

**Economic Sociology of Labour Regulation in India**  
PECO 5504 (SOC1 5502/PSCI 5505)  
2025 Winter Term  
Institute of Political Economy

---

**Day & Time: Fridays 14:35-17:25**

**INSTRUCTOR: Professor Sumeet Mhaskar**

**Office Hours: Tuesdays 15:00-16:30, or by appointment**

**Email: [sumeetmhaskar@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:sumeetmhaskar@cunet.carleton.ca) I will generally respond to course-related emails within 48 hours**

---

## **1. Course Description**

This course explores the interplay between law, economy and society and its implications for regulating labour. The British colonial state and the post-independent Indian state introduced various laws to regulate labour. The labour laws include regulating the age of workers in the factories, providing health care facilities such as the Employees State Insurance Scheme (ESIS), introducing maternity benefits, setting up crèches inside the factories, banning bonded labour, and regulating wages and other social security benefits. While most of these laws were introduced to cater to the needs of the capital, some of them were introduced due to the demands of the labourers themselves. The course will examine the social, political, and economic conditions that influenced the making of past and present labour legislation. For instance, there will be a discussion on the Maternity Legislation of the 1920s that came up during British colonial rule, amended in 1961 and further amended in 2017. The second central theme is bonded labour and how the colonial state and the present-day Indian state are engaging with the challenge. The politicisation of the manual scavengers has forced the state to take steps towards the prohibition of the caste-ordained stigmatised occupation as well as design policies for the rehabilitation of those involved in this work. The third central theme is that of domestic workers. The past two decades have seen the Indian state introducing the Domestic Workers Bill. The course will explore how different political conditions resulted in the state addressing the concerns of the employers and workers.

## **2. Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of the course, students will:**

- Learn about the state's role in labour regulation and its implications for the capital-labour relationship in the Global South.
- Be trained in analysing why the state introduces particular labour laws and the social and political processes resulting in such laws.
- Learn the economic and social implications of these legal interventions by the state.
- Learn the continuities and discontinuities of the state's role in shaping capital-labour relationships.

### 3. Course Format

#### **Class Participation and Attendance: 15%**

Students are expected to come to class after completing the assigned readings and being prepared to participate actively in class discussions and group work. Each session will consist of a lecture, small group activities, and class discussions. Over the course of the term, each student should pose at least four questions or substantive, thoughtful comments in class on the assigned readings and connect them to class discussions and other course material.

#### **One Presentation from the readings provided in the reading list: 35%**

Presentation (35%): Each student is expected to choose two research papers from the reading list and present for about 15 minutes (not a second more!). The presentations will take place the same week that particular topics will be discussed in the class. You cannot fit all the content in, so you must be strategic about what you plan to include. You will be assessed on the coherence of argument, presentation delivery (including sticking to time), and engagement with other classmates' research. The presentations will be scheduled in advance.

#### **One written assignment of a minimum of 3000 words: 50%**

Final Paper (50%): Your final papers will be due on **11 April**. While the assignment will cover a topic of your choosing, it would be best if you contacted me to let me know what you are writing **before** beginning work on this assignment. All assignments should be 15-20 pages long, double-spaced, with 12 fonts. No separate title pages are necessary. Your name and the assignment title at the top of the paper will suffice. Please use the Chicago Manual of Style for citations.

#### **Final Grade Approval**

The course instructor determines standing in a course, subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until the Dean has approved them.

#### **Technology in the classroom:**

Students are requested not to use technology in class for non-classroom activities. Doing so may negatively affect your participation and attendance record.

#### **Content Warning:**

Some of the texts we will read in this course might contain language that is significantly different from current norms and include references to sensitive issues of violence, race, sexuality and gender. If we encounter such language in the sources, it will be placed in its historical context and discussed in an atmosphere of respect and consideration.

#### 4. Statement on [Academic Integrity](#)

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful student career. Carleton's Academic Integrity Policy addresses academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration, misrepresentation, impersonation, withholding of records, obstruction/interference, disruption of instruction or examinations, improper access to and/or dissemination of information, or violation of test and examination rules. Students are required to familiarise themselves with the university's academic integrity rules.

##### **Plagiarism**

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*” **Plagiarism is a serious offence which** includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn include but are not limited to books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorised use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT)
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgement in any academic assignment
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own
- failing to acknowledge sources with proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.”

##### **Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI):**

Generative artificial intelligence tools—software that creates new text, images, computer code, audio, video, and other content—have become widely available. Well-known examples include ChatGPT for text and DALL•E for images. This policy governs all such tools, including those released during our semester together. You may not use generative AI tools on assignments in this course. If you choose to use generative AI tools in violation of this policy (or in another class that permits them), please remember that they are typically trained on limited datasets that may be outdated. Additionally, generative AI datasets are trained on pre-existing material, including copyrighted material; therefore, relying on a generative AI tool may result in plagiarism or copyright violations. Finally, remember that generative AI tools aim to produce content that seems to have been created by a human, not to make accurate or reliable content; therefore, relying on a generative AI tool may result in your submission of inaccurate content. It is your responsibility—not the tool's—to ensure the quality, integrity, and accuracy of the work you submit in any college course. If you use generative AI tools to complete assignments in this course in ways I have not explicitly authorised, this will constitute academic dishonesty. As a student in this course,

you must understand when and how generative AI tools can be used to complete your assessments and activities. Please contact your instructor for guidance if you do not know whether an online resource or tool can be used in this course. Please act with integrity for the sake of both your character and your academic record. The student must fully prepare every element of each course assessment in this course. **Generative AI is not permitted, and its use may be considered a breach of academic conduct.**

### **Intellectual property**

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).

### **Submission and Return of Term Work**

Papers must be submitted directly to the instructor according to the instructions in the course outline. The departmental office will not accept assignments submitted in hard copy.

### **Procedures in Cases of Suspected Violations**

Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy are serious offences that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. When an instructor suspects a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy, the Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student. Penalties are not trivial. They may include a mark of zero for the assignment/exam in question or a final grade of "F" for the course. More information on the University's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

## **5. Statement on Student Mental Health**

As a student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>

### **Emergency Resources (on and off campus)**

- Suicide Crisis Helpline: call or text 9-8-8, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- For immediate danger or urgent medical support: call 9-1-1

### **Carleton Resources**

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

## **Off-Campus Resources**

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: call 613-238-3311, text 343-306-5550, or connect online at <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: call 613-722-6914 or toll-free 1-866-996-0991, or connect online at <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me Counselling Service: call 1-844-741-6389 or connect online at <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: call 1-866-925-5454 or connect online at <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: for online or on-site service <https://walkincounselling.com>

## **6. Academic Accommodations**

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website ([students.carleton.ca/course-outline](https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline)). For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows: <https://carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf>

### **Pregnancy obligation**

Please get in touch with me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Department of Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC): <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

### **Religious obligation**

Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Department of Equity and Inclusive Communities (EIC): <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

### **Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact The Paul Menton Centre (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC Website for their deadline to request accommodations for the formally scheduled exam (if applicable) <https://carleton.ca/pmc>

### **Survivors of Sexual Violence**

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://studentsupport/svpolicy>

## Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognises the substantial benefits to the individual student and the university resulting from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform nationally or internationally. Please get in touch with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: <https://students.carleton.ca/services/accommodation/>

**Additional information** on your requirements for short-term informal accommodations.

- If you require supporting documentation for short-term considerations, you may only request the Academic Consideration for Coursework form. You may **not** request medical notes or documentation.
- Consult the Academic Consideration Policy for instructors information page for more details.

## SESSION PLAN AND READINGS:

### THE INSTRUCTOR WILL PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

#### WEEK 1 INTRODUCTORY SESSION

This session will give an overview of the course and introduce the importance of studying labour in terms of law, economy, and society. There are no readings for this session.

#### WEEK 2 AND 3 LABOUR REGULATION IN COLONIAL INDIA

This session will explore labour legislation in colonial India.

##### *Readings*

Kerr, I. J. (2004). Labour control and labour legislation in colonial India: a tale of two mid-nineteenth century acts. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 27(1), 7-25.

Ahuja, Ravi. (1999). The Origins of Colonial Labour Policy in Late Eighteenth-Century Madras. *International Review of Social History*, 44(2), 159-195.

#### WEEK 4, 5, 6 & 7 PAST AND PRESENT OF THE DOMESTIC WORKERS LEGISLATIONS

In this session, we will explore how the union-led movement resulted in the introduction of the Domestic Workers Bill.

### *Readings*

Mohapatra Prabhu. 2016. Legal Construction of Labour Relations in Colonial India 1814-1926. in Global Histories of Work ed by Andreas Eckert, Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsv: Berlin

Raka Ray. 2010. Masculinity, Femininity, and Servitude: Domestic Workers in Calcutta in the Late Twentieth Century. Feminist Studies. Vol. 26, No. 3, Points of Departure: India and the South Asian Diaspora pp. 691-718

Neetha, N. (2008). "Regulating Domestic Work." Economic and Political Weekly 43(37): 26-28.

Moghe, K. (2013). "Organising Domestic Workers in Pune City." Economic and Political Weekly 48(43).

Sujata Gothoskar. 2013. Confluence of Gender, Class and Caste Hierarchies: The Plight of Domestic Workers. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 48, Issue No. 22, 01 Jun, 2013

Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act 2010

[http://ncw.nic.in/pdf/files/domestic\\_worker\\_welfare\\_and\\_social\\_security\\_act\\_2010.pdf](http://ncw.nic.in/pdf/files/domestic_worker_welfare_and_social_security_act_2010.pdf)

The Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act, 2008

SEWA. 2014. Domestic Workers' Laws and Legal Issues in India. WIEGO Law and Informality Resources. Cambridge, MA, USA: WIEGO.

<http://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Domestic-Workers-Laws-and-Legal-Issues-India.pdf>

### **WEEK 8, 9 & 10 THE MATERNITY ACTS: PAST AND PRESENT**

This session will examine the debates surrounding the Maternity Act of 1929 and the recently introduced one.

### *Readings*

Srivastava, Priyanka. 2018. The well-being of the labour force in colonial Bombay: discourses and practices. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kumar, Radha. 1991. Wage Work, Maternity and Mortality In City Lives: Women Workers in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1911-1947. PhD Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University: New Delhi.

Kumar Radha. 1982. Morality, Sexuality and Family. In City Lives Women Workers in the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry, 1919-1939. MPhil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University: New Delhi.

Sarkar, Aditya. (2017). Trouble at the mill. Factory law and the emergence of labour question in late nineteenth-century Bombay. Corby: Oxford University Press.

Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, The Maternity Benefit (Amendment Act), 2017



<https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Maternity%20Benefit%20Amendment%20Act%2C2017%20.pdf>

D’Cunha, Jean. 2018 India’s Bold Maternity Benefit Act Can Become a Game Changer if it Addresses Current Limitations. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 53, Issue No. 31, 04 Aug, 2018

<https://www.epw.in/node/152339/pdf>

## **WEEK 11, 12, 13 &14 TACKLING LABOUR BONDAGES IN THE PAST AND PRESENT**

This session will examine the crucial issue of bonded labour, which is declared illegal in India. We discuss the brief history of bonded labour, its contemporary forms, and the state's role in tackling them by introducing various policies.

### *Readings*

Prakash, G. (1990). *Bonded histories: genealogies of labour servitude in colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Srivastava, Ravi. (2005). *Bonded Labor in India: Its Incidence and Pattern*. *Cornell University ILR School*.

Breman, J. and Guerin, I. 2009, ‘On bondage: old and new’, in J. Breman, I. Guerin and A. Prakash (eds.) *India’s Unfree Workforce: Of Bondage Old and New*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-17.

ILO, 2012. *Global Estimate of Forced Labour. Results and methodology* International Labour Office (ILO). Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL) [http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/ILOPublications/WCMS\\_182004/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/sapfl/Informationresources/ILOPublications/WCMS_182004/lang--en/index.htm)

Mhaskar, Sumeet. (2019). The State of Stigmatised Employment in India. In D. Dutta (Ed.), *Oxfam: India Inequality Report 2019*. New Delhi: Oxfam India.

Bhasha Singh. 2014. *Unseen: The Truth about India’s Manual Scavengers*. Penguin

Diane Coffey, Dean Spears. 2017. *Where India Goes: Abandoned Toilets, Stunted Development and the Costs of Caste*. Harper Collins.