

**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, and in-class 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 described 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.

Response Papers can be submitted at the beginning of each class meeting. Generally, response papers should be between half a page and one full page, single spaced. I will not limit your creativity in response papers. However, your writings should give me confidence that you have read the text thoroughly and are engaging with their primary themes. Response papers are required every week that you do not write comparative papers.

Comparative Papers will require students to compare themes of the assigned readings with current events happening in another part of the world. (For example, a student could write about the ways that caste-based violence and discrimination compares to racist practices in the United States or South Africa.) Students should be detailed in their observations and, when necessary, cite contemporary news articles. Students will be required to submit 4 comparative papers throughout the semester. They should range from 2-4 pages, double spaced. You do not have to submit a response paper on days that you submit a comparative paper.

The Class Presentation on Grassroots Movements will allow you to explore local responses human rights issues in South India. Students will be responsible for contacting a human rights advocacy NGO in Madurai to learn about their work, the people they serve, and the broader social issues they address. Each presentation will link students' findings with broader themes of the class, and address the complexities of human rights interventions. Students can choose to contact a range of organizations, including People's Watch, Evidence, Ekta, Sudar, and more. The presentation should run between 10 and 15 minutes (depending on class enrolment). Students can use media and creative writing (prose, poetry, short fiction, and plays) in their presentations.

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

- 10% Response Papers
- 10% Comparative Papers
- 20% Class Presentation on Grassroots Movements
- 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 (Date TBA)

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 (Date TBA)

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 (Date TBA)

Reading:

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

Class IV: Human Rights Abuses by Law Enforcement (Date TBA)

Readings & Materials:

“Draupadi” – Mahasweta Devi, Trans. Gayatri Spivak

The Gospel of Yudas – K. R. Meera, Trans. Vasantha Surya

(Optional) Bandit Queen – 1994 Film directed by Shekhar Kapur

Class VI: Female Infanticide (Date TBA)

Reading:

Birthright – Vaasanthi, Trans. Vasantha Surya

Class VII: Patriarchy among Muslim Communities (Date TBA)

Reading:

Breaking Ties- Sara Aboobacker

Class VIII: Socio-Sexual Hierarchies

(Date TBA)

Readings:

“My Mother, Her Crime”– C.S. Lakshmi (Ambai), Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom

“There is a Kitchen in the Corner of the House” – *Ibid*

Class IX: Dalit Issues in Poetry and Short Stories

(Date TBA)

Readings & Materials:

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

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

“Nostalgia” – Paul Chirakkarode, Trans. Catherine Thankamma

“Black Ink” – Sanjaya Kumar Bag, Trans. Raj Kumar

“Promotion” – Arjun Danlge, Trans. Lalita Paranjape

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

Class X: Dalit Autobiography (in Translation)

(Date TBA)

Reading:

Karukku – Bama, Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom

Class XI: “So-Called Honor Killings”

(Date TBA)

Readings:

Pethavan (The Begetter) – Imayam, Trans. Gita Subramanian

Class XII: Trans Issues and Alternate Sexualities in India

(Date TBA)

Readings:

The Truth About me: A Hijra Life Story – A. Revathi, Trans. V. Geetha

Class XIII: Student presentations

(Date TBA)

Students will present on their independent research on Human Rights issues and advocacy in the Madurai Area.

Class XIV: Organ Donation and Surrogacy

(Date TBA)

Reading:

The Harvest – A Play by Manjula Padmanabhan

Final Papers Due on TBA

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)