Socialism and Literature in India in the twentieth century

Level/Semester: Level 5
Convenor: Dr. Tom Langley
Teaching: 1 x one hour lecture weekly, 1 x one hour seminar weekly.
Credits: 15
Assessment: 1 x 4000 word essay (100%)
Formative assessment: One seminar presentation (verbal feedback)

Module outline

This module introduces participants to the study of socialism and literature in India during the 20th century. The primary texts range from short stories and novels, to poetry and literary manifestoes.

This module thinks about the diverse ways in which artists on the left in the twentieth century have confronted questions of how to represent and reach out to “the people” and how to create support for the revolutionary project of socialism. We will look at key debates amongst artists and political leaders, and the generic experiments that arose around questions such as the literary forms and content that would be most appropriate for a socialist literature, the combination of realism with older popular vernacular traditions, and the engagement with Marxist aesthetic theories. We will think about the ways in which socialist thought and aesthetics move, about the importance of borrowing, appropriating, and rewriting. The course considers the complex relationship between socialism and literature in India as one that is locally generated, globally informed, and nationally invested.

Week 1 - Setting the Stage: the Limits of Realism and Radical Literature in India


C. Coppola, ed., Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature (Michigan, 1974).


**Week 2 - Socialist realism and the Indo-Anglian novel: Mulk Raj Anand’s* Untouchable* (1935; Penguin edition, with preface by E.M. Forster).**


**Week 4 – Writing the village part 1: Ignazio Silone’s *Fontamara* (1933 – any edition)**

Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question* [1927]


**Week 5 – Writing the village part 2: Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938 – any edition)**


**Week 6 – Reading Week**


Walter Benjamin, 'Concerning the Critique of Violence' (any edition)

Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (any edition)


Neel Mukherjee, 'Neel Mukherjee’s Top 10 Books About Revolutionaries', *The Guardian*, 14/01/2015 [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/14/neel-mukherjee-top-10-books-about-revolutionaries]

**Week 9 - Political radicalism, the short story and partition: Saadat Hasan Manto's 'Loosen up', 'A Lump of Cold Flesh', 'Khushia', and 'Black Salwar'. Texts provided.**

Alok Bhalla, ed., *Life and works of Saadat Hasan Manto* (New Delhi, 1997).

Howard Brasted and D.A. Low, eds., *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities* (New Delhi, 1998).


**Week 11 – Conclusions and revision**