

## SPRING 2006 Faculty Seminar: February 13 - March 3, 2006

Directed by Veena Das

### Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities

The Center for the Humanities invites applications from faculty interested in participating in the three-week Faculty Seminar directed by Veena Das, the Krieger-Eisenhower Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University and Grinnell College Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Humanities. Professor Das has researched extensively on questions of violence, social suffering, and subjectivity, and is currently working on a project on the burden of disease and health-seeking behavior among the urban poor in Delhi. Her first book, *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual* (Oxford University Press, 1977), sought to understand the working of long time cultural logics in contemporary events through an examination of texts produced in local communities in which myth and history were embedded in each other. Recent books include *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Oxford University Press, 1995) and several edited volumes. Before coming to Johns Hopkins, she taught at the University of Delhi for thirty-three years. Das serves on the executive board of the Institute for Social and Economic Research in Development and Democracy in Delhi and the International Center for Ethnic Studies, and is a foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Up to fifteen faculty members will be selected as Fellows to meet weekly to discuss selected readings on the seminar theme. The seminar will meet on Tuesday's, (Feb. 14, Feb. 21, Feb. 28 from 4:15-6:00 p.m. in BCA 269. A weekly lunch meeting will also be scheduled on Fridays at noon.

#### **Seminar Theme: "Violence, Everyday Life and Urban Religious Cults"**

The philosopher Stanley Cavell's sense of the ordinary as uncanny invites us to think of ways in which the ferocious search for escaping the ordinary might be read as an assault on the everyday. When do religious concepts that try to define the boundaries of a religion become ways of undermining the everyday and when might one consider these as ways helping on the path of spiritual or moral perfection? As background to these questions we will read two philosophical essays. Participants are encouraged to think of both religion and violence as constituted though the everyday as a site on which moral beings are created rather than as a taken-for granted site of banal repetition.

The two essays are:

Stanley Cavell, "The uncanniness of the ordinary" In *In Quest of the Ordinary*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Hent de Vries, *Minimal Theologies*, Chapter 12, "The Other Theology". Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Professor Das will also present data from her field work on these themes.

#### **Application Procedure:**

The Center seeks participants from a broad range of disciplines and from all the divisions. To apply faculty are asked to submit a one paragraph description of their interest in the seminar topic.

#### **Deadline for Applications:**

Applications should be submitted by Monday, February 6, to Sondi Burnell, Administrative Assistant for the Center for the Humanities.

#### **Review Committee:**

The Center for the Humanities Advisory Board will review the applications. Further information about the Center and Professor Das can be found at: <http://web.grinnell.edu/CentHumanities/index.html>