

**ASAM 320/GST 380**  
**Feminist & Queer Politics in Brown Media**  
Spring Semester 2019

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Class meets TR 10:30 am – 12 pm

**Course Description:**

This upper division undergraduate course examines depictions and interactions of gender, sexuality, queerness, nation, and migration in brown media, focusing primarily on creators in India and the South Asian diaspora. This course places these representations within the socio-historical contexts of these communities, primarily focusing on female experiences. Using a wide variety of theoretical frameworks, including feminist, queer, postcolonial, mythological, legal, political, and cultural lenses, students will contextualize and analyze prominent films and literature produced by Indian and South Asian diasporic artists. Course time will be split between an instructor-led lecture on the week's topic and student-led discussion on readings/viewings.

**Learning Objectives:**

By the end of this course, students will:

1. Gain more nuanced understandings of the social, historical, and political influences that have shaped modern India and the South Asian diaspora in the United States.
2. Be exposed to a wide range of feminist and queer discourses in India and the South Asian diaspora.
3. Be able to identify, analyze, and defend different theoretical approaches to media.
4. Develop a deeper understanding of how nation, culture, gender, and sexuality shape personal experiences, choices, and behavior; and how media works to reflect and mediate these narratives.

**Course Requirements & Evaluations:**

1. **Attendance and participation (25%):** As this course is designed primarily as a discussion seminar, your attendance and active participation are crucial. For class discussions to be productive and engaging, it is important for you to complete assigned readings/viewings prior to class. Active participation will be evaluated as rigorous contributions to discussion, coming to class prepared by having completed readings/viewings, and regular class attendance.
2. **Weekly reflections (20%):** On the Sunday prior to class, you will post a short reflection (100-200 words) on the online class forum by 11:59 pm. These reflections should include your personal thoughts and reactions to the week's topics. While primarily reflective, you should use examples from class discussions, lectures, and materials to support your points when possible.

3. **Presentations (5%):** The purpose of these presentations is to provide a brief overview of the diversity contained within modern conceptualizations of the Indian nation-state and diaspora. Presentations will occur in Week 2. During our first class, you will select a state or region in India, or a country with significant Indian diasporic presence to research and prepare a five- to seven- minute presentation. Presentations do not have to be exhaustive, but should provide information on cultural, social, and political markers that differentiate the state/region/country with diaspora.
4. **Mid-term exam (25%):** The mid-term exam will consist of five essay questions to be completed in class. On the Sunday before the mid-term (March 3), I will email the class a list of possible exam questions from which I will select five questions for the exam. The questions will be open-ended and evaluated on your ability to craft an argument and support that position with evidence and knowledge you have gained from the class. The exam will be open notes, which means you may consult your notes, readings, and hand-outs to answer the exam questions, but you must put materials into your own words.
5. **Final paper (25%):** For your final paper, you will write about a person close to you in your life and their narrative. Think about the ways in which the works we read and viewed in class use personal narratives to examine social, political, historical, and cultural influences, then place this person within the social, political, historical, and cultural influences that have shaped *their* lives. Apply the broader postcolonial feminist and queer theories discussed in class to their narrative. Evaluate your perceptions of them. What do you think is hidden from you? *Why* do you think these aspects are hidden from you? You are encouraged to discuss these questions with the person you are writing about, if you are able to. Your final paper should be 15-20 pages, double-spaced.

## **Class Schedule & Assignments**

### **Week 1 – Socio-Historical Context of India & Limitations of this Course**

Tuesday, January 22:

Guha, Ramachandra. “The Challenge of Contemporary History.” *Economic and Political*

*Weekly*, vol. 43, No. 26-27, pp. 192-200.

Thursday, January 24:

Balachandran, Gopalan and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. “On the History of Globalization and India:

Concepts, Measures and Debates.” *Globalizing India*. Edited by Jackie Assayag and

Chris Fuller, Anthem Press, 2005, pp. 17 – 46.

## **Week 2 – Socio-Historical Context of India cont.**

Tuesday, January 29:

Sathaye, Adheesh A. *Crossing the Lines of Caste: Viśvāmitra and the Construction of Brahmin Power in Hindu Mythology*. Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 1 – 18.

Thursday, January 31:

Student Presentations

## **Week 3 – Queer and Feminist Discourses in India**

Tuesday, February 5:

Chaudhuri, Maitrayee. “Feminism in India: The Tale and Its Telling.” *Revue Tiers Monde*, No. 209, pp. 19-36.

Thursday, February 7:

Shahani, Nishant. “What can Queer Theory Learn from Feminism in India?: Reversing Epistemological Frames.” *Indiscretions: At the Intersection of Queer and Postcolonial Theory*. Edited by Murat Aydemir, Rodopi, 2011, pp. 225-241.

## **Week 4 – *The God of Small Things***

Tuesday, February 12:

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997.

Thursday, February 14:

Neti, Leila. “‘The Love Laws’: Section 377 and the Politics of Queerness in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.” *Law & Literature*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2017, pp. 223-246.

## **Week 5 – Gender and Hindu Mythology**

Tuesday, February 19:

Chitgopekar, Nilima. “Indian Goddesses: Persevering and Antinomian Presences.” *Invoking Goddesses: Gender Politics in Indian Religion*. Edited by Nilima Chitgopekar, Har-Anand Publications, 2002, pp. 11 – 42.

Thursday, February 21:

Dhand, Arti. “The Unruly Desire of Women.” *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahābhārata*. State University of New York Press, 2008, pp. 127 – 150.

## **Week 6 –*The Dirty Picture***

Tuesday, February 26:

*The Dirty Picture*. Directed by Milan Luthria, performances by Vidya Balan, Naseeruddin Shah, Tusshar Kapoor, and Emraan Hashmi, Balaji Motion Pictures, 2011.

Thursday, February 28:

Beck, Brenda. “Goddesses Who Dwell on Earth: A Folk Paradigm of Divine Female Multiplicity.” *Inventing and Reinventing the Goddess: Contemporary Iterations of Hindu Deities on the Move*. Edited by Sree Padma, Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 13 – 34.

## **Week 7 – Mid-term Exam**

Tuesday, March 5: No class, open office hours

Thursday, March 7: Mid-term exam, open notes

## **Week 8 – Spring Break, No Classes**

## **Week 9 - Feminist Discourses on the Indian Nation-State**

Tuesday, March 19:

Narayan, Uma. "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists." *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism*. Routledge, 1997, pp. 1-39.

Thursday, March 21:

Puar, Jasbir. "The Sexuality of Terrorism." *Terrorist Assemblages*, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 37 – 38.

## **Week 10 – *Dil Se***

Tuesday, March 26:

*Dil Se...* Directed by Mani Ratnam, performances by Shah Rukh Khan, Manisha Koirala, and Preity Zinta, Madras Talkies and Varma Corporation, 1998.

Thursday, March 28:

Bora, Papori. "Between the Human, the Citizen and the Tribal." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 12, no. 3-4, pp. 341-360.

## **Week 11 – Sex, Marriage, and Family in India**

Tuesday, April 2:

Puri, Jyothi. "Negotiating the Norm: Speaking of Heterosexual Desire." *Woman, Body, and Desire in Post-Colonial India: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality*. Routledge, 1999, pp. 103-133.

Thursday, April 4:

Sen, Samita. ““Without His Consent?’: Marriage and Women’s Migration in Colonial India.”

*International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 65, pp. 77-104.

### **Week 12 – *Parched***

Tuesday, April 9:

*Parched*. Directed by Leena Yadav, performances by Tannishtha Chatterjee, Radhika Apte, Surveen Chawla, Adil Hussain, Lehar Khan, and Sayani Gupta, Ajay Devgn FFilms, 2016.

Thursday, April 11:

Gangali, Geetanjali. “The Campaign Against Domestic Violence.” *Indian Feminisms: Law, Patriarchies and Violence in India*. Routledge, 2007, pp. 99-118.

### **Week 13 – South Asian Diaspora in America**

Tuesday, April 16:

Shukla, Sandhya. “South Asian Migration the United States: Diasporic and National Formations.” *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*. Edited by Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook, Routledge, 2013, pp. 166-180.

Thursday, April 18:

Bhattacharjee, Annaya. “The Habit of Ex-Nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Immigrant Bourgeoisie.” *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*. Edited by Shamita Das Dasgupta, Rutgers University Press, 1998, pp. 163- 185.

### **Week 14 – *The Lowland***

Tuesday, April 23:

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Lowland*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

Thursday, April 25:

Biswas, Bidisha. “Negotiating the Nation: Diaspora Contestations in the USA about Hindu Nationalism in India.” *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2010, pp. 696-714.

### **Week 15 – South Asians in America – Feminist Discourses**

Tuesday, April 30:

DasGupta, Sayantani and Shamita Das Dasgupta. “Sex, Lies, and Women’s Lives: An Intergenerational Dialogue”. *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*. Edited by Shamita Das Dasgupta, Rutgers University Press, 1998, pp. 111 – 128.

Thursday, May 2:

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Genealogies of Community, Home, and Nation.” *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 124 – 136.

### **Week 16 – *Brown Girls***

Tuesday, May 7:

Asghar, Fatimah, creator. *Brown Girls*. Open TV, 2017.

Thursday, May 9:

Hussain, Yasmin. "The New Woman in South Asian and Diasporic Literature." *Writing  
Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Ashgate, 2005, pp. 53 – 70.

**Week 16 – Final Paper Due by May 14th**