

Caste Politics in Twentieth Century India

HIST31912 / Semester 2, 2021

Dr. Jesús F. Cháirez-Garza:

jesus.chairez-garza@manchester.ac.uk



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the enduring connection between caste and politics in India during the twentieth century. The course starts with an introduction to the history of caste as a concept. This is followed by an analysis of the political implications of caste from the era of British colonialism to the first years of India as an independent country. Particular attention is paid to the rise of popular movements that found in caste, usually thought as system of oppression, a form of political organization that allowed them to challenge hierarchical structures of power such as the Dalit movement.

By analysing a selection of important primary and secondary sources, the course shows the multifarious ways in which colonial and Indian intellectuals thought and transformed the concept of caste to pursue different political objectives. This course also evaluates the way caste may shape and expand our understating of democracy in present day politics, both in India and abroad.

Course Objectives

This course will give you an introduction to the study of non-Western history, Indian history in particular, both in a colonial and a post-colonial context. By the end of the subject you should be able to:

- Understand the main historical debates around the question of caste in the twentieth century.
- Comment on the different political implications of caste during the struggle for India's independence.
- Develop an in-depth historical argument about the connection between caste and democracy in India.
- Students should be able to analyse and comment on the primary and secondary sources they have studied.
- Be aware of the history of low-caste political movements in India.

- Understand the main links between colonialism and the emergence of Indian nationalism.
- Understand the links between racial theories and caste practices in India.
- Evaluate the links between identity politics and caste politics.
- Comprehension of the main theories related to the practice of caste and untouchability.
- Identify the connection between colonialism and the emergence of caste politics.
- Assess the rise of low-caste politics after India's independence.
- Comprehend the debate regarding positive discrimination in India in connection to caste practices.

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

You will be assessed on three written assignments for this course. All papers must conform to the style guidelines in the History Handbook.

1. Blackboard Forum 1 x 100 words post (Formative)

2. A 2,000-word essay OR public history artefact (40%)

3. A 2,500-word (60%)

Potential Topics

- 1) Understanding the concept of caste
- 2) Caste and colonialism: Was caste a colonial invention?
- 3) Caste and the nation: What role did caste play at the beginning of the national movement?
- 4) Challenging caste hierarchy in politics: The anti-Brahmin movement
- 5) Untouchability: What is it?
- 6) The emergence of the Untouchable movement: B.R. Ambedkar and M.C. Rajah
- 7) Untouchability and the nation: M.K. Gandhi and Ambedkar
- 8) Untouchables as political subjects: Congress and the Untouchable vote
- 9) Caste after independence I: Reservation and the rise of the OBC's
- 10) Caste after independence II: The Dalit Panthers and the Bahujan Samaj Party
- 11) Contemporary Dalits lives: Arts, folk and prostitution

General/Background Reading:

Most of these reading can be found in the library or online. They will give you a brief introduction to most questions of caste in history. They will also provide you with important references to further readings.

- Banerjee, Ishita (ed.), *Caste in History* (Delhi, 2008).
- Bayly, Susan. *Caste, society and politics in India from the eighteenth century to the modern age* (Cambridge, 1999).
- Dirks, Nicholas. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001).
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and untouchability: Analysing and fighting caste* (Delhi, 2005).
- Omvedt, Gail. *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond* (New Delhi, 2011).
- Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement* (New Delhi, 2013).