

Course Name – Biodiversity Conservation: Human and Policy Dimensions

Course Code – LH-E-706-E

Credits- 4

Faculty Name – Abhijit Banerjee

Faculty Biography –

Dr. Abhijit Banerjee has Master's and PhD in Environmental Policy from the US, where he also taught at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. He has been teaching a variety of environmental studies courses at JSLH since 2019. Between 2014 and 2019, he has worked with several international organizations such as the German Agency for International Development Cooperation (GIZ) and the United Nations (New Delhi).

Course Description-

Biodiversity, in its many dimensions – genetic, species and ecosystems – provides an essential underpinning for a living and thriving planet, but the importance of biodiversity remains largely unrecognized in modern society. Biodiversity collapse on an epic scale, almost unprecedented in earth's history, has been called a planetary emergency by scientists. This course explores challenges and potential solutions towards biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and most importantly, the political and socio-economic forces that make biodiversity loss so hard to address. Is an "utilitarian" sustainable use approach adequate or is a fundamental ethical rethinking of the human-nature relationship necessary? Is a preoccupation with biodiversity "elitist" in the face of widespread poverty or is biodiversity conservation crucial for poverty reduction? Are the "poor and illiterate" destroying forests or is the rich world's appetite the main culprit? Should expert-driven government agencies be in charge of biodiversity conservation or are indigenous/local communities the best guardians? Should local communities be excluded from "protected areas" in the name of biodiversity conservation? Can isolated species/habitat protection laws ever work unless the overall socio-economic "development" path and associated policies are rethought? How can international biodiversity conservation treaties be successful in a framework dominated by "competitive nationalism"? Is there a practical, and indeed moral, case for Northern financing of biodiversity conservation in the South? This course will grapple with such critical questions and analyze lessons learnt from more than a century of biodiversity conservation approaches and efforts. Special emphasis will be placed on the Indian context, where there is world renowned scholarship on the human dimensions of biodiversity.

The course is suitable for upper-level undergraduate students from different backgrounds and interests including social sciences/liberal arts, environmental studies/development studies, political science/international relations/global studies, law/public policy, etc. A biology/natural science background is not essential, although a basic introductory environmental studies course may be helpful. Guest speakers and seminars will be an important part of the course and at least one field trip will be planned, conditions permitting.

Prerequisites- none

Scheme of Evaluation and Grading –

Movie Assignment: 15%

(In-class) Mid Term Exam: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Research Paper and presentation: 25%