Work, Culture and Politics:
The Historical Meanings of Work

Lecture Course open to 2nd and 4th semester MA and MPhil students

Course Instructor: Janaki Nair

Readings:

Students are required to complete AT LEAST TWO of the recommended readings before the class each week.

Two tutorials (25 percent each, 1 grade point, MA, half grade point MPhil each) and one end of term examination (50 per cent, MA or 2 grade points; one grade point for MPhil).

Course Description

This course will explore the historical meanings of work, as they have changed over the last two centuries, since the beginning of industrial capitalism. Moving away from labour history’s earlier focus on the workplace and moments of collective action, the course will turn to changing ideas about a “work ethic” and “rationalized” leisure, formality and informality, time-discipline and “horseplay”, co-operation and trust, antagonism and struggle, or even questions of attention and distraction that have marked the industrial and post industrial age. In order to address such themes, the course will go beyond the workplace and neighbourhood/home, thus far the classic sites of labour history, to the fields of law, religiosity, language, and visual/performative representations of work/workers. As such, while many readings will relate to the Indian experience, discussions and insights from other locations will be a large part of this course.

1. From Labour History to a History of Work


Joan W. Scott “The "Class" We Have Lost” International Labor and Working-Class History, No. 57 (Spring, 2000), pp. 69-75

Marcel van der Linden “The "Globalization” of Labor and Working-Class History and Its Consequences” International Labor and Working-Class History, No. 65, Agriculture and Working-Class Formation (Spring, 2004), pp. 136-156.
2. **Industrial Bodies and Work Ethics**


3. **Skill as “property” and the capacity to labour**


4. **The work of Religion**


5. **Coercion and/or contract**


6. **Intersections: Beyond Production**

David Levine “Punctuated Equilibrium: The Modernization of the Proletarian Family in the Age of Ascendant Capitalism” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 39 (Spring, 1991), pp. 3-20


7. **The Stigma of Work**


8. **The Strike as Weapon**


9. **Languages of Law**


10. Informality and formality


11. Spaces of work


12. Domestic Work

Carolyn Steedman ” Social History

Karen Tranberg Hansen “Body Politics: Sexuality, Gender, and Domestic Service in Zambia” Journal of Women’s History, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1990, pp. 120-142.

Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum “ Cultures of Servitude” : Modernity, Domesticity and Class in India” Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 1-64.

13. Working and Leisure


14 “Representing labour”


15. Work as enchantment, liberation, resistance


General Readings

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, Rethinking Working Class History (Princeton, 1989): 65-154

Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan, The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in Colonial India (Cambridge 1994) 72-123; 168-238.


Joshi, Chitra, Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories (Permanent Black 2003): 100-176; 208-236

Moodie, Dunbar Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration (Berkeley, 1994) 44-179


Sen, Samita, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge 1999) 89-176


Tutorial Topics:

Tutorial One:

1. How has the question of freedom/unfreedom been rethought by labour and working class historians in the last two decades?

2. What is the place of religion in more recent understandings of work/work ethic/working class action? Discuss with reference to India.

Tutorial Two:

3. The law has been vital to the protection of working class rights in the workplace, and plays more than just a regulatory role. Discuss with reference to India/England.

4. How have concerns about non-work sites/processes reconfigured the history of work? Discuss with reference to India/Southern Africa.