WOMEN IN CROSS CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES
Instructor: Jyoti Sanghera

Very often cross-cultural studies in the social sciences seldom go beyond opening little windows onto different cultural communities and examining their "wealth" of cultural diversity. To what extent are these multitudes of diversities interlinked and historically impacted upon by each other in the context of international structures of power, with possibly some effectively standing in the way of others who seek to 'liberate' themselves. Women's Studies, as we understand, is much more than a discipline for 'interpreting' and 'examining'. It, therefore, faces the task of not merely looking at women of various cultural communities to ascertain how different they are, but of learning from the struggles of these women.

Several new insights have emerged within feminist praxis with the sharpening of women's struggles in different parts of the world. This has resulted in a wide diversity of perspectives on some key feminist issues based upon cultural, socio-economic and political variations of the content and site of these struggles. In fact, it is being noticed that often different perspectives on certain vital issues are at such diametrical variance, and women, through their struggles, are increasingly discovering that there is no one feminism and no single road to liberation. Consequently, they are seriously examining and challenging earlier claims of some feminists for global solidarity and international feminism.

Within the ambit of feminist praxis, what questions then, are on the agenda for reexamination? What are the ideological, theoretical and methodological bases for this reexamination? This course will attempt to discuss these crucial questions by focussing concretely on a few of those issues within the women's movement which are couched in a multitude of perspectives and cannot be viewed unidimensionally.

This course will seek to discuss issues and their facets through selective readings, project reports, films, guest lectures and seminars. The objective will be to make the course as interactive and participatory as possible so that not only does it inform and educate but also draw out the diversity of perspectives on these issues from amongst the participants in order to contribute to the ongoing debate.

REQUARED READING


RECOMMENDED READING


ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE ALLOCATION

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<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>In-class presentation and summary</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
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<td>Discussion and participation</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
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<td>Midterm assignment</td>
<td>30 percent</td>
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<td>Final assignment</td>
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DETAILED COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1. Introduction: An introduction will be provided to the course outlining the approach and special focus. An introduction will also be provided to the various books and articles to be used, with an emphasis on how to critically 'read' and evaluate reading material.

Week 2. Issues and definitions. A brief introduction will be forwarded to all the key issues which shall be examined during this course. Some important concepts and definitions will be discussed and some dimensions of women's struggles introduced. The interfacing of gender, patriarchy, race, class and ethnicity will be viewed in the context of feminist perspectives.


Film: In the Dust of Development.

Week 3. Women and Environment: The environment Movement and the dominant issues within it will be discussed from women's standpoint in the context of the North-South divide. Poverty and Development as key variables are analyzed when presenting feminist perspectives and struggles on the environment. What is the impact of environmental degradation on women and how do they respond in terms of initiatives?


Film: Voices from Baliapal.

Week 4. Reproductive Rights and Autonomy: Readings and discussion this week seek to broaden the issue of reproductive rights and control over women's bodies by introducing dimensions of struggles from various parts of the world. Concepts such as Autonomy and Reproductive Rights will be examined in the context of concrete movements.


Week 5. Women, Ethnicity and Identity: Discussion this week would focus on the resurgence of struggles around issues of ethnicity and identity and nationhood; specific violence against women, repression and fascism will be placed in this context. The interfacing of ethnicity and religion will be our principal focus.
Gedri Ismail, "Boys will be Boys: Gender and National Agency in Frantz Fanon and LTTE in Economic and Political Weekly", Aug. 1-8, 1992, Pp. 1677-1679.


Optional: Last two essays in Bridenthal, et al., When Biology Became Destiny.

Week 6. Women, Ethnicity and Labour: Some questions of the previous week will be located in the context of race and class in discussing the creation of the ethnicised female worker. Some redefinitions of theoretical categories such as Patriarchy and Class will be analyzed.


Matsui, Y., "Women Workers in Modern factories", in Women’s Asia, Pp. 33-49.


Week 7. Where are all the Women Going? Internationalization of capital has created far-reaching changes on the socio-economic canvas of the third world. While feminization of poverty is being observed all over the globe, feminization of migration is a unique outcome, characterizing the flow of labour from the developing world. Some recent trends will be discussed in the context of the migration of women domestics workers.

Matsui, Y., "Migrant Women Workers: Abuse and Isolation", in Women’s Asia, Pp. 50-61.

Guest Speaker: Cecilia Diocson from the Philippines Women’s Centre. There will be a film on domestic workers in Canada.

Week 8. Children - the Prime Commodity: What can money not buy? Children are the most coveted commodity in the international marketplace, whether as units of labour or as gratifiers of modern/post modern fantasies.


Serrill, M.S., "Wrapping the Earth in Family Ties", in Time, Nov. 4, 1991, Pp. 52-60.


Film: Whose Children?

Week 9. Prostitution: The Political Economy of Women’s Sexual labour: The next 3 weeks will focus around the above issue. Specifically, theoretical and ideological dimensions of the problem will be introduced through readings. Concepts of Poverty and Prostitution will be examined. Prostitution seen from the standpoint of labour, ideological
control and imaging sexuality forms the kernel of women's subordination in terms of
gender, class and race.


Sanghera, J., 'Creating International Brothels: Sex Tourism and Social Change in Some
Asian Countries', 1989, Pp. a-6, 30-60.

Truong, Sex, Money and Morality, Pp.30-56.

Films: Cannot Run away
Prostitution, A Factor in Nicosia.

Week 10. Transnationalization of Women's Bodies: The incorporation of women's sexual
labour in the tourism industry will be discussed concretely through a case study of
Thailand.

Truong, Sex, Money and Morality, Pp. 158-192.

Week 11. Theorzing Sexual Labour: Various feminist perspectives on this crucial issue will
be discussed with the underlying question being: is prostitution another form of violence
against women or is it something else? Is there a third world perspective on prostitution?
What is the process of production of sexuality and racist imaging?

Sanghera, J., 'Poverty and Prostitution in Asia: Redefining some categories', in Diva, vol.
3, issue 3, Pp. 46-53.

Truong, Sex, Money and Morality, Pp. 57-92.

Week 12. Feminism and Feminisms.... Diverse feminist perspectives, mystifications and
contradictions which have emerged in the context of various issues discussed during the
course will be analyzed in their theoretical, ideological and methodological dimensions.

Kishwar, M., "Why I do Not Call Myself a Feminist", in Manushi, no.61, Pp. 2-8.

Russo, a., "We Cannot Live Our Lives: White Women, Antiracism and Feminism", in

Johnson-Odim, C., "Common Themes, Different Context: Third World Women and
Feminism", in Mohanty et al., Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,
Pp. 314-327.

Week 13. Concluding and Recapitulating.