

**School of Human Studies  
Ambedkar University, Delhi**

**Course Code: SHS201724**

**Title: Childhood, Identity and Society**

**Type of Course: Core course for MA Psychology (Psychosocial Clinical Studies)**

**Cohort for which it is Elective: None**

**No. of credits: 4**

**Semester offered: IIIrd Semester**

**Course Co-ordinator and Team: AnshumitaPandey, DeeptiSachdev, Vinod R**

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**Course Description:** As it traverses then through three words – Childhood, Identity and Society – and how they come to impact one another, the course offers the student a glimpse of the deeply political discourse that surrounds and constructs childhood, impacts the everyday of the child, on one hand and on the other takes one to a critical engagement with the psychological processes of infancy and childhood - ‘the earliest’ and ‘the deepest’ within. CIS marks a re-turn to one’s ‘foundations (in observation)’ located in a psychosocial matrix that allows us to see each individual located within a culture and having a privately evolved but structured culture of his/her own. With a reading of Burman, Nieuwenhuys, Nandy and others, we begin by locating childhood within a confluence of discourses – historical, economic, legal, political. The social construction of childhood then marks the first entry into the world of the child and the themes that populate it. This is followed by a turn to Winnicott and Erikson who take the student to the ‘bi-personal field’ of the mother and child and the subjective processes of infancy and childhood. We get glimpses into the absoluteness of dependence, the pleasure – pain of separation, the arrival of ‘I’ and ‘me’ – the relational beginnings of psyche - ‘mind’ when it could at best ‘sense’ things. We find ourselves wondering - What is the ‘nature of the child’s tie to the mother’? ‘What is trauma for the child?’ ‘Why do children play?’ ‘Is there a relationship between playing and reality’? Through readings, film analyses and case discussions, we visit how a child, helped by the mother’s formative response begins to make the world his own, how playing – at once precarious and robust – allows the child to consolidate his being, to find a way to exist as oneself and relate to the other as oneself, how in this space marked by a peculiar concentration that allows one to be lost, the child is creating a personal idiom that is alive and ‘feels real’. Erikson detailing a similar process that enables experiences to be organized in an individual ego gives to us the basics of identity, its formation and sensitively makes us see how such consolidation is routed through a culture’s collective behavior - historical memory, mythology, rituals or avoidance - that closely inform individual experience. Here one is not merely engaging with an oversimplified analogy of the relationship between the individual and the collective but making a case for how an individual, a child, is at all times an organism, an ego and a member of a society - each a crucial dimension of experience out of which identity is knitted. A special focus in the

course becomes 'childhood at the margins' that we trace through individual life stories and their complex realities.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of the course, the student is expected to:

1. come to have an appreciation of and relationship with the world of a child, outside and inside (the childlike that lingers within) and the discourses that shape the child's everyday.
2. have a slowly deepening relationship with key ideas in the works of thinkers like Winnicott, Erikson, Kakar, and Nandy.
3. supplement theoretical gleanings and sensitive (self) reflection so as to come to have a 'sense of' what working with children entails.
4. have a critical sensibility that allows one to deconstruct and reconstruct the relationship between childhood and society.

### **Brief Description of Modules:**

#### **Unit 1: What is this thing called the child?**

The opening unit of the course is meant to engage in a rich discussion about the discourse of childhood and developmental psychology. With a close reading of writings of Erica Burman and Olga Nieuwenhuys, the attempt is to destabilize a seemingly single story of childhood which as it then unfolds shows childhood as historically produced, as socio-culturally constructed and a deeply political field.

#### **Reading List:**

~ *From Useful to Useless: The Changing Social Value of Children; Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* by Viviana A. Zelizer; Review by: Nancy Tomes in *American History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Mar., 1986), pp. 50-54 Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

~ "Grow up!" : *The devaluation and stigmatization of childhood as a threat to progress in contemporary social thought* Author(s): Roger Neustadter in *Sociological Focus*, vol. 26, no. 4 (October 1993), pp. 301-314, Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

~ *Global Childhood and the Politics of Contempt* Author(s): Olga Nieuwenhuys in *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (July-Sept. 1998), pp. 267-289, Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.

~ *Development Phallacies: Psychology, Gender and Childhood* Author(s): Erica Burman in *Agenda*, No. 22, *Families in Question* (1994), pp. 11-20 Published by: Agenda Feminist Media

~ *Toys, Mythologies*, Roland Barthes, Hill and Wang, New York, 2012

~ *Born into Brothels*, Documentary, Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, 2005

## **Unit 2 : The child in the Indian Tradition**

The second unit is an attempt to locate the attitudes and practices that impact the child, now grounded within the Indian socio-cultural milieu. We attempt to locate the history of childhood in India and see childhood caught between traditional and modern scripts.

### ***Reading List:***

*~The child in Indian Tradition : Appendix, The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India, SudhirKakar, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981*

*~Baby Icons: Forms and Figures of a New Generation, Freedom and destiny: Gender, family and Popular Culture in India, Patricia Uberoi, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006*

*~ Reconstructing Childhood: A Critique of the Ideology of Adulthood, Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias, AshisNandy, oxford university Press, New Delhi, 1992*

## **Unit 3: The inner world**

Primarily foregrounding the work of D.W. Winnicott, we take a closer look at the baby as a person and psychic accomplishments in this journey. We explore:

- ~ The phenomenology of infancy
- ~ The nature of the child's tie to its mother
- ~ "Me" and "Not Me": Psyche's relational beginning
- ~ The significance of transitional spaces

### ***Reading List:***

*Baby as a Person, The Child and the Outside World, D. W. Winnicott, Penguin, 2000*

*Further thoughts on Babies as Persons, The Child and the Outside World, D. W. Winnicott, Tavistock Publications, 1957*

*The Theory of Parent-Infant Relationship, Maturational Processes and The Facilitating Environment, D.W. Winnicott, International University Press, 1985*

*From Dependence to Independence in the Development of Individual, Maturational Processes and The Facilitating Environment, D.W. Winnicott, International University Press, 1985*

*Ego Integration in Child Development, Maturational Processes and The Facilitating Environment, D.W. Winnicott, International University Press, 1985*

*Primitive Emotional Development, Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis, D.W. Winnicott, Karnac Books, 1984*

*Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena, Playing and Reality, D.W. Winnicott, Tavistock Publications, 1971*

*Real Making, Winnicott, Adam Phillips, Harvard University Press, 1988*

*The Appearing Self, Winnicott, Adam Phillips, Harvard University Press, 1988*

*Mothers and Infants, The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India, SudhirKakar, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981*

#### **Unit 4: The Metaphor of Play**

The aliveness of self and identity is explored through playful and creative living. We shift from the use/ content of play to the significance of playing in life: as creating a self idiom, as a space of working through, as communication, as actively setting up a relationship with reality and with social scripts that populate the everyday. A crucial emphasis of the unit is on a child not being able to play. What is the work of therapy at such a moment? What substitutes playing? What is the relationship of this moment to a therapist's own ability to play?

#### **Reading List:**

*Why children play?, Child, Family and the Outside World, DW Winnicott, Penguin, 2000*

*Playing: A Theoretical Statement, Playing and Reality, D. W. Winnicott, Tavistock Publications, 1971*

*Playing: Creative activity and the search for the self, Playing and Reality, D. W. Winnicott, Tavistock Publications, 1971*

*Aggression in relation to emotional development, Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis, D.W. Winnicott, Karnac Books, 1984*

*The Capacity to be Alone, Maturational Processes and The Facilitating Environment, D.W. Winnicott, International University Press, 1985*

*Play and Vision, Toys and Reasons: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience by Erik H. Erikson, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1963*

*Ego Distortion in terms of True Self and False Self, Maturational Processes and The Facilitating Environment, D.W. Winnicott, International University Press, 1985*

*New Light on Children's Thinking, Psychoanalytic Explorations, D.W. Winnicott, Harvard University Press, 1989*

*String: A Technique of Communication, Maturational Processes and The Facilitating Environment, D.W. Winnicott, International University Press, 1985*

*The Squiggle Game, Collected Papers by D.W. Winnicott*

*Dibs in Search of Self, Virginia M. Axline, Random House Publishing, New York, 1964*

*The Play of Interpretation, Winnicott, Adam Phillips, Harvard University Press, 1988*

*Ponette, 1996 (Film on the theme 'What happens when a child's mother dies?')*

#### **Unit 5: Steps In Identity Formation: Development in Erikson's Psychology**

A closer look at Erikson's Life cycle approach to appreciate further the complex interplay between self and society.

***Reading List:***

*Eight Ages of Man, Childhood, Identity and Society, Erik H. Erikson, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1963*

*The Life Cycle: Epigenesis of Identity, Identity, Youth and Crisis, Erik H. Erikson, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1968*

*The Traditional Hindu View and the Psychology of Erik H. Erikson, Identity and Adulthood, SudhirKakar, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993*

**Assessment Methodology:** Assessment will consider the student's engagement with different aspects of the course requirements. Critical and self reflexive writing in the form of written assignments, individual and group presentation, photo-essays to enhance creative expression, spontaneous thinking in viva or observation based writings are different modalities that can be chosen from in the course of a semester, counting (in varying proportions) towards the final grade for the course. No assessment shall exceed 40% in over-all weightage.