Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
South Asian University - New Delhi

Social Theory, Society and Modes of Thinking
(Compulsory Course for MPhil)

Total Credits: 4 Credits

Objectives of the Course

What is social theory? This is a question that all students in social sciences are faced with at every level of the university and beyond, be it undergraduates or doctoral candidates, and eventually practicing academics as well. However, teaching social theory at research level is different. It no longer remains limited to knowing new facts about theory, but acquires a more intensive reflexive potential as well.

The course may be thought of something 'more' than what has been taught so far, or it may be more self-reflectively considered as adopting an overt approach towards the process and politics of theorisation itself, something, which is generally not dealt with at B.A. or M.A. stages. More specifically, the course is geared towards reading the process and politics of theorisation in a South Asian context, and this is different from the approaches that abounds theory courses in the region.

This course is meant for candidates in the first year of the doctoral programme who are expected to have a reasonable familiarity with sociological and anthropological theories and relevant engagements by philosophers. Rather than focusing on a particular set of theorists or schools of theory, the course will try to provoke the class to think about theory in a dialogical manner. Hence, the course will encourage students to see how different theories or representatives of different theoretical schools/factions speak across to each other in the context of particular, themes and explore where they as researchers might intervene in the conversations. Due to the location and the vision of the Department, this conversation will extend to South Asian theorists as well. The ignorance and the resultant de-legitimization of South Asian thinking is evident by their very absence on theory courses in the region, and this course unit addresses the question of advancement from such a position. It would try to encourage the class to generate the possibility of exploring a genre of social theory from South Asia.

Unit 1: What is theory? Why Theory

Social Theory has traversed a long way. While there have been debates about 'crises' in social theory the mega theories of the past have been challenged by approaches such as post-modern and post-structuralist theory. There have been further developments in this direction such as the theories of decolonization. This section will explore three dimensions of trying to understand the context of theorization: the way

theorisations have emerged; the difference between critical and traditional theory; and why social theory generates what appears to be a fear of knowledge.

Turner, Bryan S. (2009) 'Introduction: A New Agenda for Social Theory?' In, Turner, Bryan S. (Eds.,) *The New Blackwell Companion to   Social Theory   *, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford.

Delanty, Gerard (2009). 'The Foundations of Social Theory.' In, Turner, Bryan S. (Eds.,) *The New Blackwell Companion to   Social Theory *, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford.

Holmwood, John (2009). 'Contemporary Sociological Theory: Post-Parsonian Developments' In, Turner, Bryan S. (Eds.,) *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford.

Horkheimer, Max (2002). *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. Continuum: New York (Selected chapter titled 'Crtitical and Traditional Theory').

May, Tim and Powell, Jason L. (1996). *Situating Social Theory*. Open University Press: Berkshire, pp. 7-70.

Rubio, Fernando Domínguez and Baert, Patrick (2009). 'Philosophy of the Social Sciences.' In, Turner, Bryan S. (Eds.,) *The New Blackwell Companion to   Social Theory*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford.

Eyerman, Ron (November 2004). 'Jeffrey Alexander and the Cultural Turn in Social Theory', *Thesis Eleven*, Number 79, pp. 25–30.

Jameson, Frederic (1998). *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998*, Verso: London (Chapter 1).

Nash, Kate (2001), The `Cultural Turn' in Social Theory: Towards a Theory of Cultural Politics, *Sociology*, Vol 35, Issue 1.

Obeyesekere, Gananath (1990) *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, Hannah (1998), The Public and the Private from Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition,* pp. 22-78, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Unit 2: Theoretical Categories in South Asia

Sociologists constantly engage with categories such society, culture, the political, the social, power, the state and community among many others. This engagement has happened within South Asia historically as well, and is expected to inform the sociological work that students set out to do. This unit will explore some categories to provide a window to students to look into the larger canvas of social theorization in South Asia. Some such categories will be:

Violence: Mahatma Gandhi and Gautam Buddha
Caste and Class: Jyotiba Phule and B. R. Ambedkar
Gender question: Kumari Jayawardene, Pandita Ramabai

Ambedkar, B R. (2014). *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, Navayana: Delhi.

Sarasvati, Ramabai and Meera Kosambi (2000). *Pandita Ramabai through her own Words: Selected Works*, OUP: New Delhi.

Chakrabarti, Uma (2014). *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, Zubaan: New Delhi.

Butler, Clementina (1922). *Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati: Pioneer in the Movement for the Education of the Child-widow of India*, Fleming H. Revell Company: New York.

Gandhi, M.K (n.d) *My Non-violence*, Navjivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad.

Gandhi, M.K. (2009). (edited by Anthony J Parel) *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Jayawardena, Kumari (2016). *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Verso Books: London (Chapters 5, 6, 7).

Jayatilleke, K.N. (1963). *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd: London (Ch. VII)

Jerryson, Michael and Juergensmeyer, Mark (ed. 2010) Buddhist Warfare, OUP: New York (Selected Chapters).

O'Hanlon, Rosalind (1985). *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (ch.5, ch.9).

Phule, Jotirao (2012). *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* (edited by G P Deshpande), Leftword Books: Delhi (Selected chapters).

Unit 3: Transcendence and Social Theory

Social Theories, while trying to understand the relationship of humans and the world around, also reflect on the ways to transcend the *given* – the given which is multifaceted ranging from its spiritual, religious to material aspects. Historically, philosophers have tried to engage with this idea of transcendence. It has taken diverse forms, and thinkers in South Asia have often reflected on this aspect. In this unit, students will be introduced to readings that deal with how different thinkers understand the notion of transcendence.

Chattopadhyaya, D.P. (1993). *What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy, PPH: Delhi*, Ch.6&7

Custers, Peter (2010). 'Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 47, 2: 231–59.

Das, Arvind N. (1997). *Swami And Friends: Sahajanand Saraswati and Those Who Refuse To Let The Past of Bihar's Peasant Movements Become History*, Paper for the Peasant Symposium, University Of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Seneviratne, H.L. (1999). *The Work of Kings: New Buddhism in Sri Lanka*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Kalupahana, David J. (1974). 'The Buddhist Conception of Time and Temporality', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Time and Temporality, pp. 181-191

Obeyesekre, Gananath (2012).*The Awakened Ones: Phenomenology of Visionary Experience*, Princeton University Press: Princeton.

Rahul, Walpola (1974) What the Buddha Taught, Grove Press: New York

Unit 4: Expanding Social Theory: South Asian possibilities

In this unit, we will explore some thinking from South Asia. Our academic training seems to convey that there is a lack of social theorization in this part of the world. There have been philosophical works, which looked at categories of consciousness such as in Buddhism, Charvakya philosophy and others. The same is true of categories of materialism, class, stratification in general etc. This unit will be exploratory and would prompt students to engage with some of these categories, which may also change as per requirements of the course.

Approach 1: Exploring Buddhist notions of self, consciousness and analytical method.
Approach 2: Materialism in Ancient Philosophy of Lokayata
Approach 3: Stratification through works of scholars like Jyotiba Phule
Approach 4: Religion and society in works of scholars like Maulana Bhasani