

**Modern Indian Fiction:
Human Rights and Literature
ENG 3730
Instructor: Professor C. Joel**

Course Description

Taking a cue from Jean Paul Satre’s notion of “Engaged Literature,” this course aims to introduce students to the social realities in South India through the intersecting vantage point of Human Rights discourse and Literature. The literary texts selected for this class include novels, novellas, plays, short stories, films, and poetry from various South Indian states (except the stories “Draupadi” and “Promotion”). Along with these literary texts, we will examine films, newspaper and magazine articles, and broader national and international human rights declarations to generate discussion on aesthetics and ethics, rights violation and assertion.

This course will not single out India as a locus of extraordinary human rights abuses. While the readings address contemporary issues in South India as presented by local authors, class discussions, weekly assignments, independent research, and the final paper will require students to view the human rights issues addressed in the texts under comparative and global lenses. Students should be prepared to address and critique faulty narratives of the Western world as the sole harbinger of human rights protection. They will also be encouraged to integrate global theories of power and marginality into assignments and class discussions.

Course content will focus on a range of highly sensitive issues, especially those surrounding caste, female infanticide, rape, police brutality, honour killing, organ donation, the marginalization of cis-gender and transgender women, dowry, and sexual abuse of children. Furthermore, global issues of race killings, sexual assault, genocide, and crimes of war, are among those that may be addressed in class discussions and assignments. Topics addressed in this class may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I’d be happy to discuss any concerns you may have before the subject comes up in class. If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

Course Design

This will be a discussion-based, seminar course with occasional lectures, films, field visits, and participatory activities. We will meet fourteen times throughout the term. Students will need to come to each class prepared to discuss each assigned reading in detail and submit written assignments as directed in this syllabus. All **required texts** will be available to you, via photocopy, electronic, or novel/novella form.

I strongly encourage all participants to integrate themes and ideas from other SITA courses and their proposed Independent Study Project into our class discussions.

Course Requirements

My evaluation of your performance will be based on the following criteria: class participation, discussion question, response papers, a presentation on human rights in Madurai, and a final paper. Descriptions of the formal assignments are provided below:

Discussion Questions should be submitted by 9:00am before each class meeting. They should address any major questions or points of discussion about the week's readings that you wish to address. Your questions will allow me to ensure that we focus class time on your thoughts and interests. As such, I will incorporate questions into our class when appropriate.

Comparative Papers will require students to compare themes of the assigned readings with current events happening in other parts of the world. (For example, a student could write about the ways that caste-based discrimination compares to racist practices in the United States.) Students should be detailed in their observations and, when necessary, cite contemporary news articles. ***Students will be required to submit 3 comparative papers throughout the semester.*** They should range from 2-4 pages, double spaced.

Other written assignments will be assigned, especially toward the end of the course. I will provide prompts to guide your writing.

For the Final Term Paper will be an extension of the comparative papers. Students will explore one of the assigned texts in detail and compare it with a self-selected literary text, of any genre, from a different part of the world. The two texts do not have to be mirror images of one another, but they should contain analogous themes that can produce compelling analyses and argument(s). While the texts should be a primary focus on the paper, students will be required to engage in at least two pieces of academic and journalistic literature to further explore the human rights issues discussed in both pieces. Papers should range between 12 and 15 pages in length.

Grading will be done on the following basis:

- 20% Participation
- 10% Discussion Questions
- 20% Comparative Papers
- 20% Other Written Assignments
- 30% Final Term Paper

The grading scale runs:

93% - 100%	A
90% - 92%	A-
87% - 89%	B+
83% - 86%	B
80% - 82%	B-
77% - 79%	C+
73% - 76%	C
70% - 72%	C-
65% - 69%	D
Below 65%	F

Class Schedule

Class I: Introduction to Human Rights and Literary Expressions in the Indian Context (August 18th)

Readings:

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”

(<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>)

Class II: Gender, Caste, Religion, and Politics in *The God of Small Things* – part 1 (August 22nd)

Readings:

The God of Small Things – Arundathi Roy (chapters 1-11)

Class III: Gender, Caste, Religion, and Politics in *The God of Small Things* – part 2 (August 25th)

Reading:

The God of Small Things – Arundathi Roy (chapters 10-21)

Class IV: Human Rights Abuses by Law Enforcement (August 29th)

Readings & Materials:

“Draupadi” – Mahasweta Devi, Trans. Gayatri Spivak

Class V: Female Infanticide (September 1st)

Reading:

Birthright – Vaasanthi, Trans. Vasantha Surya

Class VI: Patriarchy among Muslim Communities (September 5th)

Reading:

Breaking Ties- Sara Aboobacker

Class VII: Dalit Issues in Poetry and Short Stories (September 8th)

Readings & Materials:

“Identity Card” – S. Joseph, Trans. K. Satchidanandan

“Madness” – C. Ayyappan, Trans. Abhirami Sriram

“Promotion” – Arjun Danlge, Trans. Lalita Paranjape

“Ailment” – Abimani, Trans.N. Kalyana Raman

Kerala Assignment: Having read *The God of Small Things* and several other texts that address human rights issues, you are now more equipped to notice various social hierarchies organize space and day-to-day practice. In one of the cities you visit in Kerala (Thekkady, Kottayam, or Cochin) take two hours to observe the presence of caste, gender, and any other relevant social hierarchy you may see. You may take time to interact with people and record their responses. Write a report on your findings and relate it back to at least one of the readings we have done thus far. The assignment should be 4-6 pages, double spaced. **Due September 22nd.**

Class VIII: Dalit Autobiography

(September 19th)

Karukku – Bama, Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom

Class IX: Organ Donation and Surrogacy

(September 22nd)

Reading:

The Harvest – A Play by Manjula Padmanabhan

Class X: Gender, Banditry, and Resistance

(September 26th)

Reading: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/11/indias-bandit-queen/304890/>

<http://rarre.org/documents/roy/Arundhati%20Roy%20on%20Shekhar%20Kapur%27s%20Bandit%20Queen.pdf>

Written Assignment: Write a reflection about the representation of animosity between high castes and low castes, rape and retaliation and the role of violence. Please keep this assignment at 2-3 pages in length, double spaced.

Guest Facilitator: Nisha Felicitia

Class XI: Sexualities and Gender Expressions in India -- with Gopi

(September 29th or TBA)

Readings:

<https://www.alphachihonor.org/tasks/sites/default/assets/File/Aletheia/Aletheia%20V1-1%202016/Homosexuality%20and%20Gender%20Expression%20in%20India.pdf>

Written Assignment: Analyse a story from **Same-Sex Love in India: A Literary History** edited by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai in juxtaposition with a story from the US context and explore the differences and similarities between the two situations. This assignment should be 2-3 pages in length.

Guest Lecturer: Gopi Shankar

Class XII: Visit to TTS

(Date TBA)

Written Assignment: What do you think about the role of institutions such as the TTS in creating an equal and a just society? You may respond to this question in relation to *Karukku*. The assignment should be 2-3 pages in length, double spaced.

Class XIII: Creative Writing Workshop

(Date TBA)

Readings: Sample Poems: “Ode to Tomatoes” by Pablo Neruda

(http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/pablo_neruda/poems/15736)

“Sweet Like a Crow” by Michael Ondaatje

(<https://www.poetryinvoice.com/poems/sweet-crow>)

Sample Story: “Black Box” by Jennifer Eagan

(<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box-2>)

Written Assignment: Send the poem or story written. Also give a brief reflection of the experience.

Final Papers Due on October 19th

Further Reading (Optional)

1. Roy, Arundhati. Introduction, "The Doctor and the Saint, New Delhi: Navayana, 2014.
2. Virani, Pinki. *Bitter Chocolate: Child Sexual Abuse in India*. Delhi: Penguin, 2000.
3. ---. *Aruna's Stories*. Delhi: Penguin, 2000. (Rape Victim Story)

Films (optional)

1. *Talvar*- Dir. Meghna Gulzar (2015)
2. *Jai Bhim Comrade*- Dir. Anand Patwardhan- Documentary (2011)
3. *Yellow* – Dir. Mahesh Limaye 2014.
4. *Traffic* – Dir. Rajesh Pillai (2011)
5. *Water* – Dir. Deepa Mehta (2005)