Women’s Studies: Concepts and Contexts

General Introduction to the Courses

This is an interdisciplinary programme focused on understanding the impact of gender and sexuality on the world around us and on power hierarchies that structure it. Young people are often bewildered by the complex and shifting webs of gender relations within which they find themselves. It is important therefore to build an awareness about these issues into the academic curriculum. This will enable students to critically engage with their lived reality. It will also empower them with the necessary tools for building a more gender just and egalitarian society. Keeping this in view, courses I and II have been structured. Although these are stand alone courses (i.e., students can take any one course irrespective of the other), we advise students to take both the courses in sequence in order to gain a comprehensive perspective on gender and patriarchy.

SEMESTER-II
ED 2.20 [Group B]
Women’s Studies: Concepts and Contexts, Course I

The course explores the social meanings and representations of gender. Within the family and within many human relationships, gender shapes the way we feel, think and behave. At Universities and workplaces, we are constantly expected to make choices and perform in conformity with our gender roles. The media (advertisements, films, literature, magazines, newspapers, television programmes, video games, websites etc) constantly bombard us with gendered images of women and men. Such representations and experiences are often naturalized to the point of being commonsensical. In reality however, these are carefully constructed through social, political, economic and legal institutions and particularly through various systems of knowledge. Moreover these are steeped in power hierarchies emerging from the intersections of gender, caste, class, religion, region to name a few. This course attempts on the one hand to understand and unpack the structures that shape representations and performance of gender in various aspects of our lives. On the other, it also tries to explore the various ways in which women’s studies as a discipline generates an awareness of gendered processes and suggests ways of change.

1. Images of Men and Women in Contemporary Cultures.
   Understanding the relations between gender, visuality and the senses.
   Subject formation via images
   Interconnection between popular culture and mass-media

2. Masculinity and Femininity
   Biological determinism to sex-gender distinction to sexual difference.
Normative construction of behavior.

3. Love, romance and gender
   The Idea(l) of love and romance
   Heteronormativity
   Consumer culture and construction of desire

4. Exploring the family
   Gender socialization theories
   Work – paid and unpaid
   Public-private divide; Personal laws
   Personal as political; Domestic violence

5. Learning gender
   Linking power and knowledge
   History of Women’s Studies
   Significance and link of research and pedagogy

Reading List

- Datta, Kusum. 2007. *Women’s Studies and Women’s Movement in India since the 1970s: an overview*. Kolkata. The Asiatic Society
- Uberoi, Patricia. 2006. *Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family and Popular Culture in India*. New Delhi. OUP.
SEMESTER-III
ED 3.19

Women’s Studies: Concepts and Contexts, Course II

The course explores the different fields of study and activism that enables us to understand patriarchy as well as challenge it. Starting from body politics, to discourses on empowerment to legal interventions, several attempts have been made to unpack and dislodge gendered structures of power. Our physical and mental health, our educational and economic attainments and our overall social wellbeing are outcomes of where we find ourselves in the complex grid of various kinds of power relations. These are created by interaction of various systems of oppression like caste, class and ethnicity with gender. Further neoliberalism and globalization has unleashed forces which are reshaping our gendered lives significantly. The course makes a journey through diverse grids of power to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of patriarchy. It also takes a historical and topical look at movements and how they have challenged entrenched hierarchies. The attempt of this course is to situate gender in overall development experience of the country as well as the everyday experiences of the students. To that end, we also aim to provide an overview of empowerment and law that will enable them to claim their own entitlements.

1. Understanding Patriarchy
   Family, community, nation as sites/axes of patriarchy
   Ideological systems integral to creating gender oppression

2. Gender and body (health, sexuality, disability etc)
   Gendering the body
   Politics of health
   Reproductive technologies, motherhood and surrogacy
   Sexuality as construction

3. Pathways to empowerment
   Work, education as common pathways
   Understandings of power and empowerment

4. Law and you: On and off campus
   Property, Dowry, domestic violence
   SH at workplace
   Section 375, 376, 377 of IPC
   Indecent Representation of Women

5. Movements, Strategies and Challenges
   Thoughts and movements affecting women’s emancipation
Some milestones of the women’s movement in India
Resistance and collectivity
Linking research pedagogy and politics

Reading List

- *Ainer chokhe meyera meyeder chokhe ain*. West Bengal Women’s Commission