

Gender and Religion in Post-Colonial South Asia (1947-2020)
(MDES GU4840)
Spring 2020

Tahira Khan

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Course Time: Wed: 2:10-4:00

Location: Knox Hall # 112

Office Hours: Wed: 12:00-2:00

Location: Knox Hall # 214

Course Description

This course will examine various roles that a religion can play in shaping its believers' socio-cultural and political identities on the basis of their natural/social differences i.e. sex and gender. An attempt will be made to search for historical explanations of gendered identities and social anxieties in the context of various religious beliefs of communities living in the South Asian region. Following a series of historical events combined with theoretical approaches which had emerged after the departure of the colonial rulers, this course will explore the following themes; (a) role of religion in construction of post colonial state and question of gender; (b) formation of state policies and challenges of existing realities; (c) representation or absence of women in post colonial political institutions;

The central argument of the course is that, for historical understanding of a set of beliefs and practices regarding gender relations and women's status in any religious group, one needs to examine the historical context and socio-economic basis of that particular religion. By using the notion of gender, class and historical feminist discourses as tools of analysis, this course intends to understand and explain existing perceptions, misperceptions, myths and realities regarding gender relations and South Asian women's situations in the colonial past which has shaped their post colonial present. It is crucial to understand Intersectionality of institutions of authority such as, patriarchal state and controlling religious beliefs that have shaped and continue to reshape "womanhood" in South Asia. In this context, it is necessary to examine how women have challenged, questioned and resisted their subservient status through confrontation, reinterpretation and negotiation in the world of academia and media. This course revolves around a few major questions;

- How have the texts and re-interpretations constructed Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist femininity and masculinity?
- How have post-colonial states and communities applied religious texts to control women's body and sexuality?
- How have the institutions of authority kept alive customs and traditions of veiling, segregation, family honor, sexual "purity" etc.?
- How have the colonial and post-colonial politics affected women's mobility and space in public and private?
- How can historical re-reading of the religious texts challenge the role of patriarchy and misogyny in the South Asian politics, culture and education?

It is expected that this course will enable students to (a) understand the main assumptions of gender and feminist theories and their importance in the study of history of religion; (b) acquire knowledge of the historical contexts, textual teachings and actual practices related to gender and women's lives in South Asia; (c) analyze existing situations and current practices regarding gender issues in these regions; and (d) compare various scholarly inquiries, feminist discourses and conforming/confronting voices of South Asian women emerging in the regional and global contexts.

Grading and Evaluation

This course is based on weekly class which will involve scheduled and unscheduled discussions, debates and presentations. Students are expected to read the assigned chapters/articles **before** coming to class. Everyone is required to participate in discussions. The course evaluation and grading will be based on;

- **Class attendance and participation: 15%**

Attendance in class is **mandatory**. Only legitimate excuses supported by evidence will be entertained. Missed classes without prior notice and legitimate reason will result in grade deduction.

Class participation. A seminar course requires students to be keen readers and active participants in discussion. Your participation is required in each class. Discussion should be mainly based on weekly readings. Actively take notes on the chapters/articles while you are reading. Spend a few minutes after reading to come up with some questions or comments about the text and write them down. You are expected to share your analysis and comments related to the weekly topics and reading material. While participating in class discussion, please mention **title, name and page number** of the reading. Your participation is expected in the form of *synthesis* of assigned weekly readings, *critique* of content, and at least one *question*, related to the content or your personal observation/experience. A few tips for good participation; (a) raise a question, (b) answer a question raised by someone else, (c) identify a term or a paragraph which you don't understand, (d) mention a statement you don't agree with, (e) agree or disagree with an argument in the text, (f) sharing your personal observations about the topic under discussion.

Note: To ensure a productive class environment, at the minimum I hope that you will **(a) Remember to turn off your cell phones; (b) Make sure to keep your laptops in your bags.** Both of these gadgets become very distracting for everyone especially in a seminar class.

- **In-class weekly presentation: 15%**

Every week, two students will be assigned to make a short individual presentation based on the required weekly readings and lead discussion. Here are a few tips for preparation of individual presentation. While completing your assigned weekly readings, you should keep in mind following questions;

- (a) What is the central theme/assumption the author is making?
- (b) What position the author is taking about the issue under discussion, i.e. conforming, challenging, confronting?
- (c) What kind of support material and historical sources are used?
- (d) How do you evaluate or critique author's argument regarding issues of gender, women and Islam?

- (e) Which aspect/argument of the author you don't agree or you find it provocative or highly controversial? Or,
- (f) Which aspect/argument of the author you find convincing?

Format of Presentation

- Each presenter will get 30 minutes.
- Presentation can be made on power point. Related to the assigned readings, may include pictures, videos clips, or other material.
- Each presenter will bring handouts which consist of the main points of the reading material, summary of critical analysis and at least 2 questions posed to classmates.
- The assessment of presentation will be based on the volume of discussion and dialogue it generates and involves the whole class.
- Each presenter is expected to be innovative and creative to present the material in a novel way i.e. interactive session, creating a puzzle, showing a video clip/pic and connecting it to the topic.

Criteria for Evaluation of Presentation

- Does the presentation identify core issues discussed by authors?
- Does the presentation synthesize the main arguments?
- Does the presenter raise probing and challenging questions?
- How much the presentation draws discussion by the classmates?

- **Response paper 1: 15%**

Analytical response to the readings of week 2-6.

Length of paper:

5-6 pages, typed, double spaced with documentation in APA style

Due date: 02/26

- **Response paper 2: 15%**

Analytical response to the readings of week 7-11

Due date: 04/08

Criteria for response paper as mentioned above.

- **Final Research Paper: 40%**

Topic will be decided by each student according to his/her own area of interest. An initial outline and topic of the paper should be sent to me via email by March 25th. If you need to discuss your topic or research questions, see me during the office hours or by appointment besides office hours.

Page Limit: 12-14 pages

Due date: May 8

Note: Research paper can be submitted via email in PDF form on the due date. Late submission will automatically deduct 10% of your grade. The paper must be clearly and logically presented, grammatically accurate and free from typing errors.

- **Grade Scale**

A+ (97-100%)	A (94-96%)	A- (90-93%)
B+ (87-93%)	B (84-86%)	B- (80-83%)
C+ (77-79%)	C (74-76%)	C- (70-73%)
F (0-69%)		

Academic Integrity

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity. Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited and documented.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent. Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breath of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia. For more information on academic integrity at Columbia, students may refer to the Columbia University Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity; <http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

Special needs

If you have any special need or circumstances that I, and/or fellow students should be aware of, please do come to talk to me in the first week of class. I am keen to support in any way that I can. For more details about Columbia University's disability service for rights and responsibilities of students and instructors, click on this link.

[Information on Disability Services](#)

Weekly Readings

Articles/Chapters and links to e-copy will be available in weekly folders on canvas

Week 1. 01/22

Introduction

- Getting to know: Personal and course introduction
- Let's know what we know and what we want to know

Week 2. 01/29

Gender approaches and historical overview of South Asian Religions

- Linda Woodhead, "Gender Differences in Religious Practice and Significance" https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_TGS_027_0033--gender-differences-in-religious-practice.htm (Available on Google Scholar)
- Katarzyna Leszczyńska & Katarzyna Zielińska, "Gender in Religion? Religion in gender? Commentary and research on gender and religion." (Available on Columbia e-link)

- Orit A. Vishal, Afshan Jafar & Rachel Rinaldo, “A Gender Lens on Religion.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Alberta Giorgi, “Gender, Religion, and Political Agency: Mapping the Field.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Morny Joy, “Gender and Religion: A Volatile Mixture. (available on Columbia e-link)

Recommended reading

- Ursula King, “A Question of Identity: Women Scholars and the Study of Religion” in Ursula King (ed) *Religion and Gender* (1995) Blackwell: Oxford

Week 3. 02/05

Understanding Gender in the Religious Texts: Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism

- Nitya Pandey, Vaishali Anil, Nikita Lamba, “Gender dynamics in Islam: Transcending misogyny and politics of exclusion.”
https://www.academia.edu/10483529/Gender_dynamics_in_Islam_Transcending_misogyny_and_politics_of_exclusion
- Tanika Sarkar(2001) “Aspects of Contemporary Hindutva Theology: The Voice of Sadhvi Rithambhara” (Ch.9) in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* Bloomington IN: Permanent Black. [selections] (available in Week 3 folder)
- Tanika Sarkar, “Women, Community and Nation: A Historical Trajectory in Hindu Identity Politics” in Jaffery and Basu (1998) *Appropriating Gender: Women’s Activism and Politicised Religion in South Asia*. Routledge: New York (in Week 3 folder)
- Kamala Liyanage, “Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism/‘Fundamentalism’ and Its Impact on Gendered Political Participation in Sri Lanka” in *Religious Fundamentalisms and Their Gendered Impacts in Asia* Claudia Derichs and Andrea Fleschenberg (eds.) (available in Week 3 folder)
- Parveen Kaur and Arif Jawaid Moghal, “Lotus in the Pond: The Symbolization of Women in Sikhism.” (available on Columbia e-link)

Week 4. 02/12

Post Colonial Nation-State and Society: Religious vs. Secular

- Chatterjee, Partha, “The nationalist resolution of the women's question”. In *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*. (Ch. 6) Columbia University Press. New York: 2010 Columbia (e-version) [eBook Comprehensive Academic Collection - North America](#)
- Giorgio Shani, “4 Specters of Partition: Religious Nationalism in Postcolonial South Asia” in Jeff Kingston (ed) *Asian Nationalism Reconsidered* Routledge: Abington 2015 (available on google)
- Amrita Chhachhi, “The State, Religious Fundamentalism and Women – Trends in South Asia.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Namrata Ganneri, “Perspectives on Women and Communal Politics in South Asia.” (Available on Columbia e-link)
- Ritu Menon, “Reproducing the Legitimate Community: Secularity, Sexuality and the State in Post Partition India” in Jaffery and Basu (1998) *Appropriating Gender:*

Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia. Routledge: New York (in Week 4 folder)

Week 5. 02/19

Understanding Religious “Womanhood” in Indian State

- Zoya Hasan, “Gender, Religion and Democratic Politics in India.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi “Hindu Nationalism and the Political role of Hindu Women: Ideology as a Factor” *South Asian Studies A Research Journal of South Asian Studies Vol. 28, No. 1, January – June 2013, pp.39-54*
- Sharmila Rege, “A Dalit Feminist Standpoint.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Harel-Shalev, Ayelet, “Gendering ethnic conflicts: minority women in divided societies – the case of Muslim women in In India.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Julie Thekkudan, Church, State and women in India: Gender discourses in the Christian community, Chapter 2 and 3: pp 53-109. (available on Columbia e-link)
- Harijit K. Arora, “Sikhism and Status of women.” (Available on Columbia e-link)

Week 6. 02/26

Gender & Public/Private Space in Islam: Case studies from Pakistan and Bangladesh

- Shelley Feldman, “(Re)presenting Islam: Manipulating Gender, Shifting State Practices and Class Frustration in Bangladesh.” In Jaffery and Basu (1998) *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. Routledge: New York (in Week 4 folder)
- Sultana Kamal, “Law for Muslim Women in Bangladesh.” (available on Columbia e-links)
- Almas Zakiuddin, “Gender, religion and the ‘developmentalization’ of male Muslim imams in Bangladesh.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Maleeha Aslam, “Islamism and Masculinity: Case Study Pakistan.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Shahnaz Rouse, “Women, Religion and the State.” (available on Columbia e-link)
- Farida Shaheed. “The Other Side of the Discourse: Women's Experience of Identity, Religion and Activism in Pakistan” in Jaffery and Basu (1998) *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. Routledge: New York (in Week 6 folder)

Response Paper 1 due

Week 7. 03/04

Gender & Public/Private Space: Role of Class, Caste and religion

- Watch Movies “Water” - “Earth - “Khuda Ke Liaye” and “Bol.” Write a comparative review. It will be shared and discussed in class.

Week 8. 03/11

Gender, Buddhism and State Politics in Sri Lanka

- Kamala Liyanage, “Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism ‘Fundamentalism’ and its Impact on Gendered Political Participation in Sri Lanka.” (Available on Columbia e-link)
- Malathi De Alwis, “The changing role of women in Sri Lankan society” (Columbia e-links)
- Rita M. Gross, Comparative review article on Buddhist nuns and their role. Project Muse. (Columbia e-links)
- Elizabeth J. Harris, “Reclaiming the Sacred: Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka.” (Columbia e-link)
- Malathi De Alwis, “Motherhood as a Space to Protest: Women’s Political Participation in Contemporary Sri Lanka” in Jaffery and Basu (1998) *Appropriating Gender: Women’s Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. Routledge: New York (in Week 8 folder)

Spring Break: 03/16-03/20

Week 9. 03/25

Gender, State & Culture: Legal, Political & Social Challenges

(Research paper outline presentation)

- Ayesha Jalal, “The Convenience of Subservience: Women and State of Pakistan.” Ch. 4. In Deniz Kandiyoti (ed) (1991) *Women, Islam and the State*. London: Macmillan.
- Naila Kabeer, “The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh.” Ch. 5. In Deniz Kandiyoti (ed) (1991) *Women, Islam and the State*. London: Macmillan.
- Nazia Hussein, “Bangladeshi New women’s ‘Smart’ Dressing: Negotiating Class, Culture and Religion.” (Columbia e-link)
- Manuela Ciotti, “Dalit Women Between Social and Analytical Alterity.” (Columbia e-link)
- DS Madjidian, Haj Bras “Family, Gender and women’s nutritional status: a comparison between two Himalayan communities in Nepal.” (Columbia e-link)

Week 10. 04/01

Gender of *Conforming* Voices: Religio-political Activism Since 1970s

- Maimuna Huq, “Talking Jihad and piety: reformist exertions among Islamist women in Bangladesh.” Ch. 10. In Omnia El Shakry (ed). (2016). *Gender and Sexuality in Islam* New York: Routledge. (in Week 10 folder)
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2043393
- Khanum Shaikh, [Gender, Religious Agency, and the Subject of Al-Huda International Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism](#), 2013, ISSN: 1536-6936, Volume 11, Issue 2, p. 62 [Full Text Available](#)
- Nandita Banerji Dhawan, “From Fire-Brand to ‘water-brand’: The Cast Politics of Uma Bharati.” (Available on Columbia e-link)

- Yoshiko Ashiwa, “The Revival of Nun Ordination of the Theravada Tradition in Sri Lanka: A Landscape of the Culture in the Contemporary World” In Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies, 1/1/2015, ISSN: 0073-280X, Volume 46, Issue 1, [Full Text Available](#)
- Rekha Pande, “Married to God-The Jogin System in India” Pakistan Journal of Women’s Studies: Alam-e-Niswan Vol. 25, No.2, 2018, pp.19-35, ISSN: 1024-1256 (on Columbia e-links)

Week 11. 04/08

Gender of *Challenging* Voices: Women Claiming space through re-interpretation of religious texts

Barlas, Wadudu, Sadaawi, Nevidta’s video,

- Documentaries and analytical articles by defying and non-conforming women from these countries will be available in Week 11 folder on courseworks
India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka

Response Paper 2 due

Week 12. 04/15

Gender, women and Religious Activism in South Asian Politics

- Amrita Basu, “Hindu Women’s Activism in India and Questions it Raises” in Jaffery and Basu (1998) *Appropriating Gender: Women’s Activism and Politicised Religion in South Asia*. Routledge: New York (in Week 12 folder)
- Tanika Sarkar (2001) “Aspects of Contemporary Hindutva Theology: The Voice of Sadhvi Rithambhara” (Ch.9) in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* Bloomington IN: Permanent Black. [selections] (available in Week 3 folder)
- Anita Weis, “Competing visions of women's rights in Pakistan: state, civil society and Islamist groups” (Columbia e-link)
- Radhika Govinda, 'Didi, are you Hindu?' Politics of Secularism in Women's Activism in India: Case-study of a grassroots women's organization in rural Uttar Pradesh” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (MARCH 2013), pp. 612-651
- Role of women in LTTE war in Sri Lanka (Chapters in Week 12 folder)
- Tahmina Rashid, “Radical Islamic Movements: Gender Construction in Jamaat-i-Islami and Tabligh-i-Jamaat in Pakistan.”

Week 13. 04/22

- In-class documentary watching (two questions will be given to write a review right after the show) It will add extra credits to your grade

Week 14. 04/29

**Sharing is Learning
Research Paper presentation**

