Gender in Indian Society: Concepts, Practices and Processes of Transformation

Aims. In this course the students are introduced to the myriad ways by which gender exercises its influence on Indian society, and how in turn is being influenced by it. The course brings to fore factors that led to the creation of gender identities and gender barriers, while also tracing the emergence of movements, which identified and protested gender hierarchies. The changing ideologies and strategies of the women’s movement that has a history of nearly two centuries are discussed in a critical perspective, so as to bring out both the green and grey areas. Lectures are delivered by academicians and activists. Class room lectures are supplemented by a nearly equal number of panel discussions, film reviews, field visits and interactions with grass roots level women groups, elected women representatives and members of autonomous women organizations.

Field Visits. Field visits are an important part of the course and the occasion for students to compare what has been discussed in lectures with observable realities. The following will be visited:

- Samata Progressive Women’s Forum
- Shakti Dhama
- State Home for Women
- Day Care Centres for Children
- Special Schools for Girl Children, Self-Help Groups
- Panchyati Raj Institutions (Rural Local Self Government)

Films. The following films will be screened in and out of class:

“No one Killed Jessica” (2011; Hindi; dir. Rajkumar Gupta); feature film, a political thriller explores ability of VIPS to manipulate legal system
“Puttakkana Highway” (2011; Kannada; dir. B. Suresha); feature film based on novel by B. Chandrashekar explores land scamming in a Karnataka village

“Khap” (2011; Hindi; dir Ajai Sinha); feature film explores dilemmas raised by arranged and romantic marriages in present-day India.

**Evaluation.** There will be one term-end examination and one term paper. The term paper can be based either on secondary sources of data or on field experiences. Students can choose the topic for the term paper in consultation with the Instructor. Since meaningful learning and understanding depends on active presence and participation in the classroom, regular attendance is a pre-requisite. Weight age is also given for attendance and class participation, documenting field experiences and film reviews Grades will be calculated on the following basis: Attendance and Class Participation: 20%, Final Exam: 30%, Term Paper: 20%, Documenting Field Experiences/Film Reviews: 30%

**Office hours.** Professor Indira will be available to meet students by appointment either before or after regular class meetings. She can be contacted by email as given above and also at indiraramarao@rediffmail.com

**Lectures and suggested readings**

Unit 1: Course Overview and Discussions on Student Expectations-1 hour

Unit 2: Women in India: A Diverse Social Canvas-1 hour


Unit 3: Construction of Gender Identities in Indian Society: Role of Patriarchy-1 hour


Unit 4: Gender, Caste and Religion: The Interplay-2 hours

Unit 5: The Rise of Women’s Question: Historical and Cultural Settings- 1 hour


Unit 6: Women’s Movement through the 19th and 20th Centuries: Journey from Reform to Revolution?- 2 hours


Unit 7: Family, Marriage and Gender: What has Changed and What has Not? 2 hours


Unit 8: Emergence of Gender and Development Debate: Redefining Development-2 hours


Unit 9: Is India’s Development Engendered? Critical Perspectives on the Role of Increasing Opportunities for Education, Health Care and Employment-2 hours


Unit 10: Violence against Women: Old and New Forms-Response of State, Law and Civil Society Groups-3 hours


Unit 11: Gender and Affirmative Action: How does it make a difference? Experiences of Women in Grass root level Politics-1 hour


Unit 12: New Issues in Indian Women’s Movement: Sustainable Environment Management, Rights of Sexual Minorities, Cultural Policing:3 hours


**WATCH** Hindi Film “Khap” (2011) directed by Ajai Sinha

Unit 13: Women and Indian Media: Bollywood, Beauty Industry and Changing Images of Women-1 hour


Unit 14: Mobilizing Women for Change: Typology of Women’s Groups-1 hour

Unit 15: Looking Ahead: Charting an Agenda for Future Action-1 hour


Films

The following films will be screened and students have the option to review the films from a gender angle:

“No One Killed Jessica” (2011) Hindi feature film directed by Rajkumar Gupta based on a real life story that revolves around the cold blooded murder of a celebrity model Jessica Lal in a bar when she refused to serve liquor after the closing hours, to the ward of a rich and mighty politician in Delhi. The film showcases the struggles of Jessica Lal’s sister and a woman media professional to bring to book the murderer who at one point of time in the investigation was let loose by a trial court. This sparked nationwide protests and the law enforcing machinery was forced to sit up and take notice. The machinations of the gender insensitive and power hungry political system and bureaucracy, and the challenge that the two courageous women threw up to these powers and their success in re-opening a case that had almost been given up are the high points of the movie.

“Puttakkana Highway” (2011) Kannada feature film directed by B. Suresha is about a rural woman’s struggle to retain land rights of the local community. She stands up to the designs of the construction industry which is trying to take away land that has been the mainstay of rural livelihoods in the name of development. India’s village economy is severely disrupted by acquisition of village lands that have helped village communities to sustain themselves for years. Mega dams, high ways, apartment blocks and such other symbols of economic growth are posing a threat to the survival of village communities. The film is about the saga of Puttakka, a simple rural woman who throws up a challenge to the powers that be to take away the village land for construction of a high way.

“Khap” (2011) Hindi feature film directed by Ajay Sinha brings to light the moral policing being done by the Khaps, traditional village bodies that are not only opposing inter-caste marriages, but also marriages between certain categories of kins. Virtually letting loose a reign of terror, the Khaps have assumed unlawful powers that have often resulted in the
killing of couples who dared their orders. Especially active in the states of Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the Khap Panchayats are encouraging honour killings in the guise of protecting caste and family honour. The film brings to fore the dark side of traditional and the struggles of the young people in these areas to decide the course of their lives.

* * * *

**ADDITIONAL COLLEGIATE COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.**

**Administrative Home**
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Student Academic Handbook.

**Electronic Communication**
*University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences. (Operations Manual, III.15.2. Scroll down to k.11.)*

**Accommodations for Disabilities**
A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet privately with the course instructor to make particular arrangements. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/ for more information.

**Academic Fraud**
Plagiarism and any other activities when students present work that is not their own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is a serious matter and is reported to the departmental DEO and to the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum. Instructors and DEOs decide on appropriate consequences at the departmental level while the Associate Dean enforces additional consequences at the collegiate level. See the CLAS Academic Fraud section of the *Student Academic Handbook.*

**Making a Suggestion or a Complaint**
Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit the instructor, then the course supervisor, and then the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident. See the CLAS *Student Academic Handbook.*

**Understanding Sexual Harassment**
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI *Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment* for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.