COURSE TITLE
GENDER AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN INDIA

Course Description

This course explores how the making of a modern Indian nation state entailed a remaking of gender identities. It will look at how colonialism led to the growth of an ambiguous attitude towards modernity and how tradition and culture became key sites of contention for gender issues. Through the analysis of specific debates in public discourse, in different historical junctures in colonial and independent India, the course will examine the intersections between gender, diversities and inequalities.

The course will broadly be divided into four parts. Part 1 and 2 will look at some critical events during the colonial period, while Part 3 and 4 will focus on independent India. Central to this course will be attention to contexts, actors and the manner in which gender is played out in India’s public discourse. Part 1 and 2 therefore will look at the dynamics between the colonial state, communities, social reformers, nationalists and women’s organizations. Part 3 will look at the key actors in different phases in independent India: (i) the transformed character of the state and the way other actors get reconfigured in the postcolonial context; (ii) the wide range of social and political movements including a strong and diverse women’s movement (that has since become an important voice in public debates) in the 1970s; (iii) the rise of religious fundamentalism and its attack on gender equality and secularism in the 1980s. Part 4 centers on India’s economic liberalization from the 1990s and looks at the new actors that acquire prominence in India’s public discourse, such as the media, international institutions, corporate houses, public relation and advertising firms, and the Indian diaspora. The broader intent of the course here is to investigate the hyper-visibility of gender in public discourse even as the idea of ‘India’, its ‘public sphere’ and ‘democracy’ get redefined.

The reasons for choosing this long period are three-fold: (i) the intersectional relationship of gender, caste, class and religion, evident in the early years has persisted. The past bears on the present even as contexts have redefined the contours of debates; (ii) it allows focus on concrete gender issues in different historical moments providing a vantage point to understand, on one hand, Indian society and its transformation and on the other, comparable issues of conflict, along the fault line of gender in an increasingly multicultural west; (iii) and given that some of the more influential scholarship on India has been historical and postcolonial studies have in a
sense rested on that, this course would facilitate a careful look at the empirical details to assess the conceptual limits and possibilities of this approach.

**Course Requirements**

Students are required to:

1. Write a note (four to five pages long, double spaced and typewritten) on a substantial amount of the required readings for any week of their choice. **This has to be submitted before the relevant class discussion.**
2. **Participate actively** in class discussions.
3. Make **one class presentation** on a 20 to 25 pages research paper concerning an important aspect of gender and public discourse in India. The paper topic and the date may be chosen in consultation with the instructor.
5. Last date for submission of paper December 4th.
6. The **recommended readings** are meant to help students begin to explore issues relevant to their paper topics in greater depth.

**Grading**

The grades will be determined in the following way:
- Note on the reading: 20%
- Presentations & Class Participation: 20%
- Paper: 60%

Aside from being worth 20% of the marks, class participation will influence the grades in cases where students are on the borderline between two letter grades.

**Format**

The class meets once a week for three hours. Each class consists of a short introductory presentation by the instructor followed with interactive debates and discussions involving students. This research seminar is articulated around students’ questions, concerns and discussions. It is absolutely essential not only for students to complete all the readings, but also to reflect about them prior to the course in order to fully benefit from discussions.

**McGill Policy Statements**

1. "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information)." (approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)
2. “In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.” (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

Readings

PART 1
Social Reform and the Women’s Question in early modern India

WEEK 1
Reading India’s Past and Present: Some Methodological Issues


WEEK 2
Social Reform in 19th century colonial India


Maitrayee Chaudhuri *The Indian Women’s Movement: Reform and Revival* (Delhi, Radiant, 1992) Reprinted 2011 (Delhi, Palm Leaf) pp. 1-68.

**WEEK 3**

**Social Reform in 19th century colonial India**


**Suggested Readings for Part 1**


Maitrayee Chaudhuri “Reform, Revival and the Women’s Question at the Turn of the Century” in Chaudhuri *The Indian Women’s Movement: Reform and Revival* (Delhi, Radiant, 1992) Reprinted 2011 (Delhi, Palm Leaf) pp. 69-105.

Patricia Uberoi (ed), *Social Reforms, Sexuality and the State*, Sage, New Delhi, 1996.


Uma Chakravarti *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*. Zubaan 2012.
PART 2
Nationalism and The Women’s Movement in Early 20th century

WEEK 4


**Suggested Readings for Part 2**


**Part 3**

**Independent India**

**WEEK 5**

**Independent India: The Early Years**


WEEK 6
The Women’s Movement from the 1970s: new questions and perspectives


WEEK 7
Gender Rights, Fundamentalism and Secularism


Pathak Zakia and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan “Shahbano” Signs 14(3): 558-82.


Recommended Readings for Part 3


Kumar Radha 1997 The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women’s Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990 (New Delhi, Zubaan)

Sunder Rajan Rajeshwari 2003 The Scandal of the State: Women, Law, and Citizenship in Postcolonial India (Delhi, Permanent Black)


Desai, Neera and Vibhuti Patel Indian women: change and challenge in the international decade 1975-85 (Prakashan, Bombay, 1985.)


Sen Illina 1990 *A Space within the struggle: women’s participation in people’s movements* (New Delhi, Kali for women) pp. 1-24, 111-124; 141-159.


**PART 4**

**Globalizing India: 1990s onwards**

**WEEK 8**

**Globalization, social transformation and democratic politics**


**WEEK 9**

**Media, Communication and Gender**


WEEK 10
Issues: Old and New


WEEK 11
Issues: Old and New

John, Mary E “The politics of quotas and the women's reservation bill in India.


**WEEK 12**

**The Nirbhaya Case**

Agnes Flavia 2013 “No Shortcuts to Rape” Economic and Political Weekly XLVIII:2. pp.1-4


**BBC Documentary- 'India's Daughter' on... - YouTube**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJmk2wVtiSo

**Suggested Readings for Part 4**

Arjun Appadurai India’s World: The Politics of Creativity In a Globalized Society. Rupa, Delhi, 2012.


