

165:197 International Development (3 S. H.)

Section 01: Empowering Villagers in Rural India: Field Experience in Chitrakoot, India

Dec. 27, 2009 - Jan. 15, 2010

The course instructor, Amy Butler (amy-c-butler@uiowa.edu), is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work. She earned an MSW and PhD in Social Work and Sociology at the University of Michigan. She currently conducts research on poverty and the effects of social policy on families. She teaches courses on social welfare policy and has led student immersion courses to the inner-cities of Philadelphia and San Bernardino; to El Salvador; and to Tamil Nadu, India.

If you watched the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* you saw the scenes of the massive slums in Mumbai (Bombay) and the homeless children. One of the reasons for the growth of these slums is the inability of families in rural areas to support themselves, forcing villagers to move to cities to look for work.

The Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) our **sponsor** is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) founded by Nanaji Deshmukh to promote rural development and self sufficiency. DRI works with 80 villages in the vicinity of Chitrakoot, an area characterized by high poverty and unemployment and low literacy. The organization focuses on children's education (with an emphasis on girls), entrepreneurship training for young people, water harvesting, organic agriculture, cottage industries, Ayurvedic medicine, naturopathy, and yoga. "Social craftsmen couples" (resident social workers) live and work with the villagers and tackle social problems with the goal that the villages become self reliant and harmonious. Students will visit villages and schools, observe self-help groups, talk with families, and participate in a variety of activities sponsored by DRI.



Young girls buying bangles in Chitrakoot (photo taken by Raj in July, 2009)

In social work, as well as in related fields, we strive to recognize the extent to which a culture's structure and values may oppress and marginalize some groups while creating or enhancing privilege and power among other groups. At the same time, we seek to practice in a manner that is culturally competent and respectful of cultural differences. In this course we will explore the tension that can

develop between the promotion of human rights—including those of women—and culturally competent practice.

Using the primary values from the social work profession of the dignity and worth of all individuals, we will assist students to discover and identify strengths in individuals, families, communities and cultures. The empowerment process will be taught through the use of dialogue groups to enhance awareness and facilitate problem solving perspectives. While in India, we will meet as a group each evening to process our experiences and engage in a creative growth journey. We will also develop our own ideas for what might be done to improve the well-being the individuals, families, and communities we visited and we will share these ideas with the Deendayal Research Institute at the end of our stay.

Chitrakoot is a destination for Hindu pilgrims because, according to Hindu tradition, Lord Rama and his wife Sita spent most of their 14-year exile here. We will familiarize ourselves with the *Ramayana* (the story of Rama's life) and visit several holy sites in the area. This is a necessary step in becoming cultural competent because, as we will see, religion is an integral part of everyday life in India.

This is an opportunity to see the world from a different lens on many levels. We will help you understand how to reframe problems and difficulties to challenges and opportunities, a common social work undertaking. You will see the world from an Eastern mindset, from a third world perspective, from an economic perspective and a spiritual perspective. This is truly a life altering experience that has the potential to expand your worldview.



Ram Ghat in Chitrakoot
(photo from Wikipedia)

Course Requirements

Prior to departure

- Attend orientation meeting(s).
- Attend three 2-hour Friday afternoon seminars (3-5pm, dates TBA), read and view required materials, and turn in two reflection papers on those materials.

During our stay in India

- Attend all planned activities and excursions.
- Attend regular group meetings with the instructor to process experiences.
- Keep a daily journal.

Due on January 25, 2010

- A 10-page essay about what you learned
- An essay (~ 500 words) suitable for publication in a newspaper or a public presentation about the most important part of your experience in India.



Lord Rama

Required Reading

- Bornstein, David (2007). “Ten—Nine—Eight—Childline! Jeroo Billimoria, India: Child Protection” pp. 70-91 in *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*. Oxford University Press. (available on ICON)
- Thani, Ekta (2008). “Deendayal Research Institute: A success story.” Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology. http://capart.nic.in/pub/DRI_Eng.pdf
- Kishwar, Madhu Purnima (2005). Destined to fail: Inherent flaws in the anti-dowry legislation. *Manushi* no. 148, pp. 3-12. http://www.manushi-india.org/pdfs_issues/PDF%20Files%20148/MK%20Article%203-12.pdf

- Narayan, D., Sen, B., & Hull, K. (2009). “Moving out of poverty in India: An overview.” The World Bank. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INDIAEXTN/Resources/Reports-Publications/366387-1244786182191/MOP-India-Overview.pdf>
- Rosenberg, Tina (August 19, 2009). The Daughter Deficit. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/magazine/23FOB-idealab-t.html>
- Ramcharitmanas. (Handout available on ICON)
- Singer, Peter (2009). Chapters 1, 6 & 7 in *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*. NY: Random House (available on ICON).

Required Viewing

Watch one (or both) of the following two movies:

- *Gandhi* (1982), directed by Richard Attenborough. This film won eight Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor.
- *Mahatma Gandhi: Pilgrim of Peace* (1997), A&E Biography. You can rent this documentary or download it from <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5680530360797443942#>

Recommended viewing:

For a fun introduction to the *Ramayana* from Sita’s point of view, rent the DVD: *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008) or download it from <http://www.sitasingstheblues.com/watch.html>



☆ Chitrakoot (Chitrakut)

Course Grades

Grades for the course will be based on the following elements:

- **25%** attendance at seminars; two reflection papers on required reading and viewing materials.
- **30%** Active engagement and discussion with fellow students and instructors, our hosts, and the sponsoring organizations
- **15%** Daily journal: record your thoughts, feelings, ideas, fears, joys, anxieties, insights and experiences. No self-censorship is wanted or needed. The instructor will keep what you write confidential. Submit to Amy Butler on the last day of the trip.
- **20%** 10-page essay on what you have learned.
- **10%** 500 word essay on your experience, suitable for publication in a newspaper, on the most important part of your experience with your partner organization, due on or before Jan 16th.

For more information:

- go to the INDIA and IOWA (INDIA) Winterim webpage at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~geog/india/>
- contact Professor Amy Butler at amy-c-butler@uiowa.edu or stop by her office (333 North Hall) during her office hours (Tuesday, 1-2:15; Thursday, 10:45-noon).
- For information about financial aid possibilities, go to <http://international.uiowa.edu/study-abroad/funding/financial-aid/iowa-programs.asp> and click on either “undergraduate scholarships” or “graduate fellowships.”