teaching this material.

This course is about south Asian religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism, Zorastrianism, Christianity and Buddhism) as they have been studied anthropologically and historically – as daily beliefs and practices, and in relation to wider south Asian culture, history and politics. In addition to classroom activities, there will be visits, on weekends, to four diasporic south Asian religious sites in New Jersey – to two Hindu temples, one Sikh gurudwara and to one south Asian mosque (it is hoped that all students can make at least two of these visits; arrangements will be made for those who cannot).

1. Orientation


2. Two Anthropologists Study South Asian Religion


3. Textual Hinduism


4. Jains


5. Popular and Folk Hinduism


6. Hindu Reform, Gurus and Sects


7. Post-Colonial and Subaltern Hinduism


8. Contemporary Hindutva


9. Islam


10. Sikhs


11. Parsis


12. Christians


13. A Diasporic Miscellany


