

Course CP 651

Comparing the Political: Concepts and Practices

Course Instructor: Mollica Dastider

Credits : 3

Contact Hours : 4 per week

Evaluation: 1 term paper and end-semester examination

Course introduction:

This course is about diversifying the political in its concepts and practices.

The universality of western modernity as the model philosophy for the rest of the world has come under serious contestation in the societies of non western world. The global discourse on multiple modernity instead point towards the simultaneous existence of multiple knowledge worlds. The ontological difference is implicated in the diversity of knowledge worlds and their distinctive thinking; evident also in the divergent expressions of conceptions that are 'political'. The comparison, among others, reveals diversity in forms of ideas and thought emerging from different locations in the world.

The need for diversifying the political also arise from the political reality in non western societies where the actual political practices and functioning differ widely from the normative western political theory. Original thinking that reflect social conditions in varied regions of the world therefore are crucial for situating the contingency of Western political norms.

Liberal individualism oriented Western political theory, for instance, can be grappled better with Indian engagements with community life. Similarly, the idea of 'sovereignty' can be differently interpreted as sovereign power of modern state as the final arbiter; as well as the autonomy of the indigenous as self governing members of a sovereign community; or as in the Gandhian interpretation, true autonomy lies in 'self-rule' or self governance as in 'swaraj'. Even the debates on religion and politics, and the notion of the nation-state in recent times, offer the world of theory and thought opportunities to

expand much beyond their western origins. In rethinking the concepts and revisiting practices, this course would be an exercise in diversifying the political.

I WHAT IS THE POLITICAL?

In its constant interrogation of essence; final ground; totality and universality – the political as different from social indicates towards an impossibility of ultimate foundation of society. The ontological weakening of the final ground and the diversity in the nature of being, define the conception of the Political in its distinctiveness from Politics that is concerned with action or practice. The idea of the political also had strong connection with moral in contrast to the contemporary understanding of politics as episteme of power relations. This section will introduce the ontological character of the political to understand the political difference in Post-Foundational political thought as well as in Indian thought.

Readings:

Oliver Marchart “On the Absent ground of The Social” and “Founding post Foundationalism: A Political Ontology” in Oliver Marchart’s *Post Foundational Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 2007)

Partha Chatterjee “Lineages of Political Society” and Sudipta Kaviraj “On the historicity of the Political” in M. Freeden and A. Vincent (eds) *Comparative Political Thought* (London, 2014)

II ETHICAL AS POLITICAL

Commitment to ethical behaviour formed the core of Buddhist thought. Buddhism as a distinct intellectual discipline questioned the authority of Vedas, as the revealed texts. With righteousness as political ideology, Buddhist thought presented a markedly different view from that of the Realist position of Arthashastra. The ethical norms in politics in Muslim India will also be discussed in the section to explore the traditions of tolerating difference in pre colonial India as a precursor to the secular modernity adopted later.

Readings:

Romila Thapar, ‘Alternative Histories: The Buddhist Traditions’ *Past Before Us*, (Delhi, 2013).

S. Radhakrishnan's "Ethical Idealism of Early Buddhism" in his book *Indian Philosophy*, Vol.I, (London 1929) pp. 341-475

B.R. Ambedkar, "The Buddha and His Dhamma" in his *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 11, (GOI, Reprint, 2014).

Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam in India* Section: 2,(Delhi 2004);

Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Cultural Pluralism, Empire and the State in Early Modern India' in her book *At the Edges of the Empire* (Ranikhet, 2014)

Sheldon Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular" *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, 1, February 1998

III SELF IN COMMUNITY

The section will locate liberal individualism of western political theory in the Indian understanding of selfhood. Where individual self realization is about being both autonomous as well as an embedded self in her community. Disagreeing with the liberal premise that individual right must have priority over questions of common good, it was pointed out that adjustments and compromise are ethical norms; and concrete selves work in collective obligation and solidarity to be able to live with difference.

Readings:

Partha Chatterjee, "Community in the East", *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 33 No.6 (Feb. 7-13, 1998); and "A Response to Taylor's Modes of Civil Society", *Public Culture*, 3, 1, Fall 1990, pp119-32

Avineri Sholmo and Avner de-Shalit, Avner (eds) *Communitarianism and Individualism*, (Oxford, 1992) pp. 1-11

David Bennett and Homi Bhabha, "Liberalism and Minority Culture" in David Bennett (Ed) *Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity* (London, 1998).

Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers* (Durham, 2004) pp 49-85

M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1910).

IV NATIONALISM AND POST COLONIAL THOUGHT

Both Tagore and Gandhi had warned that unself-critical Indian nationalism (against western imperialism) would be shaped by what it was responding to. Tagore was a consistent critic of Nationalism. To him, subjects of governments by nation-state live under the delusion that they are free whereas they sacrifice humanity and freedom every day to the fetish of nationalism. The thought is reflected in the Post Colonial critique, which point out the inadequacy of western normative political theory including the progressive project of nation-state, in engaging with the global phenomena of colonizing power of nations; racial discrimination; suppression of women; and marginalization of minority cultures.

Readings:

Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London, 1937)

E.P. Thompson, 'Introduction' to R.N. Tagore's *Nationalism* (London, 1991)

Edward Said's 'Foreword' in R. Guha and Gaytri C. Spivak (eds) *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York, 1988)

Homi Bhabha, "DissimiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of modern nation" in *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990)

D.R. Nagaraj's 'Introduction' to Ashis Nandy's *Exiled at Home* (New Delhi OUP).

V MODERNITY AND MARGINALITY

As the trajectory of deep modernization gets questioned there arises a need for shaping up a non-western political theory. This section shall in particular mull over the interventions and disruptions that marginalized/ minority positions constantly make in the modernity of national culture. In much of their resistances, the subaltern refuse to mould the mass/popular histories into developmental time - where the peasant died to give rise to worker who, through struggle for rights, metamorphosed into the figure of the citizen. The peasant and the marginalized indigenous, on the contrary, is 'political' in its very resistance to modern governmental power.

Readings:

'AHR Round Table on Modernity', Special issue, *American Historical Review*, 116:3, June 2011.

Walter Mignolo, 'Many faces of the Cosmopolis' in Carol Breckenridge et al edited *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham, 2002)

Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Introduction' to his book *Provincializing Europe: Post Colonial Thought and Historical Difference*. (New Jersey, 2000). pp 1- 26

Padel,F., Dandekar,A., Unni,J. "Two Cultures: A Balancing Act between People and Profit" in their book *Ecology and Economy* (New Delhi, 2013)

Prathama Bannerjee 'Culture/Politics and the Adivasi' in Gyanendra Pandey (ed) *Subaltern Citizenship and their Histories* (New Delhi, 2011)

M.S.S. Pandian "Writing Ordinary Lives", *EPW* Vol. 43 No.38 Sept. 20, 2008.

Additional Readings

Geuss, Raymond (2008) *Philosophy and Real Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Connell, Raewyn (2007) *Southern Theory: Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin

Schmitt, Carl (1996) *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago, Chicago University Press

Marchart, Oliver (2007) *Post Foundational Political Thought*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

Said, Edward (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Chatterjee, Partha (2013) *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

Jameson, Frederic (2002) *Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present*, London, Verso.

Gilbert, Jeremy (2014) *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in Age of Individualism*, London, Pluto Press.

Parel, Anthony (Ed) (2000) *Gandhi, Freedom and Modernity* Maryland: Lexington Books

Singh, Akash and Mohapatra, S.(eds) (2010) *Indian Political Thought: A Reader*, Oxon: Routledge.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2002) *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the wake of Subaltern Studies*. Chicago, Chicago University Press.

Dirlik, Arif (2000) *Post Modernity's Histories: The Past as Legacy and Project*. Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers

Coomaraswamy, Ananda (1947) *The Bugbear of Literacy*. London: Dennes Dobsin

Nandy, Ashis (1983) *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, New Delhi: OUP.

Appadurai, Arjun. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press

Sen, Amartya (2005) *The Argumentative Indian*, London: Penguin

G. N. Devy et al. (2014) *Knowing Differently: The Challenge of the Indigenous* Routledge.

Scott, James (2010) *The Art of Not Being Governed*, New Delhi, Orient Black Swan

Gilroy, Paul (1992) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard, HUP

Ivison, Duncan.(2002) *Postcolonial Liberalism*, Cambridge, CUP.

Lear, Jonathan (2006) *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, London, Harvard University Press