

# GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BARAMULLA

Semester 8<sup>TH</sup>

Major Course

Subject: Sociology

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Title: Contemporary Social Theory  
Credits (4+2): Theory 04, Tutorial -02)

Course code: SOCC1822M  
Contact hours: 60 (T) + 30 (T)

## Course Description

This course explores the trajectory of sociological theory in the contemporary period, focusing on its evolution beyond classical paradigms. It examines key debates around the 'end of theory', critiques of Enlightenment rationality, and the emergence of critical theory, post-structuralism, and postmodernism. The course situates these theoretical discourses within broader social, cultural, and political contexts, highlighting how they engage with questions of power, knowledge, identity, and modernity. Through close reading of major thinkers and texts, students will develop a nuanced understanding of how contemporary theory redefines sociological inquiry in an increasingly complex and fragmented world.

## Course Objectives

- To trace the evolution of sociological theory in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.
- To understand how critical theory, post-structuralism, and postmodernism challenge and extend classical sociological frameworks.
- To examine the relevance of contemporary theories in understanding issues such as modernity, identity, capitalism, and culture.

## Learning Outcomes

- Comprehend major themes and debates within contemporary sociological theory.
- Critically evaluate theoretical arguments from different schools such as critical theory, post-structuralism, and postmodernism.
- Analyze contemporary social phenomena through the lens of key theorists like Giddens, Foucault, Derrida
- Develop independent, reflective, and critical approaches to understanding society, culture, and power.

## Course Content

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## **Unit 1: Reconstructing Classical Theory in the Contemporary Context**

- Continuities and breaks from classical theory
- The Frankfurt School (Habermas & Critical Theory)
- Juggernaut of Modernity (Anthony Giddens)
- Reflexive Modernization (Ulrich Beck)

## **Unit 2: Post-Structuralism**

- Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction
- Michel Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and Discourse
- Roland Barthes: The Death of the Author

## **Unit 3: Postmodernism**

- Jean-François Lyotard: The Postmodern Condition
- Zygmunt Bauman - Liquid Modernity
- Jean Baudrillard: Simulation and Hyperreality

## **Unit 4: Debates in contemporary theory**

- Dorothy Smith: Standpoint Theory
- Gayatri Spivak: The subaltern
- Edward Said: Orientalism

## **Tutorials: 2 Credits**

### **Tutorial 1**

Weekly discussions on assigned readings

Critical reviews and presentations on selected theorists

Discourse analysis workshop using visual or textual materials

### **Tutorial 2**

Applied theory projects linking concepts to contemporary issues

Peer-led debates on modernity vs. postmodernity

Writing exercises on critical engagement with texts

## **References**

- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Polity Press.

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- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings*. Pantheon.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Difference*. Routledge. (Selected essays)
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
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- Smith, D. E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Northeastern University Press.
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- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications.

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