

Workshop on “Gender and Culture”

March 17 - 19, 2010

Centre for the Study of Culture and Society (CSCS), Bangalore

The workshop seeks to explore the range of analytic possibilities that a conjuncture such as “gender and culture” makes available. A series of questions follow from the very act of positing such a conjuncture: Is “gender and culture” a thematic or a problematic? How does it align with or differentiate itself from the “gender and ...” (any other object or domain such as politics/law/science etc.) series? What does the split between the two mutually constitutive terms indicate? Does the conjuncture “gender and culture” enable the production of new objects of inquiry? Or does it make available new modes of inquiry? What methodological issues emerge from the introduction of such a conjuncture into research agendas? How does it impact existing knowledge frames? These are among some of the questions that the workshop will address even as it will clarify the diverse uses of the key terms.

Both terms of the conjuncture, i.e. “gender” and “culture,” have over the years and through continually shifting registers of intelligibility acquired popular recognition. While the genealogy of these two terms within the Indian context still needs to be mapped, the existing body of scholarly work has already demonstrated that their trajectories are closely linked. They are intimately connected through the fact that the elaboration of the conceptual content of any one of the terms has often necessitated invocation of the other. Not surprisingly therefore the terms also cross-referentially underpin two interdisciplinary formations within the Indian context: Women’s Studies and Cultural Studies. While the culture question has increasingly come to be a critical part of feminist theorizing, the gender question has not been acknowledged within Cultural Studies to the same extent; this in spite of the fact that pathbreaking feminist interventions were foundational in constituting the field of Cultural Studies within India. The dynamics vis-à-vis the concepts within these two fields of knowledge need to be further queried in order to understand the overlap and difference between how they have engaged with the notions gender and culture.

The cultural turn for gender theory in India was occasioned by the women’s movement marking a shift away from its earlier emphasis on and address to the State. The ground breaking anthology *Recasting Women* (1989) consolidated the efforts to provide an understanding of gender in the Indian context by focusing on social and cultural processes within the colonial period. The articles included in *Recasting Women*, together with subsequent critical work on the colonial and nationalist moments, provide important

elaboration of how vital the task of conceptualizing notions of gender and culture was for the process of building a hegemonic understanding of the Indian nation.

While the significance of this momentous work is undeniable, the dynamics of the gender and culture conjuncture in the contemporary moment of post-nationalism and globalization still awaits examination. We could also ask the question, “Has the “woman-culture” combination that produced our national imagination earlier lost its relevance or has there been a reinvention of its use?” Addressing such a question will require us to pay closer attention to the several and heterogeneous articulations made at diverse sites that have a bearing on our present understanding of the gender-culture dyad. It is possible also that an investigation of the contemporary moment might require us to go beyond the usual and easy conflation made between, for instance, the use of “gender” on the one hand and women on the other.

Another emerging scenario is also of interest in the context of our consideration of “gender and culture.” Certain objects and domains (literary works or films and issues of sexuality for instance) through their closer alignment with conceptions of culture have thus far been the more obvious choice for asking questions about gender and culture. Increasingly, however, the conjuncture has been critical in redefining discussions in areas where culture was earlier invoked only in a cursory manner. The paradigm of “women, culture and development” (WCD) that has been proposed recently is one such example. This paradigm follows upon the earlier ones within development thought, i.e. “women in development” (WID), “women and development” (WAD) and “gender and development” (GAD). The development sector is but one among many others that are now posing the gender-culture question. The task of elaborating this question in domains that have thus far eschewed such formulations will require us to examine the conjuncture much more carefully before we begin to forge new tools for analyses relevant to the present moment.

The workshop on “Gender and Culture” will take place between **March 17 & 19, 2010** at the Centre for Study of Culture and Society (CSCS), Bangalore and will be anchored by Dr. Rekha Pappu from the Gender Initiative, Higher Education Cell, Bangalore. A set of readings will be made available to the participants prior to the workshop. Each day of the workshop will focus on at least 2-3 key readings and will engage with the concepts, arguments and issues that emerge from the readings and are addressed to the objectives outlined above.

Interested M.Phil, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral researchers are welcome to participate in the workshop. Please write in/or send an e-mail by March 10, 2010 to the Convenor, Academic Committee at CSCS, Dr. Anup Dhar (anup@cscs.res.in) with copies marked to Rekha Pappu (rekhapappu@yahoo.com) and Rakhi Ghoshal (rghoshal@cscs.res.in). Participants travelling from outside Bangalore will have to bear their own travel and accommodation expenses. The host institution will help them find accommodation.