

**Course Name – Sex, Trauma & the Nation- A Study of Horror in  
Literary/Visual culture  
Course Code – LH-E-754  
Credits- 4**

**Faculty Name – Yasodhara Rakshit**

**Faculty Biography – I am an Assistant Professor of Cinema, Gender and Writing at the Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities. After graduating from Miranda House (DU), I went on to pursue journalism (print and mixed media). I have worked with publications like The Times of India, Tehelka and The Statesman, reporting on popular culture and gender issues. I have also worked as an assistant curator in the art museum of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA). With a renewed interest in understanding cultural and literary theory, I went on to pursue further research in cinema and performance studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). I prefer the pronouns she/her/they/them.**

**My research interests lies at the intersection of nationhood, trauma and gender, the female spectre/ghost in horror cinema, stardom as a performance, the literary sleuth in detective fiction, mental health with issues around sexuality, popular culture as propaganda, film and media as an ideological tool in autocratic systems of government.**

### **Course Description-**

**‘Trauma’ is a part of our colloquial speech today. Terms such as ‘traumatized’, ‘traumatizing’, ‘in trauma’ are applied to ourselves, our experiences and our states of mind in an almost quotidian context. However, the term ‘trauma’ has had a historically rich, socially complex, politically fraught, and a culturally diverse career ever since it started receiving focused attention in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This would be a necessary foundational block for this course to understand its evolution as a cultural site for individual and social suffering in the contemporary moment. By studying examples from horror film, television and literature (a genre which almost lends itself to this discourse), we would look at the special relation that trauma has with modernity, owing largely to the new stresses of accelerated pace of urban life**

triggered by Industrial Revolution and later with the ‘politics and economics of development’ ushered by globalisation, giving rise to immense structural violence and inequality.

The idea of ‘memory’ is a matter of public record and private perception. In this course, we would be dealing with the representation of how memory, especially of shared, repressed trauma goes on to shape not only an individualistic sense of self, but also informs the notion of community and identity within it, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality. For example, we would be looking at South-East Asian horror, Nordic horror and the Extreme French wave in horror which is the political sub-liminal for reimagining the violence of the past in shaping the contemporary consciousness and also functions as a mode of protest for certain violations in history. Filmmakers like Park Wan Choon, Fruit Chan, Takashi Mike, Guillermo del Toro and Mira Nair alongside authors like Mary Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein,’ Taslima Nasreen’s ‘Lajja’ and Basharat Peer will be taken as examples to highlight the idea of a specific genre in cinema not just informing a people of nationalistic and urbane history but also as a commentary on an evolving social temperament.

To speak of history’s traumas, whether in the collective imagination or personal memory would be to recognise events as wounds. The purpose of this course would be to have students understand the historically marginalized and to ask questions as central to contemporary cultural politics and be resistant to normative answers. Through the graphic and visceral content of film and literature the course aims with answering such questions such as: What are the limits of representation? Do such limits exist? If so, what is the relationship between visual culture and these limits? The understanding which the elective attempts to reach is this: The horror film and literature’s sounds, images and narrative combine with spectator effect (like terror, sympathy and disgust) to embody issues that characterize the history of trauma through factors like nation, individual, generation and memory. The students will be able to understand and explain concepts related to trauma theory alongside factors like gender and sexuality and the need fulfilled by horror cinema and literature as a tool for catharsis.

A few examples of what we would be looking at in class:

- We will understand the need to dissect the purpose of horror cinema, television, and literature as the only possible genres to create a pleasant tension between the binaries of Freudian psychoanalysis and appreciate the meaning of ‘catharsis’ as a way of re-visiting sites of trauma and grief to exorcise oneself of negative emotions.
- We delve into the idea of an “allegorical moment,” where in horror cinema, there is a shocking, sudden collusion of films, spectator and history where

registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted, confronted and intertwined. We look at Spain's body of cinematic work with auteur Guillermo Del Toro and Pedro Almodóvar being our primary examples of locating national history through the Spanish Civil War and the idea of living a zombified existence in a fascist reign with an understanding of abject autocracy.

- We delve into the binary ideas of the need for representation for the victim/survivor and the desire to shield victims/survivors from the disempowering and destructive forces of holocaust denial. We look at the disparaging and continuing effects of nuclear warfare and dictatorial rule through arrested psychosexual development in the citizen of the modern nation-state.
- When can pain be the most distorted, politically, and psychosexually damaging? When it happens within intimate, allegedly safe spaces. We study the individual within a shared community, especially as part of the queer community (also comparable to the benevolent and aggressive nation state) where both the heteronormative family and the trauma riddled and wound obsessed genre of horror cinema and literature can be seen to be the social sites where individual and group identities are formed, destroyed and reconstructed.
- We look at the specific genre of "gynaehorror," – horror films that are concerned with female sex, sexuality and reproduction. By placing an emphasis upon philosophies of sex, gender and corporeality, we discuss womxn, trans and non-binary bodies, houses and spatiality. By looking at acts like abortion as depicted in science fiction horror, we open discourses around the pro-choice debates and understand the non-linear, damaging effects on the female body.

**Prerequisites-** This course is primarily a visual and literary studies course which would be employing the perspectives of trauma, sexualities and the idea of modern nation as represented in contemporary film, television, and literature. The course would use elements of literature, psychology, gender studies, history and film studies to study the discourses around trauma-sexual, personal and national. There would be a fair bit of discussion around ideas of violence, oppression, and trauma-induced spaces, along with watching and reading several films and texts around the same. As much of it can be compelling and exciting for us as scholars, we would also need to be deeply

**empathetic, sensitive and serious about what we would be studying. Please know this before you sign up for the course.**

**Scheme of Evaluation and Grading -**

Class Participation: 15%

Presentation on a given topic: 20%

Mid Term: 50%

Final Examination: 50%