

## **CASTE AND INDIAN MODERNITY**

**ELECTIVE COURSE-VI Semester (BA HONS) 4 CREDITS**

**COURSE INSTRUCTOR- Dr. SHAILAJA MENON**

The story of caste in India has a long genesis. It ranges from the most banal to the most philosophical. A wide spectrum of scholars has attempted to understand, analyse and deconstruct caste. At different historical junctures, ideas of caste have undergone permutations. It was argued that with the onset of modernity, progress rational values, caste would wither away. The term 'modern' is expressed to demarcate the past from the present. With the privileging of science, technology and rationality by the Enlightenment, modernity was invested with values creating a binary 'other' steeped in superstition and tradition. Every society, individual or institution felt compelled to acquire the abstraction of modernity. In Asia, Latin America and Africa, the experiences of colonialism mediated the abstraction of modernity. For the caste ridden Indian society, modernity, far from being an abstraction was something tangible as it enabled scores of the oppressed communities to seek entitlements by invoking the legal-judicial norms, again a by-product of modernity. At one level, the colonial encounter set free the local people from many hidebound traditions and opened up new vistas of social progress through education and emerging employment opportunities. The privileged communities sought refuge in the pristine imagined past unable to come to terms with modernity whereas the rest (the anti-caste intellectuals) eagerly courted modernity to establish a more secular and progressive society.

Thus, modernity is driven with contradictions. Despite the mystique of capitalist development notwithstanding, Indian society is grappling to make sense of 'semi-feudal and semi-colonial remnants'. (Gail Omvedt, Seeking Begumpura, Navayana, 2008, p.10) Hence, the exploited people have not relapsed into silence but have challenged the contradictions of modernity. As Ambedkar has observed, throughout its historical trajectory there have been attempts to annihilate the superstructure- the edifice of caste brutality as a precursor to create a modern liberal society. This course seeks to analyse the different perspectives on modernity, the manner in which various social categories in India appropriated modernity and strove to benefit from it.

For reasons of brevity, the course focuses on the social, cultural and political developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century till independence.

### Themes for Study

- ✓ **Ideas on Modernity-** This unit probes the term ‘modernity’. Is it about technological acquisition or attitudinal change in inter-personal dealings? This inter-subjectivity will be dealt with reference to autobiographical narratives comprising both caste and gender.

The selected articles will comprise

- a) Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (ed) Caste in Modern India 2 Vols- 2014
- b) Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Religion, Community, Cultural Nationalism, Permanent Black, Delhi, and Indiana University Press, 2000
- c) Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari, (ed) Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History, Rutgers, 1990
- d) Mani, B.R, Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society, Delhi: Manohar Publishers. 2005
- e) The autobiographical narratives include Om Prakash Valmiki, “Joothan”, Urmila Pawar, “We Too Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement”, Baby Kamble, “The Prisons we Broke”.

- ✓ **Alternative Socio-Political Mobilizations-** The colonial era witnessed some intense debates around issues of freedom especially involving gender (Eg. Sati and Age of Consent) and low caste assertion. The focus will be on the debates generated around these issues by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandita Ramabai, Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar and Narayana Guru.

The Selected Readings will comprise,

- a) Keer, Dhananjay Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Bombay: Popular Prakashan. 1991
- b) Gail Omvedt, Seeking Begumpura, Navayana, 2008
- c) Geeta, V & Rajadurai towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar. Calcutta: Samya.1998
- d) Kancha Illiah, Why I Am Not a Hindu? A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Culture, Ideology and Political Economy. Calcutta: Samya. 1996
- e) Critical Quest publications on Pandita Ramabai, Jotiba Phule, Narayana Guru and Periyar

- ✓ **Modernity and its Other-** The analysis of Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj and Ambedkar’s Annihilation of Caste

The selected articles/readings include,

- a) Gupta Dipanker, Mistaken Modernity: India Between Worlds, Harper Collins, 2000

- b) Omvedt, Gail, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India, New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1994
- c) Zelliott Eleanor, From Untouchable to Dalit, Essays in the Ambedkar Movement, Manohar, New Delhi, 1996
- d) Avijit Pathak, Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2015
- e) Rajni Kothari, Caste in Indian Politics (ed), New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 1970

### **Assessment**

**One written assignment of 30%, one class presentation of 30% and one end semester exam of 40%**