

INTRODUCTION TO DALIT FEMINISM

Responsible Faculty Instructor:
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Assistant Professor

Credits: 4

Credits Type: Elective

Cross-registration: Yes

Pre-requisites: NA

Medium of Instruction: English

COURSE DESCRIPTION (COURSE VISION):

Caste- and race-based violence continue to resurface in disturbing ways across societies today. In South Asia, a sudden upsurge in crimes against Dalits and marginalized communities in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka has underscored how deeply entrenched caste hierarchies remain. From the Hathras gangrape case in India to continuing caste atrocities in Nepal, these incidents expose the structural complicity of institutions, including the police and judiciary. The Covid-19 lockdown further amplified these vulnerabilities, forcing renewed reflection on systemic inequalities.

More recently, caste-based student suicides in India, the rise of caste-discrimination lawsuits in US tech industries, and persistent reports of violence against Dalits in Nepal have brought these realities into sharper focus. Meanwhile, in the United States, the *Black Lives Matter* movement against police brutality toward African Americans has expanded into broader struggles over racial justice, including debates around affirmative action, immigration, and labor rights. Together, these contexts reveal both the enduring nature of oppression and the dynamic forms of resistance mobilized against it.

This course critically examines the intersections of caste, gender, and sexuality in South Asia and beyond. By bringing these histories and contemporary struggles into conversation, participants will engage with comparative frameworks for understanding oppression, resilience, and activism. Through interdisciplinary readings and discussions, the course aims to equip students with a comprehensive grasp of justice, equity, dignity, and freedom in the 21st century.

At the end of this course, students will gain methodological and conceptual clarity on the intersectional oppressions of caste, race, gender, and class, engaging with:

- Origin of patriarchy in South Asian societies
- Evolution of feminist thought in South Asia
- Contemporary challenges in theorising feminism
- Scope of Dalit feminism in combating violation of human rights

TEACHING METHODOLOGY:

The course will adopt a discussion-oriented and interdisciplinary methodology, centering caste, gender, and sexuality as intersecting structures of power. Students will engage with a wide range of materials—canonical writings by Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, and contemporary feminist theorists—alongside case studies of caste- and gender-based violence in South Asia. Classroom pedagogy will emphasize critical dialogue, encouraging students to interrogate how social hierarchies are reproduced through institutions, everyday practices, and cultural narratives. Through reflective essays, group presentations, and engagement with documentary films and testimonies, students will connect theory with lived realities. Guest lectures and interactive sessions with activists and scholars will further deepen understanding, while assessment will prioritize continuous learning through critical reflections rather than rote memorization.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, students will be able to critically analyze the intersections of caste, gender, and sexuality in South Asian contexts, drawing on key frameworks from Dalit, feminist, and critical scholarship. They will develop the ability to evaluate how institutions such as the state, law, religion, and culture sustain social hierarchies, while also engaging with contemporary case studies of caste- and gender-based violence to link theory with lived realities. Students will cultivate skills to formulate independent arguments around justice, equity, dignity, and freedom, and communicate these effectively through written assignments, presentations, and critical reflections. In addition, they will gain an awareness of their own social locations and positionalities, and reflect on how these shape their engagement with questions of oppression and resistance.

READING LIST (upto 10 select readings):

1. Gopal Guru, “Dalit women talk differently”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1995.
2. B. R. Ambedkar, “Introduction”, *Against the Madness of Manu: B. R. Ambedkar’s Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*, edited by Sharmila Rege, Navayana, 2015.
3. Uma Chakravarti, “Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 14, April 3, 1993, 579–585.
4. Julie Stephens, “Feminist Fictions: a Critique of Indian Feminism”, *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 201-10.
5. Sharmila Rege, “Introduction”, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women’s Testimonios*, Zubaan, 2006.
6. Sunaina Arya and Rathore, “Introduction: Theorising Dalit Feminism”, *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 1-21.
7. Sharmila Rege, “Dalit women talk differently: A dalit feminist standpoint position”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1995.
8. Shailaja Paik, “Dalit Women’s agency and Phule-Ambedkarite feminism”, *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 65-81.
9. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Difference through Intersectionality”, *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 139-49.
10. Smita M Patil, “Revitalising Dalit feminism”, *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 211-22.

WEEKLY READING PLAN (WEEKLY OUTLINE):

A weekly plan is provided below:

| MODULES | WEEK(S) |
|---|----------|
| Course Orientation & Foundations Introduction to the course: caste, gender, sexuality as intersecting systems. Overview of methodology: critical pedagogy, testimonios, feminist standpoint theory. Activity: Mapping students' prior knowledge, positionalities, and expectations. | Week 1 |
| MODULE 1: Understanding Brahmanical Patriarchy Reading 1: B. R. Ambedkar, "Introduction" in <i>Against the Madness of Manu</i> (2015). Discussion: How does Ambedkar connect caste with women's subjugation? Reading 2: Uma Chakravarti, "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India" (1993). Activity: Group discussion comparing Ambedkar and Chakravarti | Week 1-3 |
| MODULE 2: Dalit Women's Voices & Agency Reading 1: Gopal Guru, "Dalit Women Talk Differently" (1995). Reading 2: Sharmila Rege, "Introduction" to <i>Writing Caste/Writing Gender</i> (2006). Activity: Students analyze excerpts from Dalit women's testimonios as epistemic resources | Week 4-5 |
| <u>Internal Assessment 1</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Assignment 1: Short reflection paper on What it means to "talk differently" viz. Dalit women's agency in epistemic terms. IA 1 (800-1000 words 20 Marks) | Week 5 |

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| <p>MODULE 3: Feminist Critiques & Contests</p> <p>Reading 1: Julie Stephens, “Feminist Fictions: A Critique of Indian Feminism” (2020).</p> <p>Discussion: How does caste challenge universalisms in feminism?</p> <p>Reading 2: Sunaina Arya & Rathore, “Introduction: Theorising Dalit Feminism” (2020).</p> <p>➔ Focus: Dalit feminism as a distinct theoretical intervention.</p> <p>Activity: Concept-mapping Dalit feminism vs. mainstream feminism.</p> | Week 6-8 |
| <p>MODULE 4: Intersectionality and Standpoint Epistemology</p> <p>Reading 1: Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Difference through Intersectionality” (2020).</p> <p>Activity: Case study analysis—how does intersectionality help explain cases of caste-gender-violence?</p> <p>Reading 2: Sharmila Rege, “Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position” (1995).</p> <p>Activity: Seminar debate on Feminist standpoint theory, testimonial practices, knowledge production.</p> | Week 9-10 |
| <p><u>Internal Assessment 2</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Assignment 2: Comparative essay on Intersectionality: Phule, Ambedkar, and Crenshaw</p> | <p>Week 10</p> <p>IA 2 (800-1000 words 20 Marks)</p> |
| <p>MODULE 9: Dalit Feminist Theory and Praxis</p> <p>Reading 1: Shailaja Paik, “Dalit Women’s Agency and Phule-Ambedkarite Feminism” (2020).</p> <p>Reading 2: Smita M. Patil, “Revitalising Dalit Feminism” (2020)</p> | Week 11-12 |
| <p><u>Student Research Presentations</u></p> <p>➔ Students present mini-research projects (comparative, textual, or case study based) on “Caste, Gender, and Sexuality today”</p> | <p>Week 13</p> <p>(Research project 50 Marks)</p> |

| REVISION WEEK | Week 14 |
|---|---------|
| Recap of key thinkers: Ambedkar, Guru, Rege, Crenshaw, Arya | |
| Thematic synthesis: caste–gender–sexuality debates. | |