
Anthropology 220The Politics of Food and Sex (in South Asia)

Department of Anthropology

Class Time: **Mo/Thurs 12:35-1:55**

Instructor: Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi (parvis@anthropology.rutgers.edu)

Office Hours: Friday 11:00 - 12:00 (zoom)

Phone: 848-932 - 4104

Location of Course: *synchronous remote* (zoom)

Credit: 3

Semester: Spring 2021

What to eat? Who to marry? This seminar examines food and sexuality in its relation to society in a comparative perspective. One strong regional focus will be South Asia, in particular India, while other regions of the world will be included. Students must be able to oscillate between different cultural and national contexts, confronting familiar phenomena inflected by unfamiliar frames of reference. The human body is frequently employed as a symbol of society. This seminar follows the contours of this symbol by investigating the ways in which food and sex form part of the formation of community boundaries. It focuses on how both are internal to forms of rejection, circulation of stigma and in occurrences of ethnic conflict. The investigation includes an analysis of the a role played by the moral and humoral classification of food substances at work in ritual mechanisms and symbolic procedures such as pollution, purification, ritual inversion, and transgression, which frequently become inscribed onto individual and collective bodies. The seminar will place a strong emphasis on the analysis of foundational experiences, phenomena such as ingestion, incorporation, disgust, revulsion; as well as the facts of procurement, production and consumption of food substances such as animal slaughter and its logical inversion, the renunciation of meat, namely vegetarianism. The class will traverse several fields of knowledge while retaining a strong focus in socio-cultural anthropology and in empirical ethnographic accounts. The reading materials consist of a wide array of texts of different genres, including ethnographic monographs (descriptive exposition), religious treatises, semiological analysis, psychoanalysis, analysis of ritual and exchange, cultural materialism, as well as philology, sociology, and history. Besides scholarly texts the reading materials include contemporary religious manuals, autobiography, journalistic accounts, documentary and feature movies, as well as travel literature.

Course objectives:

To provide students with concrete knowledge of diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and life-ways in a range of cultural contexts with special focus on South Asia but not exclusive, paying attention to the relationship of this knowledge to how groups are represented in scholarly and popular writing, as well as in commercial feature film.

To help students gain proficiency in the use of critical thinking skills in their assessment of articles, ethnographic writing, autobiography, history, philology, psychoanalysis and documentary film.

To provide students with an understanding of various aspects of Indian society, social structure, ritual, religion, identity, gender, social organization and politics.

To provide students with the training of reading and presentation skills, the use of a foreign language glossary, and a comparative approaches to cultural and social difference.

CCD-1. Analyze the degree to which forms of human differences and stratifications among social groups shape individual and group experiences of, and perspectives on, contemporary issues. Such differences and stratifications may include race, language, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, abilities, or other social distinctions and their intersections.

Readings: All readings will be on electronic reserve (sakai.rutgers.edu).

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria

Take Home Mid Term Exam (30%), 4-5 pages. Take Home Final Exam (30%), 4-5 pages. Students have to complete all the readings and participate actively in class discussion (30%). There will be two class quizzes on the content of reading materials and class discussion (10%). Attendance in each class is required. No more than two absences will be accepted! Generally, while not a requirement, students should be willing to spontaneously introduce reading material of the week in question.

Students found cheating on exams or quizzes, handing in exams or quizzes containing plagiarized passages, or otherwise violating academic integrity policies will not be tolerated. Please familiarize yourself, therefore, with the Rutgers academic integrity policy, posted online at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Do not miss class without a University absence report!

General Class Policies:

There will be no extra credit. Please note that the texts to be discussed in class have to be brought to the appropriate session for use. There is no excuse for not having the readings with you. Technological devices that do not serve class proceedings, on the other hand, do not belong in class. **Laptops and tablets if used for tasks relating to class proceedings are permitted.** Checking email, face book, and various other activities are not. Please try to be on time when class begins and in case any class material is indeed missed, do communicate with student colleagues about the content. When it comes to visiting me in office hours, *please* do come prepared with concrete questions about the class material.

1. Theme: Introduction (Thursday, January 21st — first class)

- Roland Barthes.** 1975 [1961]. Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption, *In European Diet from Pre-Industrial to Modern Times*, pp. 47-59
[12 pages]
- Jack Goody.** 1982. The high and the low: culinary culture in Asia and Europe. *In The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*. Berg Press, pp. 57-71
[14 pages]

2. Theme: Defilement and Reminders (Monday, January 25th/Thurs. 28th)

- K.T. Achaya.** 1994. Food Tales Of the Early Travellers. *In Indian Food: A Historical Companion*. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 142-153. [11 pages]
- Al Biruni.** 1983 [Arabic orig. from 11th century]. On What Is Allowed And Forbidden In Eating And Drinking. *In India*, Chapter LXVIII, pp. 237-238 (edited by Qeyamuddin Ahmad). National Book Trust of India. [1 pages]

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- Abbé J.A. Dubois.** 1897 [1999]. External Defilements, Chap. III, pp. 178-186, Internal Defilements, Chap. IV, pp. 186-194, and Defilements of the Soul, Chapter V, pp. 194-204 and The Kinds of Food expressly forbidden to Brahmins, Chap. IX, pp. 282-288. *In Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, Part II. New York: Dover Publications [32 pages]

3. Theme: Purity and Pollution (Monday, February 1st/Thursday, February 4th)

- Mary Douglas.** 2004 [1966]. Secular Defilement, Chap. 2, pp. 36-50, and Powers and Danger, Chap. 6, pp. 117-140, External Boundaries, Chap. 7, pp. 141-159 (esp. 152-9), *In Purity and Danger*. An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo. London and New York: Routledge. [55 pages]
- K. T. Achaya.** 1994. Indian Food Ethos. *In Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, Chapter 6, pp. 61-76. Delhi: Oxford University Press [15 pages]

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- Burkhard Bilger.** Nature's Spoils: The underground food movement ferments revolution. *In The New Yorker Magazine*, November 22, 2010, pp. 2-13 [11 pages]

4. Theme: Orifice, Anality and Excrement (Mo. February 8th/Thurs. February 11th)

- William Ian Miller.** Orifices and Bodily Wastes, Chapter 5, 1997, pp. 89-108, *In The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press [19 pages]

Sjaak Van der Geest. Akan Shit: Getting Rid of Dirt in Ghana. In *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 14, No.3, June 1998, pp. 8-12 [4 pages]

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Sándor Ferenczi. The Ontogenesis of the interest in money, *In First Contributions to Psycho-analysis*, 1952, pp. 319-331. London. Hogarth [12 pages]

5. Theme: Labor and Commodification (Mo. February 15th/Thurs. February 18th)

Marl Liechty. 2005. Carnal Economies: The Commodification of Food and Sex in Kathmandu. In *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, pp. 1-38 [38 pages]

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Lotte Hoek. 2010. "More Sexpression Please!" Screening the Female Voice and Body in Bangla Desh Film Industry. *In Meyer (ed.). 2010. Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.71-92 [21 pages]

Naila Kabeer. 2014. The Rise of the Female Breadwinner: Reconfigurations of marriage, motherhood, and masculinity in the global economy. In *New frontiers in feminist political economy*. pp. 62-84. [22 pages]

6. Theme: Hierarchy and Exchange (Mo. February 22nd/Thurs. February 25th)

Lawrence Babb. Foods of the Gods: Puja, *In The Divine Hierarchy*, Chap. 2, 1975, pp. 31-67 (and if desired: Chap 7, pp. 215-246) [67 pages]

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Nur Yalman. On the Meaning of Food Offerings in Ceylon, *In Social Compass XX*, 1973/2, pp. 287-302 [15 pages]

Chitrita Banerji. The Propitiatory Meal. *In Land of Milk and Honey: Travels in the History of Indian Food*, 2007, London: Seagull Books, pp. 69-96 [27 pages]

Mid Term Take Home Exam

7. Theme: Symbolism and Ritual Inversion (Mo. March 1st/Thurs. March 4th)

Jonathan Parry. Death and Digestion: The Symbolism of Food and Eating in North Indian Mortuary Rites, *In Man*, New Series, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1985, pp. 612-629 [17 pages]

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Paul M. Toomey. "Mountain of Food, Mountain of Love: Ritual Inversion in the Annakuta Feast at Mount Govardhan." *In The Eternal Food. Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, R.S. Khare (ed.), 1992, pp. 117-38 [21 page]

8. Theme: Society and Internal Boundaries: Caste (Mo. March 8th/Thurs. March 11th)

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. 1988. The dismemberment of the cosmic Person, *Rig*

Veda, *In Textual Sources For the Study of Hinduism*, Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty with Daniel Gold, David Haberman, David Shulman (ed.), pp. 27-28 [1 page]

Louis Dumont. 2004. Hierarchy: The Theory of the 'Varna,' (1966) *In Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), pp. 44-55 [11 pages]

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Josiane Racine and **Jean-Luc Racine.** 1997[1995]. High and Low Castes in Karani, Chapter 16, and The Paraiyar, Chapter 17. *In Viramma: Life of an Untouchable*. London: Verso, pp. 156-171 [15 pages]

—*Spring Recess and Reading Time, March 13th - March 21st*—

9. Theme: Animals, Morality and Identification (Mo. March 22nd/Thurs. March 25th)

Radhika Govindrajan. 2018. The Goat Who Died For Family: Sacrificial Ethics and Kinship, *In Animal Intimacies: Interspecies, Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*, Chapter 2, pp. 31-61 Chicago: UCP [30 pages]

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M.K. Gandhi. An Autobiography. The Story of My Experiments with Truth, 1927, Part I, VI and VII, esp. pp. 16-21 [28 pages]

David F. Pocock. Morality and non-violence, *In Mind, Body and Wealth. A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village*, 1973, Appendix I, pp. 164-171 [7 pages]

Gopinath Aggarwal. 1991. The 'Auto-biography' of a Goat, *In Vegetarian or Non Vegetarian. Choose Yourself*. Chap. 14, pp. 33-35 [2 pages]

10. Theme: Comparative Excursus: Papua New Guinea (Mo. March 29th/Thurs. April 1st)

Ira Bashkow. The Foods of Whitemen. *In The Meaning of Whitemen: Race & Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, pp. 145-208 [63 pages]

11. Theme: Celibacy, Consumption, and Renunciation (Mo. April 5th /Thurs. 8th)

Joseph S Alter. 2002. Nervous Masculinity: Consumption and the Production of Embodied Gender in Indian Wrestling. *In Everyday Life in South Asia*, D.P. Mines and S. Lamb, (eds.), pp. 132-145 [13 pages]

Suketu Mehta. 2004. Good-bye World. *In Maximum City. Bombay Lost and Found*. New York: Vintage, Part III, pp. 497-534 [37 pages]

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Vinay Lal. 2000. Nakedness, Nonviolence, and Brahmacharya: Gandhi's Experiments in Celibate Sexuality. *In Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 9, No. 1/2, pp. 105-136 [31 pages]

Source Material:

Malookchand R. Shah. "Then Brahmacharya is not difficult," 1999. Chap 4, pp. 69-102, Chap. 5, pp. 103-110, Chap. 6, pp. 111-116.

Swami Sivananda. "Practice of Brahmacharya," 2001. Chap. I, pp.31-40, III, pp. 57-65, VI, 72-108, and VII, pp. 109-127.

12. Theme: The Obscure Object of Sexuality (Mo. April 12th/Thurs. April 15th)

Georges Bataille. 1986[1962]. *Eroticism in Inner Experience.* In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality.* San Francisco: City Lights Books, pp. 29-39 [10 pages]

M. Masud R. Khan. 1979. Cannibalistic tenderness in Nongenital Sensuality. In *Alienation in Perversions*, Chapter 7, pp. 177-184. International Universities Press, New York [7 pages]

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Ruth Stein. 2008. The Otherness of Sexuality: Excess. In *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, Vol. 56, Issue 1, pp. 43-71 [28 pages]

13. Theme: Comp. Exc.: Body, Gender and Cosmology (Mo. April 19th/Thurs. April 22nd)

Maurice Godelier. 1986[1982]. The making of great men: Male domination and power among the New Guinea Baruya, Preface, pp. ix-xv and Chapter 3, pp. 31-76 [50 pages]

Gilbert Herdt. 2004. Sambia Women's Positionality and Men's Ritual. In *Women as Unseen Characters: Male ritual in Papua New Guinea*, pp. 16-33 [17 pages]

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Michael J. Diamond. 2006. Masculinity Unraveled: The Roots of Male Gender Identity and the Shifting of Male Ego Ideals Throughout Life. In *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 54:1099-1130 [15 pages]

14. Theme: Ingestion and Conflict (Mo. April 26th/Thurs. April 29th)

Zahir Janmohamed. 2013. Butter Chicken in Ahmedabad. In *The New York Times*, India Ink, August 20 [4 pages]

Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashata. Messing with Food habits (the politics of meat eating). In *Frontline Magazine*, cover story, December 10, 2014 [3 pages]

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Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi. 2009. The Hyperbolic Vegetarian: Notes on a fragile subject in Gujarat, In *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth.* Abdellah Hammoudi and John Borneman (eds.), pp. 77-112 [35 pages]

15. Theme: Conclusion and Exam (Monday May 3rd)

Take-Home Exam!

Final Exam Due Date: May 11, 2021