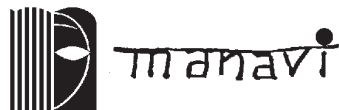


# **Cultures in/and the Classroom: Pedagogy, Sexual Violence and “South Asianness” in the United States**

*Debotri Dhar*

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## Foreword

With great pleasure, I would like to introduce the next several papers in Manavi's Occasional Paper Series, launched in 2007. Our work to end violence against women is reinforced by this documentation and welding of connections between theory and practice.

Manavi is a New Jersey-based women's rights organization committed to ending all forms of violence and exploitation against South Asian women living in the U.S. Established in 1985, Manavi was the first organization of its kind in the U.S. Manavi's programs involve direct service provision for women survivors of violence; grassroots organizing for social change within the South Asian community; and informing the practice of mainstream U.S. institutions and organizations to better serve South Asian battered women. Through its work, Manavi ensures that women of South Asian descent in the U.S can exercise their fundamental right to live a life of dignity that is safe and free from violence.

Like much of the work in immigrant communities, the area of violence against women among South Asian immigrants also suffers from an enormous paucity of research. At Manavi, we believe that research and practice are inextricably intertwined. Research provides direction to the practice of direct service to battered women, just as direct service informs future areas of research. Together, both research and practice have policy implications that create lasting change. In other words, it is essential to continually build upon and refine a body of knowledge. The Manavi Occasional Paper Series was conceptualized in order to further this thought.

This series was launched with funding from the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. We are grateful for their assistance in helping us start the process, as well as continue it. Ultimately, we hope to develop a comprehensive series of papers that will inform the research and activist communities in the U.S. and beyond. Scholars who are interested in contributing to the series are encouraged to contact us with their ideas. Such collaborations, we believe, will not only enhance the series but also expand the Manavi community.

Maneesha Kelkar  
Executive Director  
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## Executive Summary

This paper uses the classroom as a site to engage the broader issue of culture, its derivations and its deconstructions. More specifically, I aim to explore the enabling (rather than constraining) ways in which questions of culture and cultural identity may be addressed in order to tackle sexual violence against South Asian women in the United States.

To this end, the paper begins with analyzing university undergraduate students' reception of three specific texts from my Women's Studies course syllabi in order to understand the construction of gender and South Asian culture(s) in the United States. Drawing from the two inter/disciplinary fields of Women's Studies and Education Studies, and using an open systems model of education that views the classroom as a microcosm of society, I argue that South Asian culture(s) are seen by both mainstream American students, as well as by students belonging to the South Asian diaspora, as *inherently* conservative and patriarchal.

With specific reference to gender violence, the paper points out how this framing of certain cultures sets up the latter as a negative obstacle rather than a positive resource. Demonstrating how this flattened, monolithic framing of culture creates interesting challenges in the classroom, and tracing the similarities between these pedagogical challenges and those encountered in South Asian feminist anti-violence activist settings, the paper goes on to offer a more nuanced approach to theorizing culture.

This approach to culture entails two understandings of culture. The first is that any "single" culture is not monolithic and homogenous but, as a process and product of specific histories, is internally plural and contested and that it changes with the material circumstances of society. The second is that seemingly "different" cultures often embody similar hegemonic ideas of male power and privilege, and therefore have much in common. By firmly grounding our efforts in those ideas, images and interpretations of South Asian cultures that are gender-equal, and by establishing a creative and seamless dialogue between cultures, this works as a constructive approach that allows culture to be used as a resource in South Asian anti-violence activism.

## Introduction

Widely understood both as a discipline as well as an interdisciplinary formation, the field of Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) interrogates the androcentrism (i.e. the implicit and often unquestioned patriarchal assumptions) of traditional disciplinary knowledge(s). While course-level, overall learning goals and the research interests of instructors determine the specific content and thrust of individual courses offered at universities, most WGS courses ultimately aim to critique biologically essentialist understandings of gender (which see gender in terms of unchanging "natural" roles, attitudes and dispositions of men and women), in order to demonstrate the socially and historically constructed nature of gender. A key conceptual question that frames many WGS courses is: how does gender as a socio-cultural category structure our ways of seeing/being/thinking, making inequalities seem "natural?"

Gender does not function in isolation, but intersects with race, class, nation, sexuality, religion, age, dis/ability and so forth to create complex and shifting structures of power and privilege. I endeavor to incorporate this intersectional understanding of gender while designing the undergraduate courses—both introductory as well as upper level—that I teach. Given my research interests in South Asian Studies and transnational feminist praxis, my course syllabi always include texts on South Asian history, postcolonial literatures, feminist social movements in India and related topics. The courses ultimately aim to examine concepts such as culture, society, race, caste, class, religion and nation through a transnational feminist lens.

The following, for instance, is an extract from a recent syllabus for "Women, Culture, Society," which is an introductory WGS course I have frequently taught at Rutgers University for undergraduate students from all levels across disciplines.

*This course is designed to enable an exploration of the themes and concepts that have historically shaped women's—and men's—position in their society and cultures. We will begin with an introductory overview of Women's and Gender Studies as an expansive interdisciplinary field which situates women's voices at the core of analysis. Thereafter, we will go on to examine specific ways in which gender intersects with nation, race, class, ethnicity and sexuality in order to produce systematic structures of power. The course consists of an introduction followed by six sections, with each section focussing on a particular thematic area: Masculine Bodies, Feminine Bodies; Women and Religion; Gender and Work;*

*Gender, Representation and Popular Culture; Gender Violence, Nation and War; and Gender, Human Rights and Social Change.*

*Course materials include film, art, short fiction, theoretical and analytical texts. Some of the material will pertain specifically to India, in order for students to broaden their perspective by also gaining an understanding of gender in a different socio-historical and cultural context. To this end, we will examine through a gendered lens some of the political processes, postcolonial formations and feminist social movements in India; Hindu religion and mythology; sites of popular cultural (re)construction such as Bollywood; and Indian literatures in translation.<sup>1</sup>*

The learning goals of the course are clear enough and entail, first, a systematic transnational feminist analysis of how gender inequality gets universally naturalized across cultures. And second, the course deploys a comparative perspective that insists on contextualizing particular gendered practices according to geographical location and historical, material and cultural context, rather than using a “one size fits all” approach. However, this is easier said than done. My experience of teaching this and other courses structured upon a similar logic (i.e., of rejecting easy feminist generalizations in favor of nuanced cross-cultural analyses) is that they present unique challenges for students’ intellectual engagement with the course material, often also frustrating discussions on gender equality and productive social change across cultures.

These dynamics are all the more interesting given my own identity—that of a young Indian woman hailing from what is perceived to be an entirely different cultural background—and the way my cultural identity shapes the content of the courses I teach, which in turn determines the demographic composition of my classes. Thus my classes typically tend to have many students (usually between one-fourth to one-sixth of the class) of South Asian cultural heritage, a fact that may not be entirely coincidental since students do, after all, hear about instructors from their peers, along with having access to instructors’ research profiles and sometimes even the syllabi before signing up for courses. Interestingly, a majority of my class discussions on gender tend to devolve into discussions on South Asian cultures in general and Indian culture in particular, some by my own design but many others owing to students’ curiosity about me. The challenges in students’ engagement with the course materials therefore also have to do with the generally vexed relationship between gender and culture.

The key concern of many students who identify as feminist is this: if we cannot issue blanket condemnations of culture(s) and criticize them for the oppressions they inflict upon women, how can we argue for gender equality?

While this is in general a valid point, its importance becomes undeniable when discussing gender violence, a serious violation of women’s human rights. Conversely, many students from other minority communities, whose sense of culture offers them both identity and pride, are troubled by this criticism and adopt a range of postures to tackle their discomfort. This problematizes, sometimes even paralyzes, discussions on gender equality and social change.

While the next section undertakes a detailed explanation of these dynamics, it is important for now to clarify how this observation has informed the overall agenda and argument of this paper.

This paper explores how carefully-fashioned theoretical responses to students' reception of texts on gender violence and South Asian culture(s) from my Women's Studies course syllabi may offer insights and directions for South Asian feminist anti-violence activism.

To this end, the first section of this paper analyses students' reception of three specific texts in the classroom in order to explain the (mis)constructions of gender and South Asian cultures both among mainstream American students as well as among students belonging to the South Asian diaspora. The second section traces the parallels between the pedagogical challenges posed by such (mis)constructions of culture in the classroom and those encountered in feminist anti-violence activist settings, going on to demonstrate how a nuanced approach to culture and cultural identity can aid activism by making the conversation between gender and culture more productive. The concluding section then sums up these strategies of treating culture as a resource rather than an obstacle, pointing to possible directions for the future.

At this stage, two points of clarification are perhaps in order. Firstly, while the paper refers to South Asian cultures in general, the constraints of time and space have resulted in much of the emphasis being on India, and on its majority religion, Hinduism. However, despite differences in substantive content, the paper's central argument concerning culture shall certainly be applicable to other regions and religions across South Asia, too.

And secondly, while the ultimate emphasis of this paper is on sexual violence, I have placed it within the larger and more general context of gender violence. The operative idea here is of sexual violence as a continuum, since it is common feminist wisdom that different forms of gender violence do not exist in isolation but have much in common, often shading from one into another.

## Section I

### (a) In the Classroom: Three Texts and an Explication of the Problem

This part of the paper examines students' reception of three specific texts from my Women's Studies course syllabi (Uma Narayan's "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism,"<sup>2</sup> Malvika Karlekar's "Domestic Violence,"<sup>3</sup> and Ismat Chughtai's short story "Tiny's Granny")<sup>4</sup> in order to understand the construction of gender and South Asian culture(s) in the United States.

Uma Narayan argues in her article that the well-intentioned feminist conjunction to avoid gender essentialism by staying attentive to national and cultural differences among women often lapses into a cultural essentialism that can be very problematic for Third World feminist agendas. According to Narayan,

*[t]he project of attending to differences among women across a variety of national and cultural contexts then becomes a project that endorses and replicates problematic colonialist assumptions about the cultural differences between "Western culture" and "Non Western cultures" and the women who inhabit them. Seemingly universal essentialist generalizations about "all women" are replaced by culture-specific generalizations that depend on totalizing categories [ . . . ] they depict as homogenous, groups of heterogeneous people whose values, interests, ways of life, and moral and political commitments are internally plural and divergent.<sup>5</sup>*

To make her point, Narayan cites the example of Mary Daly's work on *sati*, the centuries old and now defunct practice of a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre. According to Narayan, Daly's essentialist representation of Indian culture ignores the fact that *sati* was not a cultural practice ever engaged in by "all Indians" and effaces the history of criticisms and challenges posed to this practice by various groups of Indians themselves. Narayan asks why did a practice, which was the exceptional rather than the routine fate of widows in the few Hindu communities that practiced it, go on to acquire an emblematic and central status for Indian culture in general, and a symbol of Hindu wifely chastity and devotion in a way that obscured its limited practice? Critiquing British historiography for its generalized depictions of the orient, Narayan locates the answer in a colonial need to establish Indian culture as entirely "backward" in order to build a case for British rule. Narayan also examines how some Indian

nationalists embraced these colonial definitions of culture such that, while the larger aim of the Indian nationalist movement was to counter imperialism, the unfortunate consequence was that our” culture continued to be seen in stark contrast to “theirs.” Using these examples, Narayan attempts to challenge over-generalized understandings of “Indian” culture and cultural identity—even by well-meaning cultural “insiders”—in order to develop historically informed accounts that see culture not as an unchanging monolith but as contested, plural and marked by both continuity and change.

When I teach this article, I begin with a brief introduction on Indian colonial history, going on to draw a map on the blackboard to mark out the limited areas where Sati was practiced. Thereafter, I speak of the political, economic, social and religious reasons why sati first came to be practiced in different regions. For instance, the practice of *jaubar* by female members of the Rajasthan royalty was in many ways different from the practice of *sati* by upper caste Bengali women, though both ultimately drew from similar ideas about women’s dependence on men and the latter’s control of female sexuality. I aim to emphasize how, if one considered *all* of ancient India, *sati* was the exception rather than the norm. Then I go on to explain how Indian reformers such as Raja Rammohun Roy worked with certain sections of the British authorities to abolish the practice in 1829, more than a hundred and fifty years ago.

However, this analysis and information often gets interestingly and very differently decoded by my class. My experience with teaching this article each term is that Narayan’s astute historicization of *sati* as well as her larger argument are lost in the horror of the practices themselves, such that the response of many students—that of understanding bride-burning as an integral part of Indian culture—is the exact opposite of what Narayan intends. Thus a majority of students respond in one of two ways: they either strongly criticize what they see as “Indian culture” and its horrifying treatment of women, or understanding “Indian culture” as “naturally different from ours,” they adopt a well-intentioned cultural relativist position of desisting from passing judgment. The response of Indian-American students, on the other hand, is equally interesting and consists of either agreeing with some of the dominant readings so as to disown “Indian culture” and Hindu religion as inherently oppressive, or embracing culture and religion through oversimplified and profoundly gendered metaphors of female purity, chastity and honor. For instance, students taking the former position speak of how Indian culture is no longer relevant to their modern lives in the United States while those taking the latter position insist that Indian women are culturally completely different from their Western counterparts and have the right to follow their own cultural norms.

Narayan’s article broadly engages gender violence in the context of cultural difference, and herein lies its centrality to this paper’s argument. The dichotomous responses from students—for Indian American students, either a complete rejection of what they consider to be ‘Indian culture’ or an absolute, uncritical embracing of even its historically problematic aspects, while for the other students, either a condemnation of ‘Indian culture’ as a whole or a tolerant refraining from passing judgment—makes one fact abundantly clear: Despite their seeming differences, all four responses stand united in understanding *sati* as an integral part of Indian

culture. The problem, then, is only one of whether to condemn (“their” or “our”) culture or not. Predictably, those that identify as feminist—regardless of race and/or cultural identity—decide to condemn what they perceive to be Indian culture while the others do not. The supreme irony here is that this generalized and oversimplified reading of Indian culture is completely contrary to the intention of Narayan’s article, as well as to my own in teaching the class.

These common (mis)readings surface through the class’s engagement with other texts on gender violence in South Asia, too. Another example of this is Malvika Karlekar’s article on domestic and sexual violence. Karlekar expands the insightful work of earlier scholars in order to define gender violence as:

*an act of aggression, usually in interpersonal interaction or relations. It may also be the aggression of an individual woman against herself, such as suicide, self-mutilation, negligence of ailments, sex determination tests, food denial and so on. Basically, then, violence brings into question the concept of boundary maintenance and a sense of self as well as a perception of another’s autonomy and identity.<sup>6</sup>*

Focusing on gender violence in the Indian family, the author writes:

*[. . .] violence finds resonance in a hierarchical society based on exploitative gender relations. Violence often becomes a tool to socialize family members according to prescribed norms of behaviors within an overall perspective of male dominance and control. The family and its operational unit, the household, are the sites where oppression and deprivation of individual psyches and physical selves are part of the structures of acquiescence: often enough, those being molded into an acceptance of submission and denial are in-marrying women and children. Physical violence, as well as less explicit forms of aggression, are used as methods to ensure their obedience. At every stage in the life cycle, the female body is both the object of desire and of control [. . .]<sup>7</sup>*

Karlekar’s argument is very nuanced, and pays attention not only to all the different physical, emotional, psychological and sexual manifestations of violence in India but also to how the intent and impact of violence differs markedly along the lines of location, class and economic background, education level and so forth. For instance, she is attentive to how patterns of wife-abuse differ from one class to another, with slum-dwellers publicly beating their wives and middle class professional men’s wife-abuse being far more private in nature. Karlekar also points out the role played by what is indeed a unique patriarchal cultural practice in India, that of dowry, in conjugal violence. Here she draws from anthropological studies of the asymmetry in north Indian marriage and kinship patterns that, marked by an unequal and continuous flow of material goods from the in-marrying girl’s family to her bridal home, may lead to cases ranging from mild taunting to more severe harassment, torture and even murder. At the same time, the author points out the fallacious tendency of grouping most marital and sexual violence in India under the overall head of dowry violence even

though this is not the only reason for marital discord in India. Most importantly, Karlekar argues that while the practice of dowry may impart a different connotation to some cases of marital violence in India, wife abuse itself is rampant across cultures, with evidence from other countries indicating the common prevalence of inter-spousal violence, even without the added attraction of dowry.

The same cultural contextualization is also apparent in Karlekar's treatment of sexual violence. As noted earlier, the forms and impact of violence are impossible to compartmentalize into exclusive categories. Sexual violence is another case in point; always manifesting in physical form, it may be caused or aggravated by economic vulnerability of the victim, and inflicts tremendous emotional and psychological damage. Further, if women and children are vulnerable to violence in general, their vulnerability to sexual violence is much higher. Karlekar explains that studies of sexual violence are also the hardest to undertake. Yet the India-based data that the author draws from makes abundantly clear that a large percentage of gender violence cases involve incidents of sexual violence, including child rape, where most of the rapists were known to the victims and included neighbors, stepfathers, male relatives and fathers.

According to Karlekar,

*[s]uch alarming figures are indicative not only of the sexual vulnerability of the girl child in and around her home, but also of a social climate which encourages her violation. [ . . . ] In an environment where physical contact, both affectionate and abusive, by relatives of both sexes is not uncommon, child rape needs to be viewed a little differently from the rape of a post-pubertal girl. Not unexpectedly, families rarely talk about the rape of their young daughter; when the rapist is a father or a brother, the chances of reporting are even lower.<sup>8</sup>*

The secrecy and denial surrounding child rape can also be seen in the case of sexual violence against adults. While minor children of both sexes are obviously more vulnerable than adult women, the latter may have other disadvantages with which to contend. A particular case in point is marital rape. While child rape is universally considered a heinous form of rape, marital rape continues to be disbelieved, denied and dismissed by the general population even though the available data on gender violence indicates that a large percentage of abused women across cultures are routinely forced into sexual intercourse against their will.

Karlekar claims that there has as yet been no amendment in Indian law to include sexual violence as rape within marriage. However, her article was penned more than a decade back and the legal status of marital rape has since changed for the better in India, thanks to the very comprehensive Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. But what has not changed adequately is the general attitude towards the phrase "marital rape," making the number of cases reported under this category abysmally low. So Karlekar is right in ending her article by saying that far from being a safe space, the family is completely complicit in the oppressive processes and mechanisms of gender violence.

Student responses to this very comprehensive article on gender and sexual violence are, however, very similar to those elicited by the previous article. Karlekar's plea to consider the socio-cultural context within which certain forms of violence take root is misread by many mainstream students to point to an endemic, oppressive and unchangeable feature of South Asian cultures, while the dichotomous response of South Asian American students is even more interesting. On the one hand, some students sometimes air surprising views that imply that in most South Asian families, men *always* beat and rape women. On the other hand, it is as common for some students of South Asian descent to go into denial mode, asserting that such occurrences of violence could not possibly be true since "our" culture and "our" religion respects women. Interestingly, the latter assertions are also made by students who happen to be taking concurrent courses in religion and so forth, so perhaps it is because these courses are rarely taught from a feminist perspective.

My final example of how texts on gender violence and South Asian culture get misread in class is the renowned Urdu feminist writer Ismat Chughtai's short story "Tiny's Granny." Chughtai's poignant story revolves around a young Muslim girl named Tiny and her poor and illiterate grandmother. One of the dominant themes of the story is sexual violence and its subsequent effects. The story begins with how Tiny's granny got her name.

*God knows what her real name was. No one had ever called her by it. When she was a little snotty-nosed girl roaming about the alleys people used to call her "Bafatan's kid." Then she was "Bashira's daughter-in-law," and then "Bismillah's mother," and when Bismillah died in childbirth, leaving Tiny an orphan, she became "Tiny's granny"—and she remained "Tiny's granny" till her dying day.<sup>9</sup>*

Because of abject poverty, and in order to make ends meet, Tiny's granny puts Tiny to work odd jobs at a very young age. In a horrible turn of events, the young girl is raped by her employer. Sadder still, as word of Tiny's sexual violation spreads in the neighborhood, the incessant gossip forces Tiny to grow up before her years. Tiny becomes completely promiscuous and begins to have indiscriminate and irresponsible sexual liaisons with all men in the neighborhood, finally running away to the city to become a prostitute. Granny slowly begins to lose her mind and fights with the neighborhood monkeys over pieces of stale food. Finally, a monkey steals and rips apart her last precious belonging, an old, grimy pillow, in which, as it turns out, she had sewn cheap little trinkets she had stolen from the rest of the village. The entire village showers abuses at her; laughing and crying in turns, Tiny's granny sits on her stairs, where the morning finds her frozen in death.

If we reject narrow understandings of data in order to appreciate how fiction too can offer rich "data" on societies and cultures, we will be able to see how in this instance Chughtai's short story provides an evocative account of the problems of poverty and powerlessness. Thus despite being stricken by the injustice of the sexual violence that Tiny undergoes, her poor, illiterate grandmother does not have the economic, legal and social resources to take on the rich and powerful rapist.

Students once again have very similar reactions to this story as those described earlier, where the problem is identified to reside in culture, and in this case, Islamic culture. Tiny's rapist going unpunished is seen as a manifestation of a larger cultural problem where *all* women have no name and identity to begin with, as demonstrated by the opening lines of the story. This reading is entirely off the mark, since the traditional and now disappearing South Asian cultural practice of addressing people in terms of their relationships to their children and other relatives applies not just to women but to men, too. A man could be addressed as "munni ke babuji" (Hindi for "our little girl's father"), just as his wife may be "munni ki maa" ("our little girl's mother"). Further, many couples of the older generation, both husband and wife, may use alternative and affectionate forms of address rather than call each other by their first names.

This is not to deny the existence of patriarchal forms of address. In many Hindu families of north India, husbands may address their wives as "tu" or "tum" while the wives address their husbands by the more respectful "aap." By the same token, this is also not to deny that these patriarchal forms of address draw from, as well as contribute to, a larger patriarchal mindset. Hence my intention is only to emphasize that these forms of address do not on their own sanction gender violence, just as the absence of these forms of address in other cultures and contexts does not guarantee the absence of gender violence. When we implicitly believe that some cultures are inferior, any and every sign of difference—in this case, a difference in linguistic practices—gets incorrectly and problematically decoded, leading to the misconception that the culture itself is responsible for sexual violence.

Just as this reading of South Asian culture(s) as inferior is problematic, the opposite reading of the same cultures as 'superior' to, or at least as *completely* different from, their Western counterparts is problematic, too. The latter textual misreading, as engaged in by some South Asian American students, shows sympathy with Tiny for what she has to undergo, but ultimately blames her for becoming sexually promiscuous since Muslim, Hindu and/or Indian or South Asian women are "supposed to be chaste and pure." This in fact is a misreading that commonly emerges during class discussions, not just on sexual violence but on a myriad other thematic issues (e.g., the veil, right to bodily integrity, marriage and motherhood) throughout the term, in different forms. As mentioned earlier, the implicit aim of this misreading—that of establishing cultural difference with and from 'western/American women'—is obviously problematic, since it forces one to view 'Western' women as a homogenous category.

The above analysis of student reception of three texts on gender violence and South Asian cultures also applies to other texts of a similar nature. It goes to demonstrate how the dichotomous responses of mainstream and South Asian American students can be equally problematic in the ways they understand culture and cultural identity. Condemning "those cultures" for their oppressive treatment of women or embracing and celebrating them through profoundly over-simplified metaphors of female chastity and honor both perform the discursive function of treating the cultures themselves as unchanging monoliths. They also encourage students to see certain conservative symbols and practices as emblematic of the entire culture without either contextualizing the practices and looking at the contestations within that culture,

or looking at similarities between these and other cultures. Again, the irony occurs where many students end up (mis)reading the texts, which are very nuanced and contextualized, that exhort readers to understand the interrelationships between gender, culture and violence. Of course not all students misread in this manner. However, the trends described above are so common that they cannot be denied.

So even when Narayan historicizes the practice of *sati* and asks us *not* to consider *sati* as an emblematic aspect of Indian culture, why do many students continue to consider otherwise? When Karlekar uses sociological evidence to criticize the private space of the family as one that also victimizes vulnerable women and children, why do many students understand this “fact” as applying only to families from certain, such as South Asian, cultures? Chugtai explains why Tiny’s granny was addressed in a certain way, and also describes the horrible circumstances of Tiny’s rape; why then do so many students combine the two, understanding specific linguistic practices of addressing people as the reason for women getting beaten and raped? Facts and figures prove that gender violence is all-pervasive, and that women in other cultures and across countries of the globe also get beaten and raped. Even though these facts are shared with the class, why do these facts not enable us to blame all cultures? In fact, why in those cases is the problem not seen to lie with culture at all, but with specific individuals? Also, how do somewhat coherent relationships emerge between the students’ textual misreadings and their cultural backgrounds? Clearly, the answers cannot lie within the space of the classroom itself, and must go beyond it.

I intend to answer these questions in the following section.

## **(b) Education and the (Re)Production of Gender and Culture**

Critical educational research has long established that education rarely functions in a socio-cultural vacuum. Nor does the space of the classroom always serve as neutral territory for the exercise of education’s empowering logic. Well-known educationists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Basil Bernstein, Talcott Parsons, Robert Burgess, Michael Young, Michael Apple, David Hargreaves, Aaron Cicourel and John Kituse have demonstrated how, in its inevitable task of socialization and the reproduction of society, education often reproduces the dominant patterns of society. This is probably summed up best by sociologist Emile Durkheim, who argues that education not just *has* but *is* a social function; schools are ultimately responsible for passing on what society considers its crucial beliefs and value-systems.<sup>10</sup>

So—and while not denying the obviously positive aspects of education—it becomes imperative to understand education as a dynamic sub-system which is located in relation to other sub-systems within a larger society, from which it takes its inputs and into which it feeds its outputs. This is an “open systems model of education” that takes into account how the interplay between a wide range of elements produce what gets termed as “education.”<sup>11</sup> These elements include the background and socialization of students and teachers on one hand and the goals, formal and informal structures, programs and curriculum of schools on the other,

which are in turn influenced by political environment, cultural values and ideology. In other words, classroom events do not exist in a social vacuum but are located within a society and its sub-systems at a specific point of time. This open systems model of education can help explain the misreadings of texts on South Asian cultures as discussed in the previous section.

Let us consider the most important of “inputs” into the education system: students. Students belong to diverse family backgrounds and correspondingly to different subcultures, leading to the transmission of very different understandings about gender, culture, race and class. Owing to these prior processes of socialization within their families of orientation, students from diverse cultural backgrounds carry different kinds of “knowledge into the classroom. Hence those who do not hail from South Asian families are mostly unaware of the historical, political, social and religious contexts within which certain cultural practices took root. As a result, they are apt to judge these “other” cultures ethnocentrically (i.e., from the vantage points of their own), in the process inadvertently exaggerating the differences between “us” and “them.” Thus what is taught in class gets filtered through the stereotypes they “know” and believe. This is also true for the three texts discussed above, where students would focus on those “factual” parts of the texts that emphasized the conservative aspects of South Asian cultures while paying inadequate attention to the contextualization of those cultures.

However, with respect to family background and socialization, what is more interesting for our purposes is the dichotomous reaction of students of South Asian cultural heritage. This refers to either a disowning of their culture as inherently oppressive and irrelevant to their modern life in the United States, or of embracing it through oversimplified, stereotypical and profoundly patriarchal understandings of culture. As I had pointed out before, both these reactions paradoxically perform the same function of constructing South Asian cultures as inherently conservative and unchanging. But what accounts for this particular misconstruction?

Part of the answer lies in the complex and often exilic nature of immigrant experience which, especially in the face of negative stereotyping and marginalization by the host society, seeks the symbolic solace provided by timeless notions of nation, the “homeland” and the sense of belonging and cultural identity it affords. This often also creates unfortunate conditions for the embracing of particularly conservative and *gendered* forms of such identity. Feminist scholarship demonstrates how the nation is a deeply gendered category that discursively constructs female bodies as biological and cultural “reproducers” of society, symbols of the collectivity and border-guards of its ethnic, racial and cultural differences.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the South Asian diaspora, gender and culture intersect in interesting ways; national and cultural identities play out most insistently on the bodies of “our women” who are exhorted to be different from “their women,” often leading to very conservative constructions of the former. Like other women of minority groups, women of South Asian cultural heritage therefore carry a racial-patriarchal double burden. As members of a dominant white American society, they may be racially and culturally stereotyped, while as members of their immigrant cultural groups, they are patriarchally defined and regulated. Ironically, the two processes are not mutually exclusive and may even sustain each other; many members of the diaspora may consider

the same patriarchal regulations as definitive of their cultures, and these generalized cultural definitions lead to more racial and cultural stereotyping.

When I first started teaching, I was surprised at how my undergraduate Indian-American students tended to stereotype Indian culture as completely restrictive for women, an understanding mostly reminiscent of an India of decades ago when many of their grandparents or parents may have migrated. Indian-American and mainstream American students often ask me whether my family is upset by the fact that I am single, independent and live alone in a different country, or even whether my marriage has already been arranged to someone I have never seen, questions that are fundamentally at odds with my modern upbringing in cosmopolitan and pluralistic New Delhi. All my female friends in New Delhi, for instance, are educated and successful professionals. Those who are married have had love rather than arranged marriages, often with partners from other castes and communities. Most importantly, modernization for many of us is not necessarily synonymous with Westernization, though for some like me, the two are certainly in conversation.

This is not to deny that in sections of India, as across South Asia, very conservative understandings of gender certainly do exist as a result of the many complex intersections of class, religion, caste, age, rural/urban linkages, levels of education and social mobility, political beliefs and so forth. The purpose of my argument, then, is only to point out how a range of cultural understandings and practices, both conservative and modern, exist side by side and compete for space in countries of South Asia, to differing degrees (as they do in countries across the world) and to generalize nations and cultures based on conservative practices alone is to leave out half of the story.

The complex nature of immigrant experience and the gendered understanding of cultural identity it sometimes implies results in immigrant families constructing very patriarchal versions of their "own" cultures, especially for their daughters. "Immigrant families" is also a heterogeneous category comprising people of different socio-economic backgrounds, education levels and professional profiles, religious and political beliefs, time and place of migration and subsequently diverse lifestyles and cultural practices. Viewed thus, it becomes easy to understand why many children of immigrant parents feel torn between cultures; their understanding of their cultural heritage is excessively conservative and unchanging, an easy and creative conversation between this heritage and their host culture often becomes hard to establish and the problem becomes one of either embracing this conservative version of their cultural heritage or rejecting it.

Of course, to lay the entire blame for gender and cultural stereotyping on socialization within the American family (mainstream or immigrant) would be incorrect, for these stereotypes circulate everywhere, including within the education system. With specific reference to curricular bias, it has been demonstrated how "knowledge" is selected, organized and filtered through the curriculum such that what reaches the classrooms is often what Michael Apple calls "official knowledge" and what Lawrence Stenhouse terms a "selection of culture."<sup>13</sup> With reference to gender, for instance, curricular bias has attracted policy space even in the Millennium

Development Goals, with most blueprints for equality in education admitting the existence of gender stereotyping in curricula. By the same logic, cultures also can be stereotyped and transmitted through curricula. And given the work of transnational feminist writers such as Chandra Mohanty, who have long criticized the common patronizing generalizations found in mainstream Western scholarly writing on women's status in Third World cultures, it is apparent that stereotyping of cultures occurs not just in general curricular material but, disturbingly enough, can also occur in feminist and scholarly writing.<sup>14</sup>

Gender and cultural stereotyping may also continue to persist within the educational climate via what is known as the "hidden curriculum" or "paracurriculum."<sup>15</sup> This refers to the unwritten and informal ideas, systems, rules and routines that underwrite most formal educational organizations, or in other words, all that is learnt regardless of whether or not the actual curricular content is biased.

An important component of this informal system of schools is teachers' backgrounds, beliefs and pedagogical investments. Studies have confirmed that teachers often develop different tactical responses, communication patterns and disciplining strategies for boys and girls, as a consequence of their own perception of gender differences. The same logic also applies to cultural stereotyping. Unless teachers and educational institutions have a conscious pedagogical investment in reinterpretations of culture (this is rarely the case), the possibility of students having been exposed to persistent stereotyping, from nursery right to university-levels, is very high. Minority students in my class often share childhood and teenage experiences about cultural stereotyping in curricula, in teacher assumptions and expectations, and in school environments in general. Even in some scholarly and well-intentioned graduate classes, it is not uncommon for those of us who present alternative and progressive versions of our cultures to be kindly dismissed on grounds of cultural in-authenticity and bourgeois privilege. In turn, these pedagogical processes crystallize widely-held 'knowledge' about gender and culture; children become what, according to their teachers' expectations, they are presumed to be.

Finally, the stereotyping in the family and the school both draws from, and contributes to, the cultural stereotypes that commonly circulate in the public sphere. These negative stereotypes can be seen, for instance, in media and popular culture, where "other" cultures are viewed through an exaggerated, orientalist lens. In not being attentive to the complexity and diversity within different cultures, these media stereotypes further consolidate mainstream society's ethnocentric views of other cultures, again widening the gap between "us" and "them."

According to Michel Foucault, knowledge is socially mediated by prevalent configurations of power.<sup>16</sup> It is power that produces knowledge. In fact, power and knowledge directly imply one another such that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose or constitute at the same time power relations. There is thus little difference between knowledge that circulates in popular culture in the public sphere and the "official" knowledge imparted through education, since both are ultimately validated by the value systems of a wider society and the received wisdoms

of its powerful and dominant groups. Also, as mentioned earlier, the immigrant response to this negative stereotyping by the host society is either to reject their culture or to attempt and (re) create some sort of a pristine culture of a timeless homeland of the yesteryears, while in the process embracing and celebrating the same, often conservative and patriarchal stereotypes.

As a consequence of all these interlinked processes described above, stereotypical ways of thinking about culture become ingrained among members of society, both among the mainstream as well as the diaspora. Hard to dislodge, these ways of thinking pose tremendous obstacles in the creation of new, alternative forms of knowledge that stimulate critical thinking and question hitherto accepted assumptions. Therefore, even when an attempt is made to create these types of "new knowledge" in the classroom, cultural stereotypes pose huge pedagogical challenges. Students continue to consciously and unconsciously draw from the stereotypes learned during socialization through schools and family, and circulating in the larger cultural climate of the United States. This results in the misreading of texts on gender violence and South Asian culture(s) in the classroom that I described.

## Section II

### (a) Similarities between Pedagogical and Activist Challenges

The above pedagogical challenges pertaining to gender violence and the (mis)readings of culture are not just limited to the classroom, since parallels can easily be traced between these and similar challenges in anti-violence activist settings.

Thus as a consequence of the social processes described above, immigrant women of South Asian cultural heritage have often internalized the same stereotypes about their cultures, and see their culture as monolithic, inherently conservative and unchanging. When they become unfortunate victims of gender violence, their racial-patriarchal double burden, as mentioned earlier, makes the women feel traitors to their families and cultures if they expose its wrongdoings in public. Some, including those who hail from remote parts of South Asia and/or are not educated, may not even understand their experience as wrong-doing on the part of their husbands or family members, instead equating it with their gender role within their culture *as they have learned it*. At the same time, we have seen how education has durable links with society and its belief systems, and so even those that are educated—whether in South Asia or here in the United States—may nevertheless also continue to think in the same patriarchal manner. Further, those who do see the violence inflicted on them as wrong-doing may attribute it to notions of fate, *bhagya* or *kismet* as they have been taught, and may not initially approach either women’s organizations or the law. Often by the time they do, it is too late.

While these challenges apply to all forms of gender violence, sexual violence also creates some unique challenges of its own. Conservative patriarchal understandings of female chastity and shame among South Asian communities may lead to the victims of rape being perceived, as well as perceiving themselves, as unchaste and having “lost their honor,” leading to grave psychological implications for the victim. While South Asian immigrant women across all age-groups may feel burdened by the need to protect their family reputation through non-disclosure of gender violence, the burden is all the more in the case of sexual violence. This may especially be true for young, unmarried girls from conservative South Asian families in America that practice arranged marriages. In these traditional contexts where female virginity may often be implicitly assumed if not explicitly emphasized as part of female cultural identity, any publicity of her sexual violence may harm the chances of the girl finding a suitable groom.

If concerns about a woman’s responsibility to protect family honor prevent reporting of the crime where the abuser is someone from outside the family, the seriousness of the situation only gets compounded when the abuser is a member of the family. The situation is hardest when the abuser is the husband. Not only do traditional understandings of marriage prevent women from defining their experience as rape in the case of marital rape, but they make it socially very challenging to report.

Immigrant women facing gender violence may have little to no idea about legal options in the United States, especially in situations where the victims do not have independent legal status and are economically dependent on their husbands. This is why disseminating such legal knowledge obviously helps. However, as a result of the stereotypical construction of “South Asianness” in the United States, both among the host society and the diaspora, and of the complex constitution of immigrant cultural identity (processes described in the previous section), victims of gender and sexual violence often have a selective, filtered understanding of such legal knowledge. In other words, technical knowledge of legal options available via the US legal system may not help much, since “we” understand ourselves to be culturally different from “them” and believe that we have our own duties and obligations to discharge to our families, our social networks and our culture that those located within the dominant white culture may not understand.

The parallels between this challenging activist situation and pedagogical situation described in the previous section, regarding the (mis)readings of South Asian texts in the classroom, are obvious. In both cases, and because of the same processes, South Asian cultures are understood as inherently conservative and “different” from the dominant white American culture; the choice is then only between a rejection of “our” culture and its uncritical acceptance.

At this point, a difficult but important question must be asked. Are these stereotypes about South Asian cultures held only by victims of gender violence? Or, in trying to be attentive to the cultural context of violence—an important contextualization that certainly must be made—could we, as scholars or as advocates, also be unconsciously exaggerating the same “differences” between “us” and “them,” and therefore strengthening the same stereotypes about South Asian cultures? Do we believe that South Asian cultures are inherently patriarchal? Do we believe that South Asian cultural notions such as fate result in situations where women accept the violence being inflicted upon them instead of fighting it? Therefore, do we believe that these cultures are at least partly to blame for the gender violence, if not in causing it, then at least in tolerating it?

To the extent that the answer is yes, we are undoubtedly (mis)reading culture just as the students in the classroom do; our interpretations of South Asian culture(s) are un/consciously drawing from the larger discourse on gender and South Asianness in the United States. In the process, what is perhaps being overlooked is the distinction between what culture *is* and what we *believe* it to be. What is also overlooked is how this understanding of culture sets culture up as an obstacle rather than as a resource for activist agendas. This must be counter-productive

in the long run since it implicitly suggests that in order to combat the violence in their lives, women of South Asian cultural heritage need to walk away from this heritage.

Instead, for the sake of gender justice as well as cultural diversity—two hallmarks of a modern, pluralistic society—what we need is a more creative and interpretive engagement with culture, for both victims of gender violence as well as their advocates.

It is to this interpretive and empowering engagement with culture that I now turn.

## **(b) Sexual Violence and a Deconstruction of Culture**

Thus far the paper has demonstrated how in the United States, South Asian cultures are stereotypically constructed as inherently and unchangeably patriarchal. Since this (mis)reading of culture poses a formidable challenge to effecting gender equality, we shall now examine an alternative, theoretically productive way of understanding culture and cultural identity.

This theoretical approach to culture entails a two-fold understanding of culture. The first dimension is that a “single” culture is not monolithic and homogenous but internally plural and contested, and the second is that “different” cultures often embody similar hegemonic ideas and therefore have much in common. Let us understand these two points in detail as they might apply to the issue of gender and sexual violence.

*(i) A “single” culture as internally plural and contested, as both a process and product of specific histories, and as a fluid and dynamic relationship between “dominant” and subjugated cultural knowledge(s) that changes over time*

Noted anthropologist and women’s rights scholar Sally Engle Merry sums up the past century’s nuanced theorizing on culture by noting that:

*Culture is historically produced in particular locations under the influence of local, national, and global forces. Cultures consist of repertoires of ideas and practices that are not homogenous but continually changing because of contradictions among them or because new ideas and institutions are adopted by members. They typically incorporate contested values and practices [. . .]<sup>17</sup>*

Culture is not an ahistorical, unchanging, homogenous monolith. Neither is cultural identity. Thus Stuart Hall says of cultural identity that it is not transparent or unproblematic; instead, it is:

*A production which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term “cultural identity” lays claim [. . .] We all write and*

*speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always "in context," positioned.*<sup>18</sup>

Hall goes on to argue that there are two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first "defines cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history."<sup>19</sup>

While acknowledging the *important but imaginary* coherence that such a stable conception of cultural identity offers to the diaspora's otherwise fragmented experience, apart from generally playing a critical role in postcolonial and anti-racist struggles worldwide, Hall argues that there may also be a second, less simplistic view of cultural identity. This second view recognizes that

*[a]s well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute "what we really are": or rather, since history has intervened—what we have become. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about "one experience, one identity", without acknowledging its other side—the ruptures and discontinuities [. . .] Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history and power.*<sup>20</sup>

This fluid and interpretive approach to culture is certainly not easy to understand and work with, because it requires us to move away from the comfortable categories we use to define "us and them" by deeply scrutinising *why we think the way we do* about culture.

In the classroom, I tackle this challenge by supplementing the scholarly texts in my syllabus with more personal classroom exercises, assignments and films. As the guidelines on the autobiographical essay assignment in my syllabus point out, "Feminist scholarship teaches us that engaging in a completely 'objective' analysis of social facts in the pursuit of 'knowledge' is impossible, since the 'knower' is deeply implicated in the production of his/her own knowledge. Simply put, our social location (race, age, class, gender, sexuality, nationality and other social markers) influences our world-views. What we 'know' about culture is therefore not only a consequence of objective 'truth' but also of subjective experience; our personal narratives shape how we see and comprehend larger politico-social narratives." In order to demonstrate how our lived experiences shape our views on culture, a class exercise that I always find useful is therefore to ask students what *they* understand "their own" culture to mean, and working with their answers rather than imposing those of my own.

So for instance, asking what students understand by the dominant white American culture—and the role of women therein—yields many different, often diametrically opposite responses. Some students define the typical American family as one that has a working dad and a stay-at-home mom; others are quick to dispute this generalization by pointing out that this is no longer the norm in modern times. Some students say that white American culture promotes absolute sexual freedom for women and men; some others disagree by pointing out that for many Americans, religious beliefs, such as those stemming from Catholicism, may inculcate very different views about sexuality, sexual responsibility and the notion of choice in such issues as intercourse, contraception and abortion. Some say the quintessential “American woman” is Brittany Spears, Paris Hilton or some other similar figure. Once again, other students dismiss these as celebrity hype and the effect of the media, arguing that most American girls lead very different lives from what the media and popular culture may suggest.

The point here is not to engage in value-judgments, but to use the simple examples offered by students themselves to establish the scholarly point that a “culture” is not a homogenous singularity but a plurality, always housing a diversity of practices, values and view-points, each again with its own history, and marked by both continuity and change. This fluid and dynamic understanding of culture and cultural identity usefully frames them as internally plural and contested, as both a process and product of specific histories, and therefore as an imagined coherence that, in being imposed by both cultural “insiders” as well as “outsiders,” masks the relationship between “dominant” and “subjugated” cultural knowledge(s). This understanding of culture can then offer a template to avoid perpetuating cultural hegemonies as well as cultural stereotyping, conscious and unconscious racialization, and ahistoric generalizations.

This is not to say that all generalizations about culture are ahistoric or incorrect. As Hall himself points out,

*Culture is not a mere phantasm either. It is something—not a mere trick of the imagination. It has its histories—and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual past, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always already “after the break.” It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position.<sup>21</sup>*

It is precisely to this politics of positioning that I am trying to draw our attention. The stereotypical construction of South Asian culture(s) in the United States often unwittingly ends up strengthening the most conservative voices from within these cultures. In not asking who speaks for culture, and in not being attentive enough to the diversity within cultures, these generalizations are not just empirically incorrect, but also limit the potential for tackling political conservatism, with disastrous consequences for women’s rights.

Of course, swinging to the other extreme—that is, viewing a culture as a loose set of myriad cultural practices that have *nothing* in common—is as problematic. This is not least because in being politico-historically ill-informed as well as lacking discursive insight, it again takes away from us a concrete way of both effecting as well as measuring social change. For even though the homogeneity of culture may well be “imagined,” its effects are profoundly real in both material and symbolic forms; while there may be diversity in *actual* cultural practices, there is a discursive and normative homogenization of dominant cultural ideas such as chastity that women are under social pressure to internalize, even though these normative ideas and constructions of subjectivity may not be immediately perceptible to well-meaning cultural “outsiders.” Thus while cultural stereotyping is hugely problematic, denouncing all manner of generalizations may be problematic, too.

This has an impact when considering the perception of sexual violence culturally. For example, the raped body within hegemonic Hindu discourse is understood as “having lost its honor” and therefore ritually unchaste. This is because dominant Vedic-Brahmanical traditions understand men and women to have different *samskaras* or values, marking the female body through rites and symbols and imputing to it norms of purity and pollution, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness that work to women’s ritual and socio-political disadvantage. The same dominant traditions normatively construct the “ideal” Hindu woman as chaste and self-sacrificing, who always puts her devotion to her family ahead of herself, and who finds primary identity through marriage and motherhood. Thus the chaste Hindu woman is expected to have sexual relations with only her husband (an expectation that, firstly, does not admit the concept of marital rape, and secondly, is “violated” in a situation of rape by another), and to protect her family’s honor at all costs. In fact, authors such as Sudhir Kakar have argued that these myths of the ideal woman as defined in terms of chastity, devotion and self-sacrifice still play a reasonably seminal role in the crystallization of the average Hindu female identity.<sup>22</sup>

However, a nuanced understanding of cultural identity allows us to understand that these pervasive notions of virginity, chastity and honor have crystallised as a consequence of particular historical trajectories. In India, this trajectory was a consequence of certain Brahmanical interpretations of Hinduism along with the experience of colonialism, which constructed “our women” as different from “their women,” both in the minds of the colonizers as well as those of the colonized. More importantly, these are not the only roles that Hinduism accords women. Hinduism is a religious and mythological complex that has a textually documented history stretching back to about 1200 BCE.<sup>23</sup> Not by most theological standards an organized religion, it is composed of many different texts and layered philosophical traditions accumulated over centuries, whose relationship to each other is marked by agreements and ambivalence, not to mention contradictions. Thus while chastity, virginity and male ownership over female sexuality may be understood by a majority of Hindus as a major feature of their religious and cultural tradition, the *Purusartha Chatusbtham* or four cardinal principles of Hinduism (*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*) accord the highest place to *kama*, or sexual desire. In a classic blurring of the sacred and the profane, sexual desire and its aesthetic fulfilment are seen as integral to Hindu cosmology, an understanding that then allows us to contextualize Hindu

treatises such as the Kaamasutra and the Ratisashtra *that put much emphasis on women's sexual freedom as well as female consent.*

Similarly, one should be aware of the complex treatment of wifely subservience in classical Hinduism and its androcentric oversimplification in hegemonic Hindu cultural practice. The wife of early Hindu religion was in many ways conceived of as her husband's equal, and early Vedic religion afforded many freedoms for women, including access to education, participation in religious rituals and authorship of Vedic hymns and philosophical scholarship. It was only after the first *Vedas* and up to the first codes of law (1500 BCE–100 CE) that Hindu women's role in religion and society declined.<sup>24</sup> An examination of Hindu canonical scriptures and oral traditions will easily reveal that it was only after the penning of the rigidly patriarchal *Dharmashastras* that the emphasis on chastity, virginity and subservience became an absolute parameter of "wifeliness."<sup>25</sup> Even then, the idea of the *ardhangini* or wife as an equal partner in marriage has always existed as a powerful antidote.

Similar progressive interpretations and examples abound. So for instance, the Hindu idea of *bhagya* (fate or destiny) is not fatalistic as is assumed; instead, *bhagya* (destiny) goes hand in hand with *purushkar* (hard work and individual effort). Here we must also understand that the degree to which the notion of fate becomes important to a society as well as to specific individuals has to do with a range of material, historical and other factors. For a South Asian immigrant woman who becomes a victim of domestic violence in a different country, who is cut off from her own social networks and economically dependent on her husband with her legal status linked to his, it is not hard to understand the confusion and helplessness that may assail her, forcing her to make sense of her experience by taking recourse to notions such as fate. In fact, the notion of fate in this instance actually helps the victim to create meaning and thereby to cope, until she is able and willing to exercise stronger options.

Thus the problem is not of culture per se, but of the socio-economic and psychological circumstances that make certain versions of culture more appealing than others. For if it were indeed only about culture, a Hindu woman could just as well draw from an undeniable and almost parallel cultural narrative of strong goddesses. These include Durga, Kali and Saraswati, or the female Vedic divinities, such as Usha, who is associated with light and wisdom, and particularly *shakti*, the powerful and dynamic female principle.

In other words, alternative ideas and images that are resistant to dominant patriarchal forms of knowledge already exist within the annals of culture, and can be used as resources to counter gender violence. The cultural principle of female consent can be a powerful indictment against rape. The idea of the *ardhangini* can provide a cultural space for grounding a critique of domestic violence in general and marital rape in particular, in which the protector turns perpetrator. Similarly, positive female role models such as Durga, Kali and *shakti* can be used to motivate women to take strong action against the wrongs done to them. Therefore, activist efforts aimed at eradicating gender violence and empowering women would benefit from building meaningful relationships with faith-based institutions across religions as well as with

feminist scholars and practitioners who use progressive and re-interpretive cultural models to counter gender-violence.

At the same time, one must remember that not only are there different interpretative strands and progressive practices within a culture at a single point of point, but also that culture as a whole—and its understandings of gender—changes over time.

Thus if one were to speak of women in contemporary India, one would find many educated and qualified female professionals in every sphere, be it academics, politics, business, law, medicine, engineering, media and the arts, with most modern urban families not only educating their daughters but also encouraging them to have rewarding careers. This is also a generational change, such that with every progressive generation, the number of professionally qualified women entering the workforce is increasing dramatically. At the same time, the efforts of the state and non-governmental organizations in extending free education and other facilities to the poorer sections of the population has resulted in many success stories for women. This is not in any way to paint an entirely idealistic picture of India or, more broadly, of South Asian countries, most of which are also burdened by limited resources, huge populations, bureaucratic corruption, and in some cases, religious fundamentalism and even a suspension of democracy. My purpose is only to point out that there have been numerous positive changes in the sphere of culture; with specific reference to the status of women, many alternatives are available in today’s society that may not have been as available to the women of earlier generations.

Speaking of sexual violence in contemporary India, the Indian Supreme Court has delivered a slew of progressive judgments, and nongovernmental organizations and civil society are also making tremendous contributions to create a culture where rapists are not allowed to go unpunished. Such changes have far-reaching consequences in that it is now not uncommon in India for raped women, including those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, to move courts in order to claim justice from the state. Parliamentary Acts have also been legislated in order to broaden the scope of sexual and other forms of gender violence. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 is a case in point. This law defines violence comprehensively to include physical, psychological and emotional forms of violence meted out against any female member in the domestic space, whether wife, daughter or aged mother. It is a significant improvement over relevant clauses in the Indian Penal Code, and it also expands the ambit of rape to include marital rape. Similar progressive laws have been enacted in many other South Asian countries, too. For instance, Sri Lanka’s laws on gender violence are widely considered an excellent template for legislation across South Asia.

Along with a comprehensive knowledge of the US legal system, being aware of these advances in legal understandings of gender violence in South Asian countries will be an additional asset for South Asian anti-domestic violence activism in the United States. This knowledge helps us understand and convey to South Asian victims of violence—especially those that may

have migrated from rural areas, who have conservative backgrounds and/or who came to the United States in earlier decades when the laws in their country of origin were different -how the “homeland” is changing, and that “being from South Asia” is no reason to hold back from reporting abuse.

For those who claim that a change in law does not always signal a change in culture, I would argue that there are other ways to understand cultural change. For example, examining popular culture could also indicate how collective cultural understandings change over time. In India, the Hindi film industry (popularly known as “Bollywood”) is widely considered to be both formative and indicative of national cultural identity. Analyzing Bollywood films demonstrates how patriarchal themes in films on rape in earlier decades are no longer found. Once common examples of this included film characters dealing with the experience of rape by staying silent about what happened to the victim, blaming the woman herself, treating the rape victim as “soiled goods” that no man would then want to marry and even the meting out of “justice” by the rapist offering to marry his victim. Today, many Bollywood films instead focus on breaking these cultural stereotypes and exploring the very different public and private contexts within which rape and other forms of sexual violence can occur.

The link between sexual violence and society is considerably more complicated than it appears to be, especially in modernizing contexts that mask from direct view the different forms that sexual and sexualized violence might take. In order to present to my students the modern and changing face of South Asia, with all the strengths and the weaknesses of modernity, the pedagogical strategy I use is to show some Bollywood films that reflect the general diversity of lifestyles, from the very conservative to the very modern, within South Asian nations. In the past, these films have included Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding*, which tackles the sensitive subject of sexual violence within the family; Madhur Bhandarkar’s *Fashion*, which is a film on the sexual choices of fashion models in contemporary fast-paced Mumbai’s fashion industry; and Pradeep Sarkar’s *Laaga Chunri Mein Daag*, which captures the clash of value-systems between old-world norms and the emergent globalizing order through the story of the sexual exploitation of a female escort. Through these films, students are able to better understand the arguments made by scholars like Liz Kelly that show how sexual violence is neither always rape nor always force exerted by a stranger. Instead, modernity and globalization, together with their blatant emphasis on materialism have disrupted the spiritual ethics of earlier value systems by sexualizing, commodifying and violating female bodies in a manner that often blurs the boundaries between social discrimination and personal choice. This is not to ignore the many positive changes for the well-being of women that too have come with these disadvantages. For instance, the female protagonists of *Fashion* as well as *Laaga Chunri Mein Daag* are never forcibly raped; instead, due to a lack both of viable options as well as of role models to emulate, they end up becoming the un/willing victims of a social order where female bodies are always in demand.

In other words, the “homeland” is not an eternal, unchanging monolith. Rather, it changes with time, a change that is marked by complex continuities, shifts and ruptures in culture. At an immediate level, understanding these changes can help us see how sexual violence may

not always involve what we conventionally understand as “force,” and to explain to those who come to us for support that challenges are somewhat similar everywhere. At a deeper level, being aware of these changes can help victims and advocates to negotiate what otherwise might seem like a gaping cultural divide between “us and them.” As a result, we can move away from blaming certain cultures, instead allowing ourselves to be open to a fluid, contested and dynamic understanding of culture that not only poses new challenges but also offers new possibilities.

*(ii) “Different” cultures as normatively similar, as embodying similar hegemonic ideas of femininity and masculinity, and the role of such gender norms in promoting sexual violence across cultures*

Students find it easier to accept the idea of a diversity of practices within the same culture than to accept that different cultures may share many normative similarities. This becomes an important pedagogical challenge, especially with reference to gender violence; as I have earlier demonstrated through an analysis of my class’s reception of texts, many students believe gender violence to be a problem of those “other” (in this case, South Asian) cultures.

Here the two-pronged strategy I have adopted is, firstly, to look at the empirical reality of gender violence worldwide and, secondly, to incorporate into the syllabus the work of authors who examine gender violence from a variety of countries, cultures and contexts. The first strategy establishes the widespread nature of all forms of gender violence, including sexual violence, across the world. Within the United States alone, gender violence is not limited to any one group but occurs across race, class, religion and cultural context. This empirical evidence also allows us to move away from indicting certain specific cultures, since gender violence can occur anywhere. The second strategy then allows students to appreciate and contextualize in a scholarly fashion the similarities between seemingly “different” cultures.

To use our earlier example of religion, the readings that I have included in my syllabus demonstrate the common patriarchal themes running through different religions in terms of rules, rituals and belief systems, thus speaking to the gender bias in *all* religions. For instance, an introductory text draws from the work of sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Bryan Turner and Clifford Geertz to demonstrate how religion achieves social integration through social control, and how a primary aspect of this control applies to the ideological and institutional control of women’s bodies through myths, images and ideas that both women and men internalize *across cultures*.<sup>26</sup> This is described by the author Fatmagul Berktaý:

*Women internalize the “images of women” constructed by the dominant culture; therefore, in their way forward, they need to struggle not only against pressures and obstructions from the outside but also against definitions of the dominant culture that they carry within themselves. Moreover, these dominant images and stereotypes continue to exist even after social change has achieved palpable and concrete aims, because they have penetrated the deepest nooks and crannies of our consciousness*

*and have more profoundly affected our identities than we have ever been able to realize [. . .] When women embark on the path to self-definition and self-determination, they inevitably will have to deal with and eventually get rid of the images of “cursed eve” or “Woman as source of Fitna” [. . .].*<sup>27</sup>

This is not to deny that gender violence sometimes takes very specific forms in different socio-cultural contexts. “Honor killing” is an obvious example. But the problem of ethnocentric stereotyping surfaces in my classroom discussions even here. Thus mainstream American students’ impulse to read “backwardness” into every reading on South Asian cultures results in any and every act of killing of a South Asian woman by her male partner being immediately labeled as honor-killing, alongside a refusal to put a similar label on the killing of white women by their male partners. I am not trying to argue that “crimes of honor” and “crimes of passion” are exactly similar; in fact, as Purna Sen points out in an excellent article on honor killings, the two have some important differences.<sup>28</sup> However, while not denying these specificities, Sen carefully establishes the links between these notions of honor and those that have always also existed in Western societies, concluding that “to posit a specificity that is flawed and that fails to see linkages is problematic; to deny specificity if it exists is also problematic.”<sup>29</sup>

This is exactly my point. If we are trained to move away from blaming certain cultures and instead appreciating both differences within a culture as well as similarities across cultures, we will realize that the killing of women by jealous male partners occurs everywhere and shares many similar patriarchal traits with what we term honor killing with reference to violence within specific South Asian contexts. Some of these traits have to do with male power and privilege, and with the assumed ownership of women’s bodies, sexualities and feelings by society.

The same logic also applies to the specific case of sexual violence. The fact that rape occurs across countries and cultural contexts *despite culturally specific norms and beliefs about sexuality, and despite the degree of sexual permissiveness* proves that, contrary to popular belief, rape is neither about cultural beliefs nor about sexual desire; it is about a brutal exercise of power.

Many well-known feminist theorists such as Susan Brownmiller, Jill Radford, Catherine MacKinnon and Liz Kelly have theorized about sexual violence and the patriarchal ideologies that sustain it, whether propounded by family, society or state. Differences notwithstanding, all these authors convincingly demonstrate how rape functions as a form of patriarchal social control for women across countries, cultures and contexts. In other words, seemingly different manifestations of sexual violence are, despite possible cultural and contextual differences, actually undergirded by the same or similar understandings of hegemonic masculinity.

One such text on sexual violence that I routinely use in my syllabi is Liz Kelly’s “Sexual Violence as a Continuum.”<sup>30</sup> Using the concept of a continuum, Kelly blurs the public/private, stranger/intimate, normal/deviant and consensual/coercive divides by linking sexual violence to other more common, everyday aspects of hegemonic male behaviour across cultures. In this she draws from the earlier work of Gilbert and Webster, who had noted that “many rapes

merely extend traditional heterosexual exchanges, in which masculine pursuit and feminine reticence are familiar and formalized. Although rape is a gross exaggeration of gender power, it contains the rules and rituals of heterosexual encounter, seduction and conquest.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus Kelly demonstrates how “typical and aberrant” male behaviours shade into each other so imperceptibly that it becomes impossible to place forms and contexts of gender violence in discrete categories. For instance, sexual harassment experienced by women in the everyday may often be seen by men—and by many women—not as harassment at all but just as “harmless fun.” Yet the intrusive nature of these and other “socially sanctioned” exchanges—whether whistles on the street, unwelcome touching, sexual jokes and innuendoes at the workplace or manifestations of male power and privilege within the home—that define “normal” everyday interactions between women and male-dominated institutions across cultures are only exaggerated in forms of gender violence such as rape, which the law then codes as criminal.

This also suggests that official statistics report only the extreme end of the continuum, whereas a much larger percentage of sexual violence scenarios have to do with situations that were disturbing but were either not culturally decoded as sexual violence (e.g., unwelcome sexual messages picked up from relatives within the family, or use of pressure in intimate relations, including coercive sex) or, while contributing to a generalized climate of fear, disgust and unease, were still culturally normalized as “common male behaviour” and therefore “not serious enough” (e.g., obscene calls, street harassment and flashing). Since these scenarios of sexual violence play out across cultures and contexts, and since its most extreme form—rape—is also widely prevalent across the world, any understanding of sexual violence as stemming from or being condoned by “those other” cultures is purely ethnocentric stereotyping.

Similarities between cultures are even more established when we examine some of the common patriarchal myths surrounding sexual violence, and its victims and perpetrators.<sup>32</sup> Some of these myths are:

1. The women enjoy/want it.
2. They ask for/deserve it.
3. It only happens to certain types of women/in or from certain kinds of backgrounds.
4. The victims tell lies/exaggerate.
5. If they resisted, they could have prevented it.
6. The men who do it are sick, ill, under stress, or out of control.

As Kelly says, these myths create stereotypes about which men commit sexual violence and which women it occurs to, thereby normalizing the violence; pathologizing the offenders and the victims; and resulting in the deflection of responsibility from men and the denial of women’s experience. These deflections of male responsibility and denials of women’s experience through victim blaming and character assassinations of women have cross-cultural

parallels everywhere, which in turn draws from the double standard in most societies and cultures wherein, regardless of the degree of social and sexual permissiveness, the standard is at least slightly stricter for women in that specific society.

Of course, this is not to deny that there may be important cultural and contextual differences, too. Notions of socially appropriate clothing and behaviour vary between social spaces and contexts; what is appropriate dress and conduct for Indian women frequenting discotheques and bars in New Delhi and New York does not hold for most women in and from rural India, and subsequently, what constitutes the patriarchal myth of a woman “having asked for rape” by wearing provocative clothing will differ, too. However, my point is that despite these differences between (as well as within) cultures, *similar if not same* patriarchal ideas pertaining to sexual violence do exist in various forms across cultures and contexts, manifesting in formulations such as: What was she wearing? Who was she with? Why was she out in the street and at what time in the night? Did she resist and what proof is there of the degree of such resistance? If the rapist was known to her and/or was an ex-partner or a husband, was it really rape?

In fact, global feminist work on sexual violence has been grounded in precisely these understandings of the *universality* of sexual violence, and its patriarchal framing by states, societies and citizens. This frame draws from cross-cultural ideas structured around notions of “normal” masculine and feminine behavior, the former read as strong, active, sexually aggressive and rational, and the latter as weak, passive, nurturing and emotional. These ideas then play a large role in what society understands as sexual “violation,” extending even to how many sex offenders may understand and explain away their offences. A good example from among the articles I use in my syllabi is Pauline Fuller’s “Masculinity, Emotion and Sexual Violence,” which examines how a set of sex offenders in Britain explained and justified their acts of sexual violence by blaming their wives’ lack of love, understanding and neglect of household duties.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, just as it would be incorrect to claim that all men in any single culture understand masculinity in similar terms, it would be even more incorrect to make this claim for men across cultures. In another article from my syllabi, on a cultural analysis of American masculinity, Michael Kimmel astutely argues that masculinity and femininity are not static, ahistorical concepts but derive their meaning through particular social, historical, political and economic contexts.<sup>34</sup> As a consequence, important aspects of what it means to “be a man” may well differ within the same culture as well as across cultures at a single point of time, along with transforming over time. Within dominant white American culture, for instance, Kimmel demonstrates how a change in the economic and politico-social environment led to very changed understandings of masculinity, transforming the normative American male from the “genteel patriarch” and “heroic artisan” to the aggressive, competitive and emotionally insensitive “marketplace man.”<sup>35</sup> I would argue that Kimmel’s notion of American “hegemonic masculinity” echoes patriarchal understandings in many societies around the world, just as his notion of alternative masculinity, which encompasses ideas of sensitivity, equality, emotional orientation and so forth, provides a template for a cultural reinterpretation of the past as well as progressive change in the future across cultures.

In other words, developing a complex and nuanced account of patriarchy requires us to be attentive not only to cultural differences but also to cross-cultural similarities. To return to an earlier example, we can better appreciate why it is inaccurate to understand a South Asian woman’s reluctance to step out of a situation of domestic violence by blaming the South Asian cultural notion of fate (*bhagya/kismet*). In the earlier subsection, I argued that alternative understandings do exist within South Asian religions, and that the degree to which notions of fate become important to individual South Asian women has to do with a range of economic, legal, historical, socio-psychological and other factors. In this subsection, I will add that such ideas of fate, destiny and providence occur across *all* religions and cultures, and may form as important a part of a white American Christian woman’s subjective self as much as it would a brown Hindu or Muslim woman’s. The work of a range of feminist activists in different countries and cultural contexts shows that it is hard for any woman to come to terms with a violent relationship regardless of religious beliefs and cultural context. The coping and/or help-seeking strategies differ from woman to woman based on a range of factors, such as her social and financial situation, self-definition of the problem and the accessibility of networks and legal options. However, the decision to leave the relationship is always a very difficult decision in all contexts, made only when all other strategies of resistance, coping and survival fail.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it seems that keeping in mind the normative similarities across cultures, in terms of both the empirical reality of gender violence as well as the common patriarchal myths, ideologies and explanations for it, allows us—whether as teachers or as activists—to develop a far more comprehensive understanding of patriarchy. As a result, we can stop using culture to explain away either the perpetrator’s violence or the victim’s inaction, instead asking more complex questions and framing more resourceful answers. As one author writes:

*A comparative and comprehensive approach requires the study to proceed from many angles and various perspectives [ . . . ] A comparative framework ensures the acknowledgement of the differences and similarities among cultures. Otherwise it is difficult not to be confined by particularism and take as absolute the differences in form and degree. Similarities among cultures are equally significant as differences, and the cultural relativist who is blind to this fact prevents the possibility of reaching a dialogue among cultures and finding universal values.<sup>37</sup>*

## Conclusion

To sum up, this paper has argued that the pervasive framing of South Asian culture(s) as inherently and unchangeably patriarchal positions culture as a negative obstacle rather than a positive resource. With specific reference to gender violence, including sexual violence, this flattened framing of culture creates interesting challenges in the classroom, which are indicative of similar ethnocentric trends in the wider society that must ultimately be counterproductive for feminist activism. Hence I have tried to demonstrate how a more nuanced pedagogical approach to theorizing culture may offer insights for South Asian feminist anti-violence activism.

The practical usefulness of this theoretical approach to culture for tackling violence faced by South Asian women in the United States can be summarized in the following points:

- Culture is not static, monolithic or homogenous. Culture is spatio-temporally produced as a consequence of a complex intersection between specific histories, politics and power.
- A “single” culture always consists of a repertoire of ideas and a diversity of practices that are continually changing because of contestations and contradictions among them, or because of an adoption of new ideas that may in turn signal a corresponding change in the material and symbolic circumstances of a society. A culture is thus always marked both by continuity and by change, and cultural identity becomes a matter of self positioning.
- Since religion is an important part of culture, and in order to demonstrate how South Asian cultures may well afford several different interpretations, I have used the example of Hinduism. Being attentive to not just hegemonic understandings of Hinduism but also pointing out a range of alternative progressive understandings and interpretations, I have shown how, for instance, the cultural principle of female consent can be a powerful indictment against rape; the idea of the *ardhangini* can provide a cultural space within which to ground a critique of domestic violence in general and marital rape in particular; and positive female role models such as Durga, Kali and *shakti* can be used to motivate women to take strong action against the wrongs done to them. In other words, alternative ideas and images that are resistant to dominant patriarchal forms of knowledge already exist within the annals of culture, and can be used as resources to counter gender and sexual violence. Thus building alliances with progressive South Asian faith-based institutions as well as feminist scholars of South Asian religions would be a step in the right direction.

- Culture as a whole changes over time. Yet the complex and exilic nature of immigrant experience often frames the “homeland” in timeless, romanticized terms, making women serve as the upholders of culture. To ensure that the racial-patriarchal double burden carried by immigrant women does not result in feelings of treachery or betrayal to their family, community and culture if they report violence, the association between culture and “homeland” must be productively reworked. I have used the example of legal and popular cultural understandings of rape in India to demonstrate how “homelands” are changing, too, a change that is marked by complex continuities, shifts and ruptures in culture.
- Along with a comprehensive knowledge of the legal situation in the United States, being aware of advances in legal understandings of gender violence in South Asian countries will be an additional asset for US-based South Asian anti-domestic violence activism. This knowledge helps us understand and convey to South Asian victims of violence—especially those that may have migrated from rural areas, conservative backgrounds and/or in earlier decades when laws were different—how the “homeland” is changing, thus helping victims of violence to negotiate what otherwise might seem like a gaping divide between “us and them.” More importantly, it drives home the point that respect for a woman’s bodily integrity is a universal human rights principle, and that violence cannot be tolerated under any circumstance.
- Apart from a diversity of ideas and practices within the same culture, there are also several similarities across seemingly “different” cultures. Thus statistical evidence points to the widespread incidence of gender violence across the world. Within the United States, gender violence is not limited to any one group but occurs across race, class, religion and cultural contexts. The same logic also applies to sexual violence; the fact that rape occurs across countries and cultural contexts despite differences in dominant cultural norms and beliefs about sexuality, and despite the degree of sexual permissiveness, proves that rape is neither about cultural beliefs nor about sexual desire but about a brutal exercise of power that draws from cross-cultural patriarchal understandings of male privilege.
- A bulk of global feminist work on sexual violence has been grounded in precisely these understandings of the universality of sexual violence, and its patriarchal framing by state, society and citizens. One such feminist author that my syllabus draws significantly from is Liz Kelly, whose work on sexual violence as a continuum blurs the conventional public/private, stranger/intimate, normal/deviant and consensual/coercive divides in common understandings of rape. Instead, Kelly’s analysis links sexual violence with other more common, everyday aspects of hegemonic male behaviour to reveal the sexual intrusion, intimidation and aggression underlying many interactions that women and men have been socialized to view as “normal” across cultures.
- Similarities between cultures are even more strongly established when we examine popular patriarchal myths and stereotypes about which men commit sexual violence and the women to whom it occurs. By denying the violence, normalizing it or pathologizing

the offender and the abused woman through victim blaming and character assassinations of women, these stereotypes result in the deflection of responsibility from men and the denial of women's experience.

- In other words, developing a comprehensive account of patriarchy requires us to be attentive not only to cultural differences but also to cross-cultural similarities so that we do not use culture to explain away either the perpetrator's violence or the victim's inaction. As an example, I have explained why it is problematic to blame the religious/cultural notion of fate (*bhagya* or *kismet*) to explain away a South Asian woman's reluctance to step out of a violent marriage.
- Thus a dynamic and constructive approach to culture provides a resource for our work on gender and sexual violence. By firmly grounding activist efforts in those ideas, images and (re)interpretations of culture that are gender-equal, and by establishing a creative and seamless dialogue between cultures, this approach opens up greater possibilities for progressive social change.

## Notes

1. Debotri Dhar, "Women, Culture, Society." (Rutgers University, Fall 2009) Course syllabus.
2. Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," in *Women, Culture, Society: A Reader*, ed. Barbara Balliet (Iowa: Kendall, 2002), 60–73.
3. Malvika Karlekar, "Domestic Violence," in *Women's Studies in India*, ed. Mary E. John (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), 241–9.
4. Ismat Chughtai, "Tiny's Granny," in *Truth Tales: Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of India* (New York: Feminist Press, 1990), 146–159.
5. Narayan, 61.
6. Karlekar, 241.
7. Ibid, 242.
8. Karlekar, 243–4.
9. Chughtai, 146.
10. Emile Durkheim, *Education & Sociology* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956).
11. For a discussion on the Open Systems Approach, see for instance Jeanne H. Ballantine, *The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 16–22. Also see Robert G. Burgess, *Sociology, Education and Schools: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education* (London: Batsford, 1986), 159–62.
12. See for instance Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); and Rada Ivekovic and Julie Mostov, *From Gender to Nation* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002).
13. Michael W. Apple, 'What Postmodernists Forget: Cultural Capital and Official Knowledge,' in *Education: Culture, Economy, Society*, eds. A. H. Halsey, Hugh Lauder, Phillip Brown and Amy Stuart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 595–604; and Lawrence Stenhouse, *Culture & Education* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 57. Also see Michael F.D. Young, *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971).
14. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Feminisms*, eds. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 91-6.
15. Benson R. Snyder, *The Hidden Curriculum* (New York: Knopf, 1971); and David H. Hargreaves, 'Power and the Paracurriculum,' in *Power and the Curriculum: Issues in Curriculum Studies* ed. Colin Richards (Driffield: Nafferton, 1978).
16. Michel Foucault, 'The Eye of Power,' in *Power/Knowledge* ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1977).
17. Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11.
18. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 110.

19. Hall, p. 110–11.
20. Hall, 112.
21. Hall, 113.
22. Sudhir Kakar, “Feminine Identity in India,” in *Women in Indian Society: A Reader*, ed. Rehana Ghadially (New Delhi: Sage, 1988).
23. Emily Kearns, “Indian Myth,” in *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*, ed. Carolyne Larrington (London: Pandora, 1992), 189.
24. Ibid, 46–7.
25. Vasudha Narayanan, ‘Hindu Perceptions of Auspiciousness and Sexuality,’ in *Women, Religion and Sexuality: Studies on the Impact of Religious Teachings on Women* ed. Jeanne Becher (World Council of Churches, 1991).
26. Fatmagul Berkday, *Women and Religion* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1998).
27. Berkday, 3.
28. Purna Sen, “‘Crimes of Honour,’ Value and Meaning,’ in *Honour: Crimes, Paradigms and Violence Against Women*, eds. Lynn Wechman and Sara Hossain (London: Zed, 2005). Sen suggests that crimes of honor have six key features: gender relations that control women’s behaviors, shaping and controlling women’s sexuality in particular; the role of women in policing and monitoring women’s behavior; collective decisions regarding punishment, or in upholding the actions considered appropriate, for transgressions of these boundaries; the potential for women’s participation in killings; the ability to reclaim honor through enforced compliance or killings; and state sanction of such killings through recognition of honor as motivation and mitigation.
29. Sen, 50.
30. Liz Kelly, ‘The Continuum of Sexual Violence,’ in *Women, Violence and Social Control*, eds. Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard (NJ: Humanities Press, 1987).
31. Quoted in Kelly, 50.
32. Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 35–6.
33. Pauline Fuller, “Masculinity, Emotion and Sexual Violence,” in *Gender Relations in Public and Private: New Research Perspectives*, eds. Lydia Morris and E. Stina Lyon (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).
34. Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” in *Women, Culture, Society; A Reader*, ed. Barbara Balliet (Iowa: Kendall, 2002), 32–44.
35. Kimmel, 34.
36. Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, 182.
37. Berkday, 11.

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