

**REL220 Asian Religions. Fall 2002**  
**Professor Kurtis R. Schaeffer: kschaeff@bama.ua.edu**  
**Essay #1: *The Ramayana*: Due Tuesday, September 24**

**Essays**

You will write two four-page **essays** in this class. The essays will explore fixed topics on primary texts (including films). All **essays** must follow the conventions of the Modern Language Association (MLA). Use the following book for reference: *A Pocket Style Manual: Third Edition*. Diana Hacker. Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston. 2000. This is the style manual used in English Composition (ENG101). You should own a copy of this manual. Essays must conform to the following conventions: typed; double-spaced in a standard 12pt font; 1-inch margins on white paper; page numbers; your name and the name of the class on the top of the first page; stapled. (See *A Pocket Style Manual*, pp. 138-140). All quoted material must be clearly referenced according to MLA style (see *A Pocket Style Manual*, p. 123).

You are free to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your essay, though this is not required. If you have a strong interest in a topic relating to the assignments in the course, please provide me with a brief summary of your proposed topic and I will in most cases try to accommodate you.

**Essay One: Karma or Dharma**

Karma, the law of cause and effect, and Dharma, duty or ethics, both play prominent roles in the plot of the *Ramayana*. Narayan offers brief definitions of the two concepts (p. 129): *Dharma*: One's religious and social duty, including both righteousness and faith; *Karma*: One's actions, whose cumulative result is held to have a determining effect on the quality of rebirth and future existences, [as well as one's fate in the present life.] In this assignment I would like you to choose one of these two important Hindu concepts and argue why it is the major force in the epic. Focus on the actions of a particular character to illustrate your argument. Cite particular passages from the epic which emphasize either karma or dharma, and which support your reading of the work. Use Knott (2000) for background material to support your reading of the *Ramayana*.

An example:

Question: What are the reasons King Dasharatha must banish his son, Rama?

\*Karma major force: He shot another's son and now he is reaping the karmic outcome of this action.

\*Dharma major force: He made a vow, an important act of dharma, and now he must fulfill the vow.