Sociology 233
Gender and Power in South Asia
Smitha Radhakrishnan
M/Th 11:10-12:20
PNE 151
Office Hours: W 10-11, Th 12:30-1:30, 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 before moving on to use gender as a tool to understand state and economic power. In the latter part of the course, we will 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 question 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 women’s movements, the legal system, regional politics, 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.

Apart from the required readings, you will be required to watch several films and to attend a performance on February 20th, 2011 at the Houghton Chapel (details TBA). Through analysis of scholarly texts, film, and performance, you will learn to interpret a variety of texts through a sociological lens.

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.

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%

*A note about grading: 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, either by not completing the assignment or by not putting in the required time and effort.

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)

IV. Course Outline

January 24th: Introduction

PART I: Developing a Gender Lens for South Asia

January 27th-January 31st: “Seeing” with Feminist Eyes?


February 3rd-7th: Colonial Gaze/Feminist Gaze


February 10th: Imaging Womanhood in South Asia I: The Erotic Woman


February 14th-17th: Imaging Womanhood in South Asia II: Women as Victims

- Bandit Queen (on e-reserve)
February 20th (Sunday)
• *Encounter.* A show by Navarasa Dance Theater. Houghton Multifaith Chapel. 6pm. Online response on Sakai required.

February 21st: Imaging Womanhood in South Asia III: The Political Leader

February 24th: Thinkpiece I due before class
• In class film: *Water,* Deepa Mehta

PART II: Gendering the Nation and the State

February 28th-March 3rd: Gendered Nationalisms
• Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. “Colonialism, nationalism, and the contest in India.” *American Ethnologist.* 16 (4) 622-633  (available online from Wellesley Library)

March 7th-14th: (Re)thinking the State

SPRING BREAK: March 16th-25th

March 28th-March 31st: Women’s Activism

PART III: Gendered Livelihoods in a Neoliberal Economy

April 4th-7th: Microfinance and Entrepreneurship
• Thinkpiece II Due April 4th
• Readings TBA

April 11th-14th: Factory Work

April 11th-14th: Global Work

April 18th: NO CLASS, Patriot’s Day

CONCLUSION: Seeing vs. Listening

April 25th: Outline of Analytical Paper Due
• In-class film, *Lakshmi and Me*, Nishtha Jain and Smriti Nevatia.

May 2nd: 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)

May 5th: Wrap-up

Final Analytical Paper Due on May 16th at 4:30 PM