



The City, the River, the Sacred

SOCI 360: *Varanasi: City of Confluence and Contradiction*

Course Description

Varanasi, Kashi, Banaras, is an intensely challenging and endlessly fascinating city. An intricate mosaic of cultures, it is said to be the quintessence of India's religious, ethnic, social and linguistic diversity. Like any urban space, the city of Varanasi is at best the expression of multiple contradictions and confluences which need to be understood.

This interdisciplinary, core course aims to provide students with an introduction to the complex reality of Varanasi, exploring the complex intersections of the city, the river, and the sacred that both define it and place it in the greater context of national and global urban setting. The course provides students with an academic framework within which they can process the environment around them by presenting both an historic and current, holistic view of the city and its people over the years.

We will consider Varanasi as a sacred space and place of pilgrimage as well as an arena of cultural and social interaction, economic and political activity.

Learning Objectives

The purpose of this course is to enable students to progressively detangle the complex layers of interpretation and understanding of Varanasi, and provide them an academic context and platform to do so. It is expected that, from this course, students:

1. Will learn about the historical evolution of the city of Varanasi, an urban center imbued with significant religious, cultural, and political importance within Northern India.
2. Will develop a more nuanced understanding of the urban, environmental, socio-economic and historical components that make up the fabric of contemporary Varanasi.
3. Will be able to extrapolate insights into the local reality of Varanasi towards a richer understanding of contemporary India.
4. Will learn to compare and incorporate the results of interviews with local citizens conducted during field visits with textual sources

Course Schedule

Session 01-29

Introduction to the course and the city of Varanasi

Readings:

Thapar, Romila. (1990). *A History of India: Volume One*. London, UK: Penguin Books. (pp. 15-27).

Session 02-29

Boat-ride on the Ganges

Readings:

Eck, Diana L. (1999). *Banaras - City of Light*. New Delhi, India: Penguin Books. (pp. xiii-xvi, 1-25).

Session 03-29

Varanasi and the ghats

Readings:

Pandey, Rajesh Kumar. (2014). High court adjourns hearing in Varanasi buildings' case. *Times of India*. April 2. retrieved from

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/allahabad/High-court-adjourns-hearing-in-Varanasi-buildings-case/articleshow/33106282.cms>;

TNN (2014). Allahabad high court orders expert panel for Varanasi heritage. *Times of India*. September 11. retrieved from

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/allahabad/Allahabad-high-court-orders-expert-panel-for-Varanasi-heritage/articleshow/42290827.cms?>

Session 04-29

Varanasi: The sacred city

Readings:

Eck, Diana L. (1999). Kashi: City of All India. In Madan, T. N. (ed.). *Religion in India*. (pp. 138-155).

Assignments:

Writing Assignment 1 due on class 10

Session 05-29

Varanasi: The city of ascetics

Readings:

Sawyer, Dana, W. (198) The Monastic Structure of Banarsi Dandi Sadhus. In Hertel, Bradley R. & Humes, Cynthia Ann. (Eds.). *Living Banaras: Hindu Religion in Cultural Context*. (pp. 159-180)

Session 06-29

Interview with ascetics

Session 07-29**Varanasi: The city of death**Readings:

Parry, Jonathan (1994). *Death in Banaras*. Cambridge, United Kingdom. Cambridge University Press (pp. 11–32).

Session 08-29**Field visit to cremation ground and old city**

Session 09-29**Varanasi in the eyes of Banarsi Muslims**

(Guest lecture by Muslim faculty)

Readings:

Searle-Chatterjee, Mary. (1998). Religious Division and the Mythology of the Past. In Hertel, Bradley R, Humes, Cynthia Ann Ed. *Living Banaras. Hindu Religion in Cultural Context*. (pp. 145-158).

Session 10-29**Varanasi: The city of saints**Readings:

Hawley, J. S. and Juergensmeyer, Mark. (2004). *Songs of the Saints of India*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press. (pp. 9-23 and 35-49).

Assignments:

Assignment 1 due

Session 11-29**Varanasi: The city of Music**

(Interview with musician)

Readings:

Neuman, Daniel. (2006). *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press. (pp. 59–84).

Session 12-29**Varanasi: The city of Ramlila**Readings:

Lutgendorf, Philip. (1991). *Life of the Text - Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas*. Oakland, USA: University of California Press. (pp. 248-253 and 267-294).

Session 13-29**Watching Ramlila**

(Class will be arranged according to the schedule of the performances)

Session 14-29**Varanasi: The city of Pandits**Readings:

Dalmia, Vasudha. (1997). *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras*. Delhi, India: Permanent black. (pp 94-107).

Session 15-29**Field visit to traditional Pathshala**Assignments:

Writing Assignment 2 due on class 23

Session 16-29**Varanasi: The city of learning**Readings:

Kockmann, Uwe. (1993). The Role of Educational Institutions in the awakening of Hindu Nationalism in 19th Century Varanasi. In Singh, Rana P.B. (ed.). *Banaras (Varanasi): Cosmic Order, Sacred City, Hindu Traditions*. (pp. 289-295).

Session 17-29**Varanasi and language**Readings:

Simon, Beth. (1998). Language Choice, Religion and Identity in the Banarsi Community(1998). In Hertel, Bradley R, Humes, Cynthia Ann Ed. *Living Banaras. Hindu Religion in Cultural Context*. (pp. 245-268).

Session 18-29**Varanasi: The city of weavers**Readings:

Kumar, Nita. (1988). *Artisans of Banaras : Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986*. Delhi, India: Longman. (pp. 12-39).

Session 19-29**Field visit to Madanpura (weaver's quarters)****Session 20-29****Varanasi: The city of Bazaars**Readings:

Reading: Freitag, Sandria B. (ed.). (1995). *Culture and Power in Banaras - Community, Performance, and Environment, 1800–1980*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press. (pp. 1-22).

Bayly, C.A. (1998) *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars – North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770--1870*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press. (pp. 277-289)

Session 21/22-29**Field visit to Chowk area**

Session 23-29

Varanasi: The home of goddess Ganga
(watching Ganga Aarti)

Assignments:

Assignment 2 due

Session 24-29

Varanasi: The home of polluted Ganga

Readings:

Hammer, Joshua. (2007). A Prayer for the Ganges. *Smithsonian Magazine*. November. (pp. 75-82)

Session 25-29

Varanasi: The city of boatmen

Readings:

Doron, Assa. (2006). The Needle and the Sword: Boatmen, Priests and the Ritual Economy of Varanasi. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. 29, 3. (pp. 345-367).

Session 26-29

Varanasi and slums

Readings:

Singh, Binay. (2009). Slums pose hurdle in city's overall development plans. *Times of India*. June 16. retrieved from

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/Slums-pose-hurdle-in-citys-overall-development-plans/articleshow/4663631.cms>;

Dikshit, Rajeev. (2014). City houses 227 slums on 17% of total area. *Times of India*. February 7. retrieved from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/City-houses-227-slums-on-17-of-total-area/articleshow/29981477.cms>

Session 27-29

Interview with people living into a slum

Assignments:

Final take-home exam distributed

Session 28-29

Varanasi: The city of masti

Readings:

Kumar, Nita. (1986). Open Space and Free time: Pleasure for the People of Banaras. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 20.1. (pp. 41-60)

Session 29-29

Varanasi and foreigners (class discussion)

Assignments:

Final take-home exam due

Evaluation

Attendance & Class Participation	10%
Homework Assignment 1	20%
Homework Assignment 2	30%
Final Take-home Exam	40%

Assessment Criteria

Class Participation

At the beginning of class students will take turns summarizing the argument of the assigned reading (What is the main point of the text? What are the sources and the kinds of evidence the author uses to demonstrate the validity of the argument? The most surprising things they found in the reading?). Students are encouraged to come up with good questions that can generate an open debate (questions that ask for more information about something in the reading, for example, although perfectly valid, will not facilitate discussion).

Homework assignment 1

Students will observe people and activities on the ghats at different times of the day (morning and evening). The result of the observations will be reported into a paper (4 pages – 1000 words) and students will be assessed on their ability of analyzing their observations in the perspective of identity formation reflecting on questions like: how do those spaces help to create certain kinds of identities? How do such processes work? How might these help shape the city?

Arguments supported by bibliographic sources will receive higher marks than those supported by mere observation or general supposition. Students are expected to use at least two outside sources, in addition to the course materials provided.

Homework assignment 2

Students will observe people and activities in the IP Mall, Sagra (afternoon and evening). The result of the observations will be reported into a paper (4 pages – 1000 words) and students will be assessed on their ability of analyzing their observations in the perspective of identity formation reflecting on questions like: how does that space and (malls in general) help to create certain kinds of identities? How do such processes work? How might these help shape the city? Students may add their considerations about the impact of modernization/globalization on the city of Varanasi. Arguments supported by bibliographic sources will receive higher marks than those supported by mere observation or general supposition. Students are expected to use at least two outside sources, in addition to the course materials provided.

Final Take-home Exam

Students will complete a take-home exam, involving about 8 pages (2000) of writing. The exam questions, will be distributed one week before exam due date.

Students will be assessed on their ability to reply to the given questions, showing not only knowledge of assigned readings and topics discussed in class, but also intellectual engagement with the material of the semester

Grading

Alliance programs utilize the follow standard grading policy well accepted by most US institutions.

Excellent	A	93-100%	Good	B+	87-89%	Acceptable	C+	77-79%
	A-	90-92%		B	83-86%		C	73-76%
				B-	80-82%		C-	70-72%
						Unsatisfactory	D+	67-69%
							D	63-66%
							D-	60-62%
						Failing	F	<60%

Course Policies

Exams and Assignments

Students are required to take all regularly scheduled exams in courses for which they are registered, and to submit all assignments on time. Any compelling academic, personal, or medical reason that might justify a rescheduled exam or assignment must be brought up to the Resident Director, not program faculty. Failure to take scheduled exams or submit the requisite assignments for a course will adversely affect your grade as per the stated grading criteria for each course.

Classroom Conduct

Student punctuality is extremely important in China and India. Please do not be late for classes or other activities, as it is considered impolite to do so. It is improper to eat in class, to engage in other activities such as texting, or to slump or nap. Students are expected to be alert and engaged as a sign of respect for their professors.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory. It is essential that the students participate fully in the coursework and all required academic activities. Authorized absences may only be approved by the Resident Director, and students are expected to make up any missed work. Unauthorized absences will adversely affect a student's grades.