

READING VIOLENCE THROUGH LITERATURE

Responsible Faculty Instructor:

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Credits: 4

Credits Type: LAW

Cross-registration: NO

Pre-requisites: NA

COURSE DESCRIPTION (COURSE VISION):

Violence is not a new phenomenon; neither is its depiction. Violence has remained central to art, literature, films, television shows, and news reports. This course will explore violence and its varied manifestations through the lens of literature. By reading violence through literature the course aims to engage with the subject of violence beyond disciplinary and topic boundaries from a range of methodologies to understand the complexity of violence and its legitimization through social institutions. We will debate the role violence plays in preserving status quo and social hierarchies within institutions; family, marriage, intimate relationships, law, courts and the community. The course engages with literature that originates from diverse geographical spaces, specific political, religious and cultural contexts to understand the historical and political context of violence. Through works of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry we examine the wider frames of inequality beyond individual perpetrators and victims to locate violence within the ecosystem that sustains it. Each module examines a distinct understanding of violence and a distinct 'violent space'.

The course explores the several facets of violence, centring discussion on **a book, book chapter, short story, poetry and short clips from television shows/film**. Readings will be supplemented by **ONE critical article** based on the book or the theme, to encourage critical thinking and discussion in class and to facilitate a deeper

understanding of the complexity of relationships that coexist in violence. While we do not read the law or case law, law's limitations in addressing several forms of violence will be discussed. We will draw from case law and discuss the limited view taken by courts in responding to violence.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY:

Pedagogical material will be drawn from books (fiction and non-fiction) and popular television shows. We will read excerpts from books and watch select sections from TV shows to generate discussion around violence, sexual violence and gender. At the start of the course, we begins with examining violence through Arendt and Sen readings. Both readings provide a theoretical and historic understanding of violence in society.

The class format will thus combine reading, reflection, and discussion. This will be a collaborative learning experience. In our approach to difficult situations, teaching will go beyond the scope of the text and the 'story' it tells, to engage with history, popular culture, and politics. The structure therefore depends on students participating enthusiastically, remaining attentive through the class and raising relevant questions, comments, reflections that will take the conversations forward.

Students will be encouraged to ask questions, bring articles, news items, video clips to class to enable debates around diverse topics and issues related to the course. Essential readings/books/articles for each module will be available for download on OneDrive – the hyperlink will be shared with students. Students are expected to come to class prepared for discussion and remain engaged throughout the class. Teaching methodology will encourage the practice of critical reading, interest in the subject and willingness to engage will take precedence over knowledge / expertise in the subject matter/readings/area of study.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The course is structured to ensure the following **learning outcomes**:

1. Understanding violence beyond traditional conceptualizations and restrictive definitions of perpetrator and victim.
2. Engagement with theories of violence and its application in different situations, time and locations.
3. Conceptual clarity on ideas of identity, consent, power, gender, et all.
4. Appreciating conventions across several genres of literature and their interaction with the depiction of violence
5. Perspectives on the spaces within which violence takes place, the 'blurred lines' between public and private that allow the state to evade responsibility for intimate violence
6. Understanding the significance of identifying, exploring, and invisibilizing the most insidious forms of violence that have hitherto not been addressed adequately by law
7. In-depth understanding of sexual violence, coercion, and consent
8. Examination of the phenomenon of gender-motivated violence and the effectiveness (or not!) of legal strategies that address violence in intimate and in 'not so' private settings
9. Understanding law's limitations in addressing and deterring violence
10. Developing reflectivity on the subject of violence

READING LIST (upto 10 select readings):

1. Arendt, Hannah, *On Violence* (1969), Penguin Random House, UK, 2023 edition
2. Sen, Amartya, Chapter 2, *Making Sense of Identity in Identity and Violence, The Illusion of Destiny*, (A. Sen) Penguin Group, USA, 2006

3. Cover, Robert M. *Violence and the Word*, The Yale Law Journal, (1986), Vol. 95, No. 8,
4. Kandasamy, Meena *When I Hit You, Or, a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, Juggernaut, India, 2017 (extracts)
5. Iyamam, *If There is a God*, (Translated from Tamil by Prabha Sridevan)
6. Nafisi, Azar, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, Deckle edge Pub. (2008) (extracts)
7. Tewari, Devyani, Blurred Lines: Sexual Abuse (or not) in ‘Big Little Lies’, in (Mathur Anurag, Dwivedy ed.) *Violence in Intimate Spaces: Law and beyond* (pg. 43-57)
8. Amitav, Ghosh, The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi, in *The Individual Society, Essays, Stories and Poems*, Dept. of English, Univ. of Delhi, Longman. (2005) pg. 123-129

WEEKLY READING PLAN (WEEKLY OUTLINE):

A weekly plan is provided below:

MODULES	WEEK(S)
<p style="text-align: center;">Module 1</p> <p>Theorizing Violence - Power and Identity</p> <p>Philosophers/political thinkers like Sartre, Fanon, Sorel, Marx, Hegel and others have reflected on the nature and causes of violence in society. In this module we will be examining violence through Hannah Arendt and Amartya Sen’s readings. Both readings provide us with a theoretical and historic understanding of violence and help us explore the question: What is violence? Where and how does it emanate? How is power related to violence?</p>	<p>Week 1 & 2</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Module 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gender and Violence beyond the Public and the Private</p> <p>We read a short story by Imayam and an essay by Solnit. Each provides insights into gender and violence from very diverse perspectives. Imayam's short story translated from Tamil depicts violence as a reality in everyday life of most people and explores the role of caste, class and gender. Solnit's essay presents gendered hierarchies that expose the normalization of patriarchy through gendered responses, communication and attitude. The readings, distinct in style and storyline provide a unique context to the discussion on gender, violence, private and the public.</p>	Week 3 & 4
<p style="text-align: center;">Module 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sexual Violence, Intimacy and Consent</p> <p>We will watch select episodes of the TV show <i>Big Little Lies</i> to understand the blurred lines that exist in the nature of sexual violence in intimate relationships, especially in marriage. The analysis will be based on Devyani Tewari's chapter. Piercy's poem is a unique take on 'rape'.</p>	Week 5 & 6
<p style="text-align: center;">Module 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Violence, Religion, Culture and Resistance</p> <p>Nafisi's memoir 'Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books' introduces the idea of reading literature as an act of resistance against control and censorship when exercised as a form of religious and cultural dominance.</p> <p>Amitav Ghosh's essay provides an eyewitness account of the communal violence that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination in Delhi depicting fear and suspicion as essential elements of violence.</p>	Week 7, 8 & 9
<p style="text-align: center;">Module 5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Psychological Tactics as Violence</p> <p>Meena Kandasamy's book exposes the insidious nature of domestic violence narrated in an auto-fictional style. The book demonstrates how toxic</p>	Week 10 & 11

<p>masculinity and rigid social norms impact and marginalize women. The protagonist empowers herself by narrating her story and finds solace and strength in writing.</p>	
<p>Discussion/ debates, exercises in writing, reflexive sharing and writing based on the texts covered during the semester</p> <p>What are the several forms of resistance to violence depicted in literature? Is the normalization of violence so complete, that we rarely ponder on the less visible forms of violence when we read, watch and scroll?</p> <p>We will also bring material in class that supports/refutes the assumptions on violence studies through the prescribed texts and discuss.</p>	<p>Week 12, 13 & 14</p>
<p>REVISION WEEK</p>	<p>Week 15</p>