

**Literature and Society in South Asia: Breaking the Cast(e)**  
**SATR- 3300/7300**



**Course Description:**

Dalit literature, is perhaps the most remarkable literary movement to emerge in post-independence India. It is the voice of the marginalized segment of India's population, those formerly known as untouchables. Though 'untouchability' was abolished in 1950 when India adopted a new Constitution after independence from British rule, it still lingers on, especially among the rural population. Untouchable through religious diktat, members of this lowest stratum of the Hindu caste system now call themselves "Dalit" (the term literally means "ground down") to express their resistance to a three thousand year old socio-religious practice that denies them their basic human rights. Until the advent of Dalit literature, the lives of Dalits had seldom been recorded in Indian literatures, which were traditionally the domain of the privileged high-castes.

In this course we will read fictional as well as non-fictional narratives of prominent Dalit writers. We will also watch films to comprehend and contextualize the readings with the backdrop of Dalit lives.

**Learning Goals:**

1. Understand the complex relationship between literature and the society that produces it.
2. Get a working knowledge of the caste system and its modern manifestations in India.
3. Begin to understand the intricacies of social class and caste in India.
4. Learn to appreciate literatures of cultures other than your own.
5. Feel competent to discuss topics for this course beyond the classroom setting.
6. Learn to articulate verbally and in writing critical papers.

**Tips for being successful in this course:**

1. This course is built on the assumption that students want to be active and not passive learners. It assumes that you will complete the assigned reading, listen to lectures and participate actively in class discussion. Therefore you should be well prepared for discussions.
2. Attendance is very important. Unexcused absences will be penalized by deducting 3 points per absence from your final grade. You are allowed only two excused absences through the semester.
3. You must meet me during office hours at least once during the semester to discuss your participation progress and how to improve it further.

**Assignments:**

Bi-weekly response papers-500 words; total of 6 responses  
Weekly forum online participation  
Power point presentation on a research topic (group activity)  
Midterm  
Final paper(8 pages).

**Grading:** Participation -25% (class discussion 10% forum 15%)

Critical response papers-25%  
Midterm-15%  
Group Presentation-15%  
Extra-curricular activities 5%  
Final paper-15%

**Prescribed Texts:**

*Joothan: A Dalit Life*, Omprakash Valmiki

*Ants Among Elephants* Sujatha Gidhla

*Why I am not a Hindu*, Kancha Iiah

*Poisoned Bread*, Arjun Dangle

*Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand

*Akkarmashi, The Outcaste*, Sharan Kumar Limbale

*The Annihilation of Caste*, B. R. Ambedkar

### **Graduate Readings:**

*Writing Resistance, the rhetorical imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature* by Laura Brueck

A full reading list will be made available after the first week of class.

*Untouchable Fictions, Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*, by Toral Jatin Gajarwala

### **Expectations:**

Be prepared for narratives written in quaint unfamiliar prose, contents varying from horrific to banal. I keep attendance and expect you to be punctual in class and with assignments.

Your work should reflect your engagement with the material we cover in class. Grades will reflect your consistency in effort and the depth of your exploration of the material. Please be active on the forum.

All assignments must be typed.

Please do not email assignments unless absolutely necessary.

### **Description of Assignments:**

**Presentations** will be 15 minutes long visual narratives. Typically, the presentation will be a research project that your group has identified and which reflects the subject of the class. I encourage you to explore current political-social situations of Dalits. Or you could write and perform a play that showcases the social stigma of being Dalit.

### **Writing Assignments:**

In accordance with expectations for a course that fulfills the second writing requirement, we will do a certain amount of reflective, academic type of writing in this class. **We will also share and discuss your writing in class.**

**Bi-Weekly response papers:** The response will be to an assigned reading that we will be discussing in class the following day. Your response will provide you with pre-discussion focus that will be helpful in funneling class discussion. *It will be in the nature of a reflection grounded in a moment of the text written with a critical lens.* I must get a sense that you have read the piece you are responding to, so please make sure to get that across in your response. Be prepared to read out your response in class if asked. (I will ask for volunteers, so don't be too anxious if you are not happy at the prospect of sharing your response. Eventually, every

student in the class will get a chance to read out the response). The responses will be submitted in the drop box by 10 pm but you will also bring a hard copy to class.

I expect your response papers to work as scaffolding for constructing your longer papers. Feel free to rework or use a response as a sounding board for subsequent assignments. You must learn to articulate your thoughts in an organized manner within the prescribed word limit.

**Discussion Forum:**

This is an exercise to keep you engaged with the course content and to give you writing practice. I will be monitoring the forum.

**Extra-curricular activities:**

An important component of the course is participating in lectures and other activities related to the socio-cultural aspects of South Asia such as classical music, invited talks and more. We anticipate inviting a well-known Dalit author to speak to the class and give a public lecture on the subject of inequality.

**Writing the final paper:**

The final paper could be a research or text based paper.

A couple of weeks into the semester you will select a topic from a list of topics/subjects provided and begin to write a paper for submission at a designated date. There is an important difference between topics provided and what you choose to write about. The difference lies in the title that *you* formulate and the FOCUS of your paper. The style of the paper will be academic (follow MLA) with citations and a bibliography.

Once the paper has been graded you can revise and rewrite it again for an upgrade. I will be giving a handout of my grading criteria that will help you structure your paper.

I strongly urge you to revise and develop your paper through the semester.

**Feel free to ask me to elaborate on the assignments. The idea is to help you explore the contents of the course through thoughtful writing that will be an extension of the discussion/lecture. The goal is to deepen learning process and improve your thinking process as it translates into writing through careful revision of drafts.**

**Graduate Assignments:**

Students taking the course at the graduate level will have extra readings on the theoretical aspect of Dalit literature. They will be expected to write longer papers and meet with the instructor every fortnight for discussion of readings.

**Proposed Topics**

Indian/Hindu Social Order: Caste

Religion and Caste: Untouchables

Gandhi's Harijans

B.R Ambedkar

Constitution of India: Scheduled Castes, Backward Castes and Tribes

Mandal Commission and its aftermath

Birth of the Dalit Movement

Genres: Memoir, Autobiography, Poetry

Dalit Blogs

Films and Dalit