The reverse of the principle of Separate but Equal, caste implies Together but Unequal. This course will investigate two aspects of India’s “peculiar institution”: 1) caste hierarchy as lived in historical and present-day South Asian communities; and 2) discourses of caste as conceived, justified, and reformed within Hindu thought. Alongside mythological and didactic texts taken from classical Hindu literature, we will consider a range of alternatives to orthodox caste dharma (varnashramadharma) as advanced by lower-caste voices, exponents of Bhakti devotionalism, and modern critics such as Gandhi and Ambedkar.

The main business of this course, however, will be critical readings of analytic frameworks scholars have developed to study caste. We will work our way through the ideas of theorists such as Dumont, Srinivas, and Dirks. As a social institution apparently distinctive to South Asia (but is it?), caste has inspired some of the most innovative and provocative efforts of twentieth-century anthropologists and sociologists to map social relations along multiple axes—power, prestige, material exchange, and spatiality—in ways that have served as explicit or implicit counterpoints to models premised on images of Western modernity.

Class sessions will be conducted seminar-style, with selected readings being introduced by one or two discussion leaders who will prepare short, informal papers; I may prime the pump at the end of the preceding session by assigning discussion leaders specific questions or technical terms to gloss. There will be two exams, both take-home essays: a midterm, to weigh in at 5–7 pp., and a final essay to incorporate library research as well as a critical engagement with the theories and models introduced in the course.

**Course Goals and Learning Objectives**

This class will encourage you to develop and express your ideas in more than one way. Alongside thesis-driven written assignments, there are discussion leader assignments that invite students to communicate ideas dynamically and verbally. Another way to put this might be to say that on their presentation days, students take on the responsibility of helping to teach the course. Much of our discussion will center on questions of cultural difference—on getting inside perspectives on collective and individual identity that will provoke many of you to examine the culturally constructed character of your own notions of society and self. The challenge—which will be familiar to anyone who studies cultural anthropology—will be to balance a critically rigorous attitude with sensitivity to difference.
Note that among the assigned texts are three Indian mass-market ("Bollywood") films. These are examples of popular cinema, produced as crowd-pleasers. Attend the screenings expecting to enjoy yourselves, but also prepared to take notes over a period of up to three hours. You will be required to write a short essay on the film of your choice.

Prerequisites: There are no formal course prerequisites for ANTH 50.7. But inasmuch as your ability to formulate mature and sophisticated ideas about the material you study with me will require you to relate it to various South Asia-specific contexts, I strongly recommend that you enter this course forearmed with some prior experience of the academic study of the religion, history, politics, or social organization of South Asia, or of models of social organization proposed by theorists in the social sciences.

Required Books and Films

Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications

Narendra Jadhav, Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant Escape from India’s Caste System

Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty and Brian K. Smith, trans., The Laws of Manu

Textbooks may be purchased at Wheelock Books. Note that the syllabus incorporates numerous reading assignments taken from sources outside of these books, which will be made accessible through Baker Reserves and on Blackboard.

Agnivarsha (dir. Arjun Sajnani, 2002)

Mrityudand (dir. Prakash Jha, 1997)

Sant Tukaram (dirs. V. G. Damle and Sheikh Fattelal, 1936)

It is highly recommended that you view the films together with your classmates at the screenings as scheduled. Films will also be made accessible through the library’s reserves and streaming services.

Course Requirements

1. Class Participation, including discussion-leader assignments: 25%

2. Film essay, 5 pp.: 15%

3. Midterm essay, 5–6 pp.: 25%

4. Final essay, 10+ pp.: 35%
Classroom Policies

1. **Attendance:** Attendance in class is mandatory. If you find you are unable to attend on a particular day, tell me before you miss class, preferably through e-mail. Note that attendance is part of your class participation grade and that more than two unexcused absences will put that grade at risk.

2. **Cell phones:** Off. Checking your phone for messages, etc. while class is in session is a mark of disrespect to me, your classmates, and the College and—outside of an emergency context—will incur mockery from me or worse.

3. **Food and drink:** No eating in the classroom. Liquids are fine. If it were up to me you could smoke in class too, but if you took me up on that I suspect we could both get in hot water with the College.

*If you require a personal exemption from any of these rules, talk to me or e-mail me about it.*

4. **A general principle concerning the syllabus:** Read the whole syllabus. No, really. Like today.

5. **Another general principle concerning the syllabus:** The syllabus is subject to change through the course of the term. As your instructor, I may revise or augment what’s on the menu for any given day through the end of the term.

6. **A general principle concerning class discussion:** The classroom is a community, and class discussion is a collective project. When you contribute, be aware that your audience is a roomful of comparably well-informed interlocutors. Don’t be shy (I will try to encourage you), and keep in mind this basic point: *It’s not about me; it’s about the ideas—and contributing to a dynamic and collective discussion about them.*

7. **Please turn in all written assignments to me** (or my office mailbox) on paper, unless otherwise specified. It’s up to you to print it out in time, not up to me.

8. **Late assignment policy:** Note that the due dates for the two biggest assignments are fixed. *The midterm exam is due at 5:00 on Tuesday, 4 February.* Midterms turned in after the 5:00 mark will incur a three-point penalty for every day they are late. I will announce the prompts to all of you at the same time and so fairness requires that you have the same amount of time to complete the assignment. *The final paper is due at 5:00 on 14 March, which is the Dartmouth College deadline.* As far as the other assignments (and emergencies) are concerned, there’s one cardinal rule: Don’t be a stranger. I promise to be accessible, by e-mail and in person before and after class and at the office. If you need help with the assignments—whether your concerns are time-related, text-related, or anything else—consider me your first stop.

9. **Punctuality, yours and mine:** I will do my best to start class on time, and I really don’t like to deprive latecomers of important information, so I hope you also do your best to arrive on time. I confess to the bad habit of allowing class discussions to run
overtime. Consider yourself notified: Class ends at 12:20 sharp. If we’re still talking, you may choose to stick around in the classroom out of interest or courtesy, but you are under no obligation to do so.

10. My attitude towards grading: Do the reading for each class and make informed contributions to class discussion when you see an opening. If you follow these two baseline principles, you’ll be well on the way to succeeding in this course.

A straight-A project for me is one that exhibits excellence, and generally speaking there are two ways to do that. The first is to produce work that is letter perfect. In the case of a paper, that means the argument is tight and it discusses the material at a level of sophistication that demonstrates mastery. The second way is to take an intellectual risk—and for that risk to pay off. As a teacher, I’m never more pleased than when I recognize work from a student that surprises me and teaches me something new.

A grade in the C range or lower generally indicates that something is wrong. I don’t give out many Cs, and when I do I am sure to identify the problem. I do recognize that some students may make the call to turn in C-grade work in my class because they have placed their priorities elsewhere, and that is a decision I can respect on a personal level. In other words, no foul—so long as you’re 1) in control of the situation; and 2) not under the illusion that you’re entitled to a good grade for something you didn’t work hard on.

Academic Honesty Policy


Student Needs

Students with disabilities enrolled in this course and who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the first week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

Student Accessibility Services: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~accessibility/facstaff/.

Additional Support for your Learning

Academic Skills Center: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/.

Research Center for Writing, and Information Technology (RWiT): http://www.dartmouth.edu/~rwit/.
Course Schedule

week 1—Introductions

Jan.  6 (M)
introductions of: members of the class; the general scheme of the class; its goals and standards. How do we think of caste in historical and present-day India? As a religious concept? As a set of economic relations? As a unit of organization—social, administrative, cosmic? Is caste a “system”?

distribute handouts: Rig Veda 10.90, preamble to the Constitution of India, “Seven Prevalent Misconceptions about India’s Caste System”

supplemental reading: Eleanor Zelliot, “Caste in Contemporary India”

8 (W)
readings: Steven M. Parish, “God-Chariots in a Garden of Castes”; Sara Dickey, “Anjali’s Alliance”

10 (F)

week 2—Canonical Texts I

13 (M)
reading: Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty and Brian K. Smith, The Laws of Manu, introduction–chap. 1

15 (W)
reading: Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty and Brian K. Smith, The Laws of Manu, chaps. 2–5

17 (F)
reading: Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty and Brian K. Smith, The Laws of Manu, chaps. 6–9

week 3—Indo-Aryans

19 (Sun)
screening (7:00, room TBA): Agnivarsha (dir. Arjun Sajnani, 2002)

22 (W)
reading: Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty and Brian K. Smith, The Laws of Manu, chaps. 10–12
23 (Thu, x-period)

24 (F)
*readings*: Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, chap. 1, “Ideology and the Interpretation of Early Indian History”; Paula Richman, “E. V. Ramasami’s Reading of the *Ramayana*”

**week 4—Canonical Texts II**

27 (M)

*midterm essay assigned*

29 (W)

31 (F)

**week 5—Ethnography I**

Feb. 3 (M)
*readings*: M. N. Srinivas, “The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization,” “The Social Structure of a Mysore Village”

*assign reading for class discussion exercise on* Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India*

4 (Tue)
**Midterm Essay Due: 5:00 IN MY MAILBOX, ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT**

5 (W)

6 (Thu, x-period)
*reading*: William Wiser, *from The Hindu Jajmani System*

*class discussion exercise on* Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India*
week 6—Lower-Caste Voices

9 (Sun)  
**screening (7:00, room TBA):** _Sant Tukaram_ (dirs. V. G. Damle and Sheikh Fattelal, 1936)

10 (M)  

12 (W)  
**reading:** Narendra Jadhav, _Untouchables, first half_

14 (F)  
**reading:** Narendra Jadhav, _Untouchables, second half_

week 7—Ethnography II: Transactions

17 (M)  
**readings:** McKim Marriott, “Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism”; Gloria Goodwin Raheja, _from The Poison in the Gift_

19 (W)  
**reading:** Gloria Goodwin Raheja, _from The Poison in the Gift (cont.)_  
**discuss film essay**

21 (F)  
**reading:** E. Valentine Daniel, _Fluid Signs_, chap. 2, “An Ur Known”

week 8—Ethnography III: Who’s in the Middle?

23 (Sun)  
**screening (7:00, room TBA):** _Mrityudand_ (dir. Prakash Jha, 1997)

24 (M)  
**reading:** Lucia Michelutti, _from The Vernacularisation of Democracy_  
**discuss final paper**

26 (W)  
**reading:** Lawrence Babb, _from Alchemies of Violence_
28 (F)

week 9—Gandhi and Ambedkar

Mar. 3 (M)
film essay due

5 (W)
readings: Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, from The Modernity of Tradition, “Gandhi and the New Courage” and “Self-Control and Political Potency”; M. K. Gandhi, “Civilization” and “What is True Civilization?” from Hind Swaraj; “The Untouchables” and “Hinduism” from The Gandhi Reader

7 (F)

14 (F)
Final Paper Due: 5:00 IN MY MAILBOX, ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT