

Course description

Womanhood may be perceived as a kinship and understood through shared experience. However, perception is often skewed by the limitations of our cultural and epistemic stance. Gender is a social construct; women's identities and subjectivities are shaped within the socio-cultural constraints of their own society. One of our chief concerns in understanding women in the non-Western world is the handicap of our own perspective, that is, the western feminist perspective. Our claims of kinship with non-Western women are often tenuous. For us in this course, it is important to ask how women's experiences have touched upon women's writing on the whole. Does this writing address itself to certain questions? How do the women themselves see such writing? Was it/is it marginal or central to their lives? Can we detect any regionality in them? Is there any relationship between women writing and women's movements, and/or other political activism?

This course examines women's writing in post Partition South Asia with a view to how these writers explore issues of identity, violence, and belonging in predominantly male literary traditions. In particular, it considers how poetry, fiction, and autobiographies by South Asian women offer unique insight into new meanings of gender, work, and family that accompanied the Indian Independence Movement and the Partition of India and Pakistan, as well as more recent transformations introduced by globalization. We will be motivated by two interrelated concerns: 1) how can we understand the question of women's voices and "agency" in the South Asian context? And 2) how do women writers mobilize the category of gender to define alternative understandings of "individual" and "community" in this region? In order to answer these questions, we will trace the intersections between gender, caste, region, class, religion, and sexuality in women's fiction and non-fiction writing, giving particular regard to concepts such as "tradition," "modernity," "nation," and "genre."

Course objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to demonstrate an in depth understanding of the socio-cultural, historical, and rhetorical problematics shaping women's writing in India and Pakistan historically, and in present time. Furthermore, they will develop the critical acumen to draw connections between the particular constraints on women's writing in India-Pakistan with larger theoretical debates on the broader category of women's writing across colonial/postcolonial contexts and express these connections through close reading and critical analysis.

Readings

This is a reading intensive course. Students are expected to keep up with weekly readings and be prepared to ask questions and comment on readings during class. Some of the theoretical readings are dense, take time, and will require careful, attentive reading. Although these are demanding materials, you will find that spending time with them to understand them will be enriching not just for this semester but for your education as a whole.

Required texts

1. Manju Kapoor: *Difficult Daughters*
2. Mahashweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, Tr. and introduced by Gayatri Spivak
3. Geeta Dharmarajan, *Separate Journeys*
4. *Inner Spaces: New Writings by Women from Kerala* ed. K.M George (collab)
5. Khadija Mastoor: *The Women's Courtyard*, translated by Daisy Rockwell
6. Shahla Haeri, *No Shame for the Son, Lives of Professional Pakistani Women*
7. Krishna Sobti: *Mitro Marjani* (uploaded on Collab.)

More readings pertaining to the course will be uploaded on class website or distributed at the beginning of the semester.