

Caste, Politics, and Gender in South India: Negotiating India's Diversity via Experiential Education

SOC 2181/WMST 3170

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Course Description

South India is a complex region. We have a rich cultural heritage that we are proud of and yet we have deeply embedded social systems that we are still trying to come to terms with. At first glance, the lived realities of caste and gender in South India are difficult to measure. This is further complicated by contemporary activism and resistance to predominant hierarchies that persist in the region.

This course will serve as an introduction to issues surrounding caste, religion, and gender in South India. While a strictly classroom-based atmosphere will allow for an academic understanding of these social institutions, the goal for this course is to allow you to gain experiential knowledge as well as theoretical knowledge of India's social institutions.

As such, this course will integrate:

- a) lectures on the historical background of India's social institutions,
- b) 'hands-on' experiences with local NGOs, and
- c) and seminar discussions which will link theoretical knowledge of power, marginality, and economic development with your project work at NGOs.

This experience will be multi-beneficial. It will give you an opportunity to grasp the nuances of Indian society and gain practical experience working with organizations that seek to right societal inequalities. At the same time, you will be contributing directly to these organizations.

The introductory lectures and the seminar sessions will provide the necessary academic framework and the guidance that is needed to foster a productive, holistic experience.

Methodology

This course will begin with three orientation lectures that will explore the intricacies of India's social hierarchies. These lectures, which will supplement themes and discussions of your Ethnographic Method and Theory Class, will provide you with a framework of knowledge before entering the experiential education phase of our course.

During weeks 3-8 of your SITA coursework period, you will be required to work a minimum of 30 hours at one of the pre-approved organizations. While it is possible to complete all 30 hours in one week, we have set up a schedule to ensure that you are spreading out your participation throughout the semester. (See below.)

Your work will be varied. Some days you may be charged with creative work, like photo-documenting an event, profiling members of the communities that your organization serves, and blogging/writing short newspaper articles. Sometimes the work will help you build specific skills, such as filing Right to Information petitions for individuals or organizations. Other times, the work may be tedious and include copyediting and grant proposal writing. The goal is to allow you to experience what it is like to work in a living, breathing organization.

During these weeks, we will have extended seminar sessions once a week. For each seminar, we will discuss a series of readings on broader themes of development, colonialism, power, marginality, etc. while reflecting on the ways in which these topics inhere within the work of your organizations. We will also dedicate some time in each seminar for mentor sessions, where we will discuss the challenges you face, the goals you are developing, and ideas for future engagement.

The class will culminate in the final week of your SITA coursework. You will be required to generate a larger paper and a presentation about your experience to me and a select list of guests.

Course Requirements

Participation in lectures and seminars	-	30%
Project participation at NGO	-	30%
Journal	-	10%
Formal Written Assignments	-	10%
Final Paper & Presentation	-	20%
TOTAL	-	100%

Approved Organizations

People's Watch: People's Watch is a human rights organization focusing on making the State accountable to its citizens on human rights issues. It also works, more broadly, to promote a human rights culture. The organization does human rights monitoring, legal interventions both nationally and internationally, rehabilitation of victims of human rights violations and extensive training and advocacy efforts. As an intern at People's watch, you may be engaged in writing or drafting complaints to various human rights institutions, prepare communication materials on the work of the organization, develop a blog for the organization and so on.

The Sudar Foundation: Part of the Women’s Education Project, The Sudar Foundation in Madurai seeks to “educate women of limited means to become knowledgeable, confident, self-reliant, and responsible leaders. They accomplish this through a scholarship program and maintaining a center where young women come for various classes and workshops. Students working at Sudar would likely become engaged in English conversation workshops and would likely be tasked with leading a study skills workshop later in the semester. Major projects would include creating written, photographic, or video profiles of successful Sudar students and alumni for the programs website, annual report, and fundraising materials.

RUSS Foundation:

RUSS FOUNDATION is a non-profit organization working from Madurai in several southern districts of Tamilnadu since its inception in the year 1992. Russ Foundation concentrates its developmental efforts at the grass-root level in sectors like Health, HIV/AIDS, Education, Socio-economic development, Life-skill Vocational Training and Ecology. The primary object of Russ Foundation is to improve the quality of life of the children, women and the community at large. As an intern at RUSS, you may be engaged in documenting case studies, interacting with children and preparation of communication materials.

Evidence:

This is a human rights organisation working towards the effective implementation of laws and policies to protect and promote Dalit and Tribal rights, especially the rights of women and children, to see the eradication of discrimination and atrocities committed against them. In collaboration with like-minded human rights organizations, social movements, professionals and others, we demand accountability from both the state and civil society to ensure equality and dignity to these socially marginalized communities. As an intern at Evidence, you may be engaged in documenting case studies, interacting with victims, translation of documents into records and preparation of communication materials.

Hours Rubric

To ensure that you engage with your host organization over the entire coursework period semester (as opposed to finishing your 30 hour commitment in a shorter timeframe), we will follow an hours rubric. The semester has been divided into three sessions and makeup session. You will be awarded a maximum of 10 hours per session. With that said, we encourage you to continue to engage with your respective host organizations for as much time as needed during each session. Please feel free to spend more than 10 hours per session, as needed.

Session Number	Dates	Maximum Hours Awarded
Session 1 – Weeks 4-5	Aug. 29th – Sept. 9th	10 hours

Session 2 – Week 6	Sept. 13 – Sept. 18th	10 hours
Session 3 – Weeks 7-8	Sept. 19th – Oct. 2nd	10 hours
Makeup Session – Weeks 9+	Oct. 3 rd –	Additional makeup hours (up to 10 hours)

You will be responsible for having your direct supervisor at your host organization fill out a timesheet, outlining the hours you spent and the types of work you did. These time sheets will be due to me at the end of each session.

Readings

1. "The Doctor and the Saint" by Arundhati Roy in the book titled 'Annihilation of caste' edited and annotated by S. Anand, 2014.
2. Broken people – Caste violence against India’s untouchables by Human Rights Watch (Chapters III and V)
3. Women and Society edited by Nirmala Jeyaraj (Chapters 1, 3,4,7,8,9,14,27 and 37)
4. "Caste in Indian politics" by Rajni Kothari, 2001.
5. "All in a day's work: Sexual Harassment at the workplace" by Zia Mody in the book titled '10 Judgements that changed India', 2013.
6. International Dalit Solidarity Network Annual report 2015 – www.idsn.org - <http://idsn.org/portfolio-items/annual-report-2015/>
7. Ambedkar Principles – International Dalit Solidarity Network – <http://idsn.org/key-issues/caste-business/ambedkar-principles/>
8. Articles from the book titled India - Social Development Report 2012 - Minorities at the margins by the Council of Social Development published by Oxford University Press.
 - a. “India's health : Not Shining” by Mohan Rao and Oommen C. Kurian
 - b. “Gendering Social Analysis, Contextualising Gender: Women in Neoliberal India” by Indu Agnihotri
9. Articles from the book titled India - Social Development Report 2012 - Minorities at the margins by the Council of Social Development published by Oxford University Press.
 - a. “Recent trends in poverty and inequality” by Himanshu in the book titled India - Social Development Report 2012 - Minorities at the margins by the Council of Social Development published by Oxford University Press.
 - b. “Free and compulsory elementary education: Still a long distance for Indian children” by Muchkund Dubey in the book titled India - Social Development Report 2012 - Minorities at the margins by the Council of Social Development published by Oxford University Press.

Assignments

In addition to the readings, seminar participation, and project work at NGOs, the following assignments are designed to foster your engagement with the major themes in the class. These assignments can be done in conjunction with the work you are completing for your Ethnographic Methods and Theory course.

1. Assignment 1: You are required to observe social dynamics at any one public place in Madurai and try to understand the social realities that are reflected from these dynamics. Bring your observations and questions to the seminar session. **Date due: September 2nd 2016**
2. Assignment 2: Each of you will be asked to interview 3 persons in Madurai (host family members, friends, NGO partners, SITA team members, acquaintances, Lady Doak students or even random Madurai citizens) on their perspective on religion, caste and gender in the current context. These interviews should be presented in the seminar session with an oral, print or visual mode of presentation. **Date due: September 29th 2016**
3. Assignment 3: You are required to participate in any one social gathering (a wedding, birthday party, temple festival, special occasion etc) and share in class on the social dynamics observed there and relate it to class discussions. **Date due: October 4th 2016**

Journal

You will be required to submit a reflective journal entry on days that you do not have another written assignment due. I do not want to limit your creativity in this endeavor. As such, a journal entry could include poetry, prose, reflection of challenges and experiences, case studies, and questions that arise. Please keep these entries at around 1 – 1.5 pages double spaced. Occasionally, I will give optional prompts for these entries. Please email all journal entries the morning before our seminar sessions. I will expect them by 10:00am.

Seminar Participation

After your work at host organizations start, we will meet once a week for extended seminar sessions. In these sessions you can think of me as both a professor and professional mentor. I want to hear about your experiences and struggles. We will also discuss some of what you write in your journal entries. This is a chance to learn, vent, clarify, and share. This will also be the time when you can discuss with me and present your assignments and your thought based on the required academic readings.

Please note that active participation is required for a productive seminar. Successful participation will include more than just reflective commentary, but a deeper engagement with how you and your classmates' experiences exemplify and/or challenge our readings and broader social theories.

Final Paper

The final paper will be a more comprehensive account of your experiences. While the body of the paper can take a more narrative tone, successful papers will integrate major themes and theories from academic literature from this class and beyond. The paper can include topics that you have already addressed in your journal. However, with a bit more separation from

the experience, I hope you can discuss these issues from a larger perspective of your living experiences in Madurai. Please consider using the following sections in your paper:

- A) A brief introduction which includes a description of your organization and the work you did,
- B) a reflection of your positionality within the socioeconomic context Madurai and your specific organization,
- C) the challenges you faced and what you learned from those experiences,
- D) major accomplishments and success stories that you wish to share,
- E) any skill set that you gained or improved upon,
- F) the ways that these experiences either exemplify or challenge the social theories discussed in class, and
- F) a final assessment of the internship experience.

Course Schedule

Class 1

- DATE: 22nd August 2016 (4 pm): Introductory Lecture on Caste in India
- Pre-Class Reading: Broken people – Caste violence against India's untouchables by Human Rights Watch (Chapters III and V)

Class 2

- DATE: 25th August 2016 (4 pm): Introductory Lecture on Politics in India
- Pre-Class Reading: "Caste in Indian politics" by Rajni Kothari, 2001.

Class 3

- DATE: 26th August 2016 (4 pm): Introductory Lecture on Gender in India
- Pre-Class Reading: Women and Society edited by Nirmala Jeyaraj (Chapters 1, 3,4,7,8,9,14,27 and 37)

Session 1 of NGO Project Work begins on August 29th.

Class 4

- DATE: September 2nd 2016 (4 pm): Seminar Session 1
- Pre Class Reading: "The Doctor and the Saint" by Arundhati Roy in the book titled 'Annihilation of caste' edited and annotated by S. Anand, 2014
- Submission of Assignment 1: To be discussed during the Seminar session

Class 5

- DATE: September 6th 2016 (4 pm): Seminar Session 2
- Pre Class Reading: "All in a day's work: Sexual Harassment at the workplace" by Zia Mody in the book titled '10 Judgements that changed India', 2013
- Reflective Journal - Due before 10am by email

Session 2 of NGO Project Work Begins on September 13th.

Class 6

- DATE: September 15th 2016 (4 pm): Seminar Session 3
- Pre Class Reading: International Dalit Solidarity Network Annual report 2015 – [www.idsn.org](http://idsn.org) - <http://idsn.org/portfolio-items/annual-report-2015/>
- Reflective Journal - Due before 10am by email

Class 7

- DATE: September 19th 2016 (8.30am): Seminar Session 4
- Pre Class Reading: Ambedkar Principles – International Dalit Solidarity Network – <http://idsn.org/key-issues/caste-business/ambekar-principles/>
- Reflective Journal - Due before 10am by email

Session 3 of NGO Project Work begins on September 19th.

Class 8

- DATE: September 29th 2016 (4 pm): Seminar Session 5
- Pre Class Reading:
- Submission of Assignment 2: To be discussed during the Seminar session

Class 9

- DATE: October 4th 2016 (4 pm): Seminar Session 6
- Pre Class Reading:
- Submission of Assignment 3: To be discussed during the Seminar session

Final Papers Due on October 6th 2016

Course Facilitator

Ms. Anita Tiphagne is Assistant Professor of the Department of Social Sciences, Lady Doak College, Madurai. She holds a Masters degree in Social Work and in Sociology. She is currently engaged in her doctoral research on Denotified Criminal Tribes in South Tamil Nadu. She is also engaged in volunteering in human rights work in the state. She coordinates International Exchange Programmes at Lady Doak College.