

Sociology 233
Gender and Power in South Asia

Fall 2013

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M/Th 2:50-4:00

PNE 349

Office Hours: Thursdays, 1-2 or by appt.

I. Overview

How can we understand something as intimate and culturally specific as gender in a place that is far removed from our own everyday lives? This course takes as its premise that examining relationships of power between men and women in a part of the world as far away as South Asia teaches us not only a new political geography, but also makes us aware of how *we* see. Our study of gender and politics in South Asia seeks to situate ourselves as analysts and political actors even as we learn about the gendered dimensions of contemporary social, political, and economic debates in the region.

After a brief theoretical introduction, the course begins by examining iconic representations of womanhood in South Asia, thus situating in more detail the question of how we see gender and culture in faraway locales. In contrast, in the latter part of the course, we will delve into ethnographic studies that examine how gendered beings navigate their everyday lives in South Asia. In this way, we will move from the realm of representation into the everyday lives of women with a reflexive, self-critical perspective that continuously questions how we come to know what we know. Along the way, we will learn about many aspects of cultural and economic life in the region, including nationalism and nationalist movements, women's activism, the legal system, new livelihood forms, and the gendered body.

As this is a course in sociology, the assignments and lectures will focus upon critical reading and writing to understand and clarify relationships between the individual and society, culture and the economy, the state and the market. In this sense, South Asia is just the lab in which we will be exploring a core set of sociological concepts. The course will be run as a *seminar*, which means that everyone must actively contribute to class discussion and come to class having completed the required readings. Through analysis of scholarly texts, film, and performance, you will learn to interpret a variety of texts through a sociological lens.

Disclaimer: This course does not aim to represent all of nine countries that make up the region of South Asia. Instead the course focuses mainly on India, with some attention to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. This focus reflects my own area of specialization and knowledge, but also reflects the bias of scholarly production in the area in general toward India. There is unfortunately very little feminist scholarship that is situated in the other countries of South Asia. Students should not expect that this course provide an overview of gender and politics in each individual country.

II. Course Materials

Most of the readings are available through the Wellesley library or in Sakai. In addition, you will be required to purchase the following books. Please make sure you have access to these

books well in advance of the time we will be reading them in class. Not all may be available at the library reserve.

Nagar, Richa and the Sangtin Collective. 2006. *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lynch, Caitrin. 2007. *Juki Girls, Good Girls: Gender and Cultural Politics in Sri Lanka's Global Garment Industry*. Ithaca: Cornell ILR Press.

Radhakrishnan, Smitha. 2011. *Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class*. Durham: Duke University Press.

III. Grading and assignments:

Students will be graded on the following assignments:

1) **Weekly reading responses** (<300 words): In these assignments, you will reflect upon the readings for the week and connect them with material covered earlier in the class. These are *not* summaries, but it will be useful for you to state the key concept/contribution of the reading in your response. Mainly, the responses should focus on what stood out to you about the readings and what it made you think about. Each student must post one response to the course's Sakai forum per week and I encourage you to read one another's responses.

2) **Participation/ Attendance**: Discussion, exchange, and participation are critical components of this class and class time will be important in facilitating your understanding of the readings. Therefore, attendance is mandatory. More than two absences during the course of the term will dramatically affect your participation grade. Tardiness is not acceptable; if you are more than 10 minutes late to class, it will count as an absence. If you are consistently late by a few minutes, this will affect your participation grade as well.

Attending class is always your choice. In general, there is no need to contact me to "excuse" your absence. If you are absent **more than twice** during the term for medical or other personal reasons, then please keep me informed. I expect that everyone will have once or twice in the semester when they cannot come due to sickness or an important appointment. More than that, however, and you're missing out on class!

3) **Thinkpieces**: Thinkpieces flesh out the key themes of the class in the form of short essays. You will respond to prompts to be handed out in class. These papers are formal and must be constructed around a central argument in response to a selected prompt. You are also free to come up with your own topics, but they must be approved in advance. You will complete two thinkpieces over the course of the class that will cover the material from the first two sections of the course. More instructions to follow.

4) **Analytical Paper**: Students will be required to develop a topic of interest over the course of the semester and turn in an 8-10 page paper demonstrating your

ability to effectively analyze a specific topic through a “gender lens” by the end of the course. Your final grade will include completion of smaller deadlines to ensure that your paper is developing in a timely manner. More details on the requirements of the paper to follow.

Your final grade will be computed as follows:

Participation/Responses:	25%
Thinkpieces:	40%
Analytical Paper:	35%

All work must be submitted electronically through the Sakai assignment interface only.

Documents must be in .doc, .docx, or .rtf format. NO PDFs!! File name must include last name first and the name of the assignment (i.e. Radhakrishnan_Thinkpiece 1.doc)

Grading Policy

This course complies with Wellesley’s College-wide grading policy:

<http://www.wellesley.edu/registrar/grading/gradingpolicyfaq>

More specifically, I grade work according to quality, effort, and a demonstrated understanding of the key concepts of the course/assignment. A grade of “B” indicates good work. It means that you have made adequate effort, have shown that you understand the main ideas, and have met the expectations of the class. To get a grade in the “A” range, your work must surpass those expectations. In short, “A’s” are for work at an excellent level. Grades of “C” or below indicate that you have not fulfilled the expectations of the coursework, by not completing the assignment, not putting in the required time and effort, or fundamentally misunderstanding central concepts.

Late Work Policy

All assignments are due on the dates and times scheduled in the syllabus. After the due date/time, I will continue to accept work with a one-grade penalty each day for the first two days after the assignment is due (i.e. Thinkpiece 1 is due on 10/7 before class. A paper turned in after class and before midnight on 10/8 will receive a max of B, 10/9 a max of C). After two days, I will continue to accept late work **until the last day of classes** for half-credit only. Please plan your schedule for exams and papers accordingly. Extenuating medical or other circumstances that might form the basis for an exception to this policy will require professional documentation, such as a doctor’s note.

Our Relationship

We are in this course together and I consider it my privilege and responsibility to be the best teacher I can be for you. In order for me to do what I am here for, however, I need consistent communication from you. If you are having an issue with the course or the materials, or a personal issue that is affecting your performance or attendance, **it is your responsibility to inform me immediately**. I cannot help if I do not know what the problem is, nor can I guess the underlying reason for persistent absences, tardiness, or lack of preparedness for class. If you find you are having those problems, please write me or come see me right away. If you require any special accommodations, such as a notetaker,

extra time for exams, or any other arrangement, please inform me at the start of the semester or as soon as the need arises.

IV. Course Outline

September 5th: Introduction

PART I: Developing a Gender Lens for South Asia

September 9th-12th: “Seeing” with Feminist Eyes?

- McDowell, Linda. 1999. “Introduction: Place and Gender.” In *Gender, Identity, and Place*. University of Minnesota Press. (available as e-book through Wellesley library)
- Scott, Joan. 1986. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5. (Dec., 1986), pp. 1053-1075. (available online through the Wellesley library)

September 16th-19th: Colonial Gaze/Feminist Gaze

- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1988. “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” *Feminist Review* 30: 61-88. (available online through Wellesley library)
- Visweswaran, Kamala. 1994. “Betrayal: An Analysis in Three Acts” (e-reserve)

September 23rd-30th: Imaging Womanhood in South Asia I: Women as Victims

- Mani, Lata. 1990. “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India.” In *Recasting Women*.
- Kapur, Shekhar. 1994. *Bandit Queen*. Available at Clapp or on Youtube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UX185FMwQdc&list=PL001270A63A8CC9EA>
- Gopal, Priyamvada. “Of Victims and Vigilantes: The “Bandit Queen Controversy.” In Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. (ed.) *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India*. Pp. 293-331.
- Selection of news articles regarding Delhi and Mumbai gang rapes, TBA (2012, 2013)

October 3rd: Imaging Womanhood in South Asia II: The Erotic Woman

- Mehta, Suketu. “A City in Heat.” In *Maximum City*. (on Sakai resources)

October 7th: Thinkpiece I due before class

- In class film: *Water*, Deepa Mehta

PART II: Gendering the Nation and the State

October 10th-17th: Gendered Nationalisms

NO CLASS ON OCTOBER 14th (FALL BREAK)

- Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. “Colonialism, nationalism, and the contest in India.” *American Ethnologist*. 16 (4) 622-633 (available online from Wellesley Library)
- Maunaguru, Sitralega. 1995. “Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of

- ‘Woman’ in Projects of Protest and Control.” In Jeganathan, Pradeep & Qadri Ismail, eds. *Unmaking the Nation: The politics of identity and history in modern Sri Lanka*. Pp. 158-175
- Parameswaran, Radhika. 2004. Global Queens, National Celebrities: Tales of Feminine Triumph in Post-Liberalization India. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 21:346-370. (available online through Library)

October 21st: (Re)thinking the State

- Sunder Rajan. “Introduction: Women, Citizenship, Law and the Indian State.” in *The Scandal of the State*. Pp 1-37.

October 24th-31st: Women’s Activism

- Nagar, Richa and the Sangtin Collective. *Playing with Fire*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fontanella-Khan, Amana. *Pink Sari Revolution*. W.W. Norton & Company. (Selections TBA)

PART III: Gendered Livelihoods in a Neoliberal Economy

November 4th-7th: Microfinance and Entrepreneurship

- Thinkpiece II Due November 4th
- Karim, Lamia. 2011. *Microfinance and its Discontents: Women in Debt in Bangladesh*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Chapters 3-4.

November 11th-14th: Factory Work

- Lynch, Caitrin. 2007. *Juki Girls, Good Girls: Gender and Cultural Politics in Sri Lanka’s Global Garment Industry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

November 18th-21st: Global Work

- Radhakrishnan, Smitha. 2011. *Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class*. Durham: Duke University Press.

CONCLUSION: Seeing vs. Listening

November 25th: Outline of Analytical Paper Due

- In-class film, *Lakshmi and Me*, Nishtha Jain and Smriti Nevatia.

NOVEMBER 28TH: THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 2nd-5th: Gendered Stories, Gendered Tellings

- Raheja, Gloria Goodwin and Ann Grodzins Gold. 1994. “Purdah Is as Purdah’s Kept: A Storyteller’s Story.” In *Listen to the Heron’s Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. (164-181)
- Postscript to *Playing with Fire*

December 9th: Wrap-up

Final Analytical Paper Due on December 20th at 4:30 PM to Sakai