



### Themes for Thursday June 16, 2011:

Traditional position of women and changing gender roles and relations

Prior to the *Laws of Manu*: women accorded relative equality in Vedic rituals; no *sati*, widow remarriage allowed.

*Laws of Manu*: canon law of Hinduism:

“Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshiped as a god by a faithful wife.”

“If a wife obeys her husband, she will, for that reason alone, be exalted in heaven.”

Pre-1947 Women’s Movements:

- 1) Social reform movements: campaigns for widow remarriage; against child marriage
- 2) Joining in nationalist movement: in struggles against imperialism, took up cause of oppressed groups, including women;
- 3) Rise of separate women’s organizations:  
All-India Women’s conference: membership in tens of thousands at its height. As a lobbying group, took up important issues such as legal reform.
- 4) Attempts by communists and socialists to organize women: building unions; took up needs of women in villages - took up issue of women workers, not problems of women as women.

Since Independence:

Legal status improved at Independence. Could vote, and hold office.

**1949:** Hindu Marriage Validating Act: removed (official) intercaste barriers to marriage

**1955:** Hindu women given right to divorce under above Act; minimum marriage age raised to 18 for boys, 15 for girls

**1956:** Hindu Succession Act: female children given equal rights of inheritance; women granted full equality under the law

**1956 elections:** 27 women elected to Lok Sabha; 105 to state assemblies

**1959:** Government of India endorsed family planning

**1974-75:** beginning of new phase of women’s movement, with Government of India endorsing research for and later publication of groundbreaking report, *Towards Equality*

**June 3, 1997:** Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral on Tuesday included four women in his cabinet as part of a campaign to grant wider representation to women in the ministerial council, ultimately resulting in 33 per cent of seats in state assemblies for women.

**Films:** *Baghban* and *Laaga Chunari Mein Daag* (*Journey of a Woman*, or *There Seems to be a Stain on her Shirt*)

***Baghban*:** husband is Raj Malhotra, his wife is Pooja Malhotra; they have four biological sons, and one 'adopted' son (paid for his upbringing; unlikely he actually lived with them much)

***Laaga Chunari Mein Daag*:** two sisters are Vibhavari and Subhavari Sahay

**Themes to consider:**

- ☞ Powerful role of the family in Indian society: multiple social, economic and political connections are determined by one's family and one's family's relationships to other families
  - ☞ Glorification of the mother and depiction of other women (particularly as markers of change)
  - ☞ Relations between men and women, in families (when do men exert power? When do women exert power?) and in larger society
  - ☞ Position of women (education; work; marriage choices; agency)
  - ☞ Power relations/dynamics in various social contexts
  - ☞ Initially, foreign as threat but also something to be aspired. Today, it is the norm for the super-elite, and a desire of the poor. Why?
  - ☞ Men "come to the rescue" in both films; what insights do these events give us into Indian society?
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