

Indigeneity in India: Society, Politics, Law

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Acknowledgement of Course Ideators

Gratitude is due to Professor Dipika Jain for suggesting and catalysing this course, and for believing in its relevance to all students at the University. My engagement with Indigeneity and efforts at allyship owes to Sanghamitra Mishra, Gopinath Mohanty, Eric Wolf, Alpa Shah, Easterine Kire, Visier Meyasetsu, Rosemary Dzuvichu, Glen Coulthard, Dale Turner, and Leanne Simpson.

Course Description

Which peoples and societies in South Asia, particularly India self-identify as Indigenous? In what ways do their worldviews, livelihoods, and politics interact with hegemonic and dominant aspects of the Indian state and Indian society? What claims do they make upon its legal and political infrastructure, and in what ways are they constitutive of the Indian national imagination? Our course attempts to comprehensively engage with these questions. We hope to examine constitutional, administrative and legal arrangements, in relation to Indigenous Peoples' [IP] and how they interact with the dynamics of marginalization, development and displacement, oppression, resource extraction, securitization, and knowledge production

Further, we engage with reconfiguration of indigenous politics and activism in India in light of a global effervescence and resurgence of Indigeneity, including through conversations from across settler-colonial and neo and postcolonial contexts of the Global North and South. Lastly, we also consider intersectional solidarities between indigenous and other sites like class, gender, caste, race, ecology, and other-than-human relations.

As much as the course is a deep dive into the very specific experiences and challenges of IP in India, it aims to cultivate a sensibility for the analysis and conceptualization of politics and society at large. We hope to appreciate how, Indigenous interactions, conversations, struggles, and victories are not only for IP, but in this age of the Capitalocene, they stand for all of humanity.

• Course Aims

- To present a broad overview of diverse identities, histories, and worldviews of Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) in India and South Asia.
- To critically analyse the interactions between Indigenous communities and the Indian state's political, legal, and social frameworks, including in the shaping of the Indian national imagination.
- To explore constitutional, federal, and legal arrangements affecting IPs, with attention to issues of marginalization, displacement, and securitization.

- To examine the role of Indigenous claims in shaping Indian national imagination and state policies.
- To engage with contemporary Indigenous politics and activism in India within global and comparative settler-colonial and postcolonial contexts.
- To foster an understanding of intersectional solidarities, connecting Indigenous struggles with broader movements against class, caste, gender, race, and ecological injustices.
- To cultivate a broader analytical sensibility by situating Indigenous experiences within wider social and political frameworks, recognizing their relevance to global struggles against systemic inequalities.

Teaching Methodology

This course employs a blend of focused lectures and seminar-style discussions to explore the complexities of Indigenous Peoples' experiences and engagements with society, politics, and law in India. Students will engage deeply with a large diversity of readings, including from sociology, anthropology, politics, geography, and even literary studies. Collaborative presentations and reflective writing assignments will foster skills in research, argumentation, and hopefully solidarity. If you turn out to be an engaged and invested class, we might also request an Indigenous Elder to deliver a guest lecture/s on the universality of indigeneity. Assessments, to promote independent inquiry and critical engagement, would comprise essays, presentations, and a final research project tailored to your interests. We will try to make time to watch a documentary, and I will deeply urge you to start cultivating a deep interest in reading indigenous authors.

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Recognize the diversity and complexity of Indigenous Peoples' identities, histories, and worldviews in India.
- Critically analyse the interactions between Indigenous communities and the Indian state's political, legal, and social frameworks, including their role in shaping national imagination/ identity.
- Evaluate constitutional, federal, and plural legal provisions affecting Indigenous Peoples, focusing on marginalization, displacement, securitization, and knowledge production.
- Understand contemporary Indigenous politics and activism in India within broader global settler colonial and postcolonial contexts.
- Examine intersectional solidarities connecting Indigenous struggles with movements around class, caste, gender, race, and ecological justice.

- Develop an analytical sensibility that links Indigenous experiences to wider social and political frameworks and systemic inequalities.
- Communicate insights effectively through critical writing, presentations, and research projects demonstrating interdisciplinary understanding and independent inquiry.

MODULES and WEEKLY READINGS

(Includes Compulsory and Additional Readings)

WEEK 1

MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION

Compulsory

- Clifford, James. (2020). Varieties of indigenous experience: Diasporas, homeland, sovereignties. In Marisol De La Cadena and Orin Starn (Eds.) *Indigenous Experience Today*, Routledge. London.
- Xaxa, Virginus. (2008). The concept of indigenous peoples in India. In C. Erni (Ed.), *The concept of indigenous peoples in Asia: A resource book* (pp. 223–240). International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) & Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation (AIPP).

Additional

- Baviskar, Amita (2013). The politics of being “indigenous.” In B. Karlsson & T. Subba (Eds.), *Indigeneity in India* (pp. 33–49). Kegan Paul.
- Debbarma, R.K. (2022) Indigeneity. In Jelle JP Wouters and Tanka Subba (Eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Northeast India*. Routledge, New Delhi.

WEEKS 2, 3

MODULE 2: RIGHTS, GOVERNANCE, AND LAWS

Compulsory

- Baruah, Sanjib (2003). Nationalizing Space: Cosmetic federalism and the politics of development in Northeast India. *Development and Change*, 34(5), 915–939.
- Xaxa, Abhay. (2025). Public law and social exclusion of Indigenous people in the Fifth Schedule areas of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 60(39), 55–61.

- Sundar, N. (2023). ‘We will teach India democracy’: Indigenous voices in constitution making. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2023.2196838>
- Kannabiran, K. (2016). Constitutional geographies and cartographies of impunity: Human rights and Adivasis/Tribes in contemporary India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(44/45), 92–100.
- Bora, P. (2010). Between the human, the citizen and the tribal: Reading feminist politics in India’s Northeast. *International Journal of Politics*, 12(3–4), 341-360.

Additional

- Parmar, P. (2012). Undoing historical wrongs: Law and indigeneity in India. *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 49(3), 491–525.
- Devidsdottir, E. (2021). Our rights are carved in stone: The case of the Pathalgadi movement in Simdega, Jharkhand. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 25(7), 1111–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2021.1878351>

WEEK 4

MODULE 3: SOCIETY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Compulsory

- Xaxa, Virginus., & Puia, Rohluia. (2021). Indigenous peoples and nation interface in India. In G. N. Devy & G. Davis (Eds.), *Indigeneity and nation*. Routledge. New Delhi.
- Baviskar, Amita (2007). Indian Indigeneities: Adivasi engagements with Hindu nationalism in India. In M. de la Cadena & O. Starn (Eds.), *Indigenous experience today*. Routledge. London.
- Sundar, Nandini (2006). Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41(29), 3187–3192. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418469>

Additional

- Swaraj, Sampada., & Mishra, B. (2025). “What may be perceived by some as something quite fantastical is lived reality for us”: In conversation with Avinuo Kire. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 1–13.
- Guite, Jangkhomang. (2018). Disowning State, Becoming Egalitarian. in *Against State, Against History: Freedom, Resistance, and Statelessness in Upland Northeast India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

WEEKS 5,6

SECURITY(?), DEVELOPMENT, DISPLACEMENT

Compulsory

- Baruah, Sanjib (2021) The Strange Career of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in, In the Name of the Nation: India and its Northeast. Stanford University Press.
- Shah, A. (2010). In the shadows of the state: Indigenous politics, environmentalism, and insurgency in Jharkhand, India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16(1), 40–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2009.01696.x>
- Mosse, D., Gupta, S., & Shah, V. (2005). On the margins in the city: Adivasi seasonal labour migration in western India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(28), 3025–3038. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4416873>

Additional

Wouters, Jelle JP (2023) Colonial Lines and Postcolonial Conflicts in North East India. India Forum, October. Pp 1-9.

WEEKS 7 and 8

ECOLOGY, RESOURCE, KNOWLEDGE

Compulsory

- Baviskar, Amita (2003). Tribal politics and discourses of Indian environmentalism. In P. Greenough & A. L. Tsing (Eds.), *Nature in the global South: Environmental projects in South and Southeast Asia* (pp. 289–318). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1198tsr.14>
- Wouters, J. J. P. (2020). Neoliberal Capitalism and Ethno-Territoriality in Highland Northeast India: Resource-Extraction, Capitalist Desires and Ethnic Closure. *Geopolitics*, 28(1), 99–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1812581>
- Snipp, C. M. (2016). What does data sovereignty imply: What does it look like? In T. Kukutai & J. Taylor (Eds.), *Indigenous data sovereignty: Toward an agenda* (Vol. 38, pp. 39–56). ANU Press.

Additional

- Karlsson, Bengt G. (2011). Political ecology at the frontier. In *Unruly hills: A political ecology of India's Northeast* (NED-New edition, Vol. 1, pp. 266–289). Berghahn Books. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qcmsq.13>

WEEK 9

INTERSECTIONAL SOLIDARITIES(?)

Compulsory

- Hota, P. (2024). Introduction and crafting indigeneity and its other. In *The violence of recognition: Adivasi indigeneity and anti-Dalitness in India*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Shah, A. (2017). Humaneness and contradictions: India's Maoist-inspired Naxalites. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(21), 52–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26696126>

Additional

- Iralu, E., & Kikon, D. (2024). Indigenous pedagogies of love: Theorizing nonscalable worlds. *Political Geography*, 114, 103184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.103184>
- Axelby, Richard. (2018). Chamba Valley, Himalaya, Himachal Pradesh. in Shah, A., Lerche, J., Benbabaali, D., Donegan, B., Raj, J., & Thakur, V. (Eds.) In *Ground down by growth: Tribe, caste, class and inequality in 21st century India* (pp. 143–175). Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.28799897.11>

WEEK 10, 11

INDIGENEITY IN INDIA AND GLOBAL DISCOURSES

Compulsory

- Steur, Luisa. (2017). Research and activism in, on, and beyond a capitalist world system. In *Indigenist mobilization: Confronting electoral communism and precarious livelihoods in post-reform Kerala* (Vol. 20, pp. 3–28). Berghahn Books.
- Prasad, Archana (2022). Contested indigeneities: “Adivasi” politics historically and in contemporary times. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 11(1), 37–61.
- Chakraborty, Dipesh. (2013). Politics unlimited: The global adivasi and debates about the political. In B. Karlsson & T. Subba (Eds.), *Indigeneity in India*. Kegan Paul.
- Davis J, Moulton AA, Van Sant L, Williams B. (2019). Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?: A Manifesto for Ecological Justice in an Age of Global Crises. *Geography Compass*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12438>

WEEKS 12,13

Reflection, Research Paper Final Feedback, Documentary, Guest Lecture.

