

GENDER AND ISLAM: THEORY AND PRACTICE
WINTER 2008
(INTS 4877)

Tahira Khan
 Winter Quarter 2008
 Thursday: 6-9:00 pm
 Office Hours: Wednesday 10:30-12:00 Noon.
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Course Description

This course focuses on the role that every religion plays in shaping its followers' social identities (gender) on the basis of their physical differences (sex). The central argument of the course is that to understand a set of beliefs and practices of any religious group, one needs to examine the historical context and philosophical basis of that particular religion. Further, one needs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the tools of analysis that will be applied when attempting to comprehend the nature of various religious practices. In this course, the theoretical tool of analysis is GENDER and the case study of a religion is ISLAM. As an example of the socio-political and geographical importance of study of Islam, there are over one billion Muslims living in more than 87 countries throughout the world, and 57 of these are Muslim states.

This course begins with a discussion and explanation of the concept of gender/feminism as a tool of analysis, the importance of feminist analysis of religion and an introduction to Islam and its historical context. It further attempts to provide knowledge about male and female roles, rights and relations in the major texts, traditions and historical sources such as the Quran, Hadith, Sunnah and Shariah. This course revolves around three major questions: What does Islam say about the roles, rights and responsibilities of Muslim women and men in its texts and teachings? How have Muslim states and communities applied original texts and early teachings while determining gender roles, rights and responsibilities over time? Why do many contradictions and variations exist in the application of the texts and teachings of Islam regarding women/gender issues across the Muslim world today?

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 religion; (b) acquire knowledge of the historical context and textual teachings of Islam regarding gender issues; (b) to analyze existing situations and current practices regarding gender issues among Muslim communities; and (c) compare various feminist discourses and dissident voices of Muslim women emerging at regional and local levels.

Text Books and Readings

Required Books

1. Nigosian, S. A. *Islam: Its History, Teaching, and Practices* (Bloomington: India University Press) 2004
2. Anwar, Etin, *Gender and self in Islam* (New York: Routledge) 2006
3. Ali, Kecia, *Sexual Ethics & Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld) 2006

4. Bodman, Herbert L. and Nayereh Tohidi, *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner) 1998
5. Wadud, Amina, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1998

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Class participation and presentation: 30%**
Students are expected to read all the assigned readings before coming to class and participate in the discussion related to the weekly topics. General class participation can be in the form of *questions, comments and concerns*. Besides, every week, one student will be asked to make a short presentation based on the required weekly readings and lead discussion for at least one hour. Class discussion will be based on two or more questions, which should be sent to me one day before this class. Please bring copies of the main points and synthesis of the readings and questions for everyone on the day of your presentation. One presentation and regular participation by each student throughout the course will account for 30% of the grade.
- **Short Research Paper One: 20%**
This paper is required to focus on one or two issues related to gender which have been discussed in the text and traditional sources of Islam (i.e. *marriage institution or veiling* mentioned in the Quran, Hadith or Tafsir).
Due date: January 31, 2008
- **Short Research Paper Two: 20%**
This paper is required to focus on the study of existing situation, problems and issues of Muslim women in one particular country in the light of your understanding of one particular gender issue discussed in the paper one. In simple words, this paper invites you to apply your textual knowledge of a particular gender issue on the present conditions/problems/challenges which Muslim women face today.
Due Date: February 28, 2007
- **Take Home Exam: 30%**

Note:

If due to unavoidable circumstances you have to be absent in the class, you need to turn in a summary and critical overview of the assigned reading material for that week. Otherwise, it would affect your attendance and class participation grade percentage.

NO LAPTOPS AND CELLPHONES IN THIS CLASS PLEASE !!!!!

Weekly Topics and Readings

Week One

Introduction to history, terms and concepts related to gender and Islam.

What do we know?

What do we want to know?

- Defining Gender concepts, terms and theory

- Knowing Islam

Week Two

Understanding Gender approaches and historical background of Islam

Readings

King, Ursula, *Gender and Religion*, Introduction and chapter 1

Anwar, Introduction

Nigosian, Introduction, Chapter 1, 2, 3

Recommended reading

Lewis, Bernard, "Defining Islam" (chapter 1) in *The Crisis of Islam*, New York, The Modern Library, 2003 (pp. 3-28) on Ereserve.