

Indian Social and Political Thought (1885-1950)

Course Description

This course offers a critical, diverse, and purportedly nonpartisan representation of Indian social and political ideas and debates from the late nineteenth century (approximately the time of the establishment of the Indian National Congress) to 1950 (approximately the time of the establishment of the Indian Republic). It is based on a diverse corpus of writings by key thinkers, agents, activists, and reformers, and charts the percolation and transformation of ideals of nationhood, social justice, identity, and reforms in India. Students seeking nuanced exegeses on Indian history stand to benefit through encounters with heterodox views on the foundational questions that undergird notions of democracy—as an enduring global project of. The course will introduce formative questions and themes revolving around caste, gender, religion, coloniality, nationalism, democracy, and the meanings of freedom, while assessing how these shaped and were shaped by major intellectual and political currents of a nation-in-the-making. It aims to blend textual hermeneutics with historical contextualization, and sensitization, besides comparative scholarly discussions, to foster engagement with complex and contested ideas. Students are expected to participate in interactive lectures, group discussions, and presentations, and will be assessed through presentations and essays.

Primary Texts

1. Excerpt(s) from *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, by **Pandita Ramabai**
2. Excerpt(s) from *Arctic Home in the Vedas*, by **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**
3. “Selections from *The Secluded Ones*,” by **Rokeya Sakhawat Hosain**
4. Excerpt(s) from *Third Class in Indian Railways*, by **M.K. Gandhi**
5. Writings and speeches on **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, by **Sarojini Naidu**
6. Excerpt(s) from *India and the Empire*, by **Annie Besant**
7. Excerpt(s) from *India Calling*, by **Cornelia Sorabji**
8. Excerpt(s) from *Waiting for a Visa*, by **B.R. Ambedkar**
9. Letters of **Subas Chandra Bose** (from correspondence exchanged with **M.K. Gandhi**)
10. “**Crisis in Civilization**,” a speech by **Rabindranath Tagore**
11. Excerpt(s) from *India Wins Freedom* (a book dedicated to **Jawaharlal Nehru**) by **Abul Kalam Azad**
12. Excerpt(s) from *Our Democracy*, by **C. Rajagopalachari**
13. Excerpt(s) from *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces*, by **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay**

Secondary Texts

The course also plans to engage with the ideas of other influential, reformatory, controversial, and/or contextual personalities like Savitribai Phule, Rukhmabai, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Herabai Tata, Madame Bhikaji Cama, Sri Aurobindo, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, and others, including members of the Constituent Assembly.

Key Themes and Learning Objectives

- **Nationalism and Civilizationism**
- **Caste and Equity**
- **Gender and Reforms**
- **Religion, Secularism, and Pluralism**
- **Colonialism, Modernity, and Cultural Resistance**
- **Democracy and the Nation State**