New Developments in Global Political Theory:
Comparative, Decolonial and Indian Political Theory
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OVERVIEW

Increasingly influential and widespread critiques of the internationally dominant tradition of political theory – that is, Rawlsian liberalism – along with the advent of globalization, have led political theorists towards the view that political theory should not quarantine itself from the world’s social and political realities, but instead must remain attentive to the burning issues of our time. To achieve this, political theorists should be willing to enlarge their horizon of engagement – they should be comparative, global, and cross-cultural. The term for this orientation is comparative political theory. But is it really what we need? According to de-colonial theorists, comparative political theory might at bottom be understood just to be a more perfect universalization of transatlantic (commonly called, ‘Western’) political theory. If so, it would scarcely contribute to the authenticity and autonomy of Indian political theory. But what, exactly, is Indian political theory?

Some of the very same forces behind the development of comparative and de-colonial political theory have been serving as sources of momentum and inspiration for the many scholars of Indian social and political theory, who have been trying, against the odds, to inaugurate and cultivate a new tradition of Indian political theory in recent years. In this course, we shall aim to help redirect the gaze of (Indian) political theory back upon the lived experiences of (Indian) political life, and to present an innovative, systematic, compelling case for why we need to. Our fundamental concern will be how to re-found the discipline of Indian political theory. In its re-founding, it must not rely on transatlantic (or ‘Western’) theory, nor can it glibly participate in ‘global’ or ‘comparative’ thought. The poverty, or inadequacy, of those two alternatives pushes us toward a return to ‘tradition’, but a hybrid and evolving tradition. To avoid this return being stultifying or oppressive, we introduce a principle of reform alongside the return, which is analogical to what is widely known as the difference principle; that is, the principle that any modifications to be made must benefit the least advantaged and that only those changes that do benefit the least advantaged are legitimate.

OBJECTIVES

i) Exposing participants to the most recent developments in global political theory

ii) Building capability amongst the participants in the application of deep, thoughtful, critical reappraisal of currently dominant academic/institutional expectations regarding research and writing in political theory and its associated disciplines

iii) Providing exposure to theoretical problems and their solutions, through case studies in political theory and the associated disciplines of transatlantic Marxism, post-structuralism, and postcolonial ethnography

iv) Enhancing the capability of the participants to begin to formulate ways to inaugurate an authentic and autonomous political theoretical framework in India
In Lecture 6 we discuss human rights, which have occupied the space of emancipation so completely that the possibilities of new imaginations and alternatives have received little to no attention. In an effort to draw out some of the seriously limiting consequences of this, we enter a critical discussion of Žižek’s work ‘Against Human Rights’.

Lecture 7: Theories of ‘our’ liberation: Rawls, Sen, and the romance of global justice

Lecture 7 plunges into the great global justice debate. This has been raging for 40 years now. The debate treats of the international relations of persons, states, and institutions. Curiously, such large-scale issues are being determined, debated, and negotiated, and yet so very few non-Western participants are active in it.

Lecture 8: Unkindness of theories: transatlantic Marxism, post-structuralism, postcolonial ethnography

In Lecture 8 we turn to another set of theories, prepared specially for or about ‘us’ by transatlantic academics; what I call, using the collective noun for ravens, an unkindness of theories. We explore the inauthenticity and ill-fit of ‘Western’ Marxist, post-structural and postcolonial theories and ethnographies with the ground realities experienced by the Indian masses.

PART III: Preconditions for svaraj

Lecture 9: Tradition, hybridity, equality: tarrying with the negative

Lecture 9 delves into the nature of ‘tradition’ within contemporary political theory. 'Tradition' is not a backwards turn to some pre-modern golden age; rather, it is a look within, which is to say an excavation downwards.

Lecture 10: Dalit svaraj: the precondition for authentic Indian political theory

The final lecture attempts to tie together the strands, and to clarify why Indian political theory has found itself at an impasse. We unfold clearly here that Ambedkar holds the solution for overcoming this dilemma: we must interrogate the Indian masses for the determination of a vocabulary of experience-near concepts that form the legitimate basis of authentic Indian political theory.
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