RELG 333: Sex, Gender and Religion
Honors College CourseSpring 2013MW 3:55-5:10 Humanities Classroom 314

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How do religious ideologies determine social behaviors and norms, such as gender? How are those norms lived out, reinforced, and subverted in practice? This course examines issues of women and gender in religion, with a focus on two religious traditions: Christianity and Hinduism. Themes explored include the construction of male and female roles in ancient religious texts; feminist criticisms of religion and feminist theology; goddess traditions; religious gender transformations; and the uses of gendered imagery and language in contemporary religious discourse.

We begin the semester with discussions of what it means to study issues of women and gender as part of the broader discipline of the academic study of religion, and clarify for ourselves the relevant vocabulary of sex, gender, feminism, masculinity, patriarchy, etc. We then spend the first few weeks looking at gender-critical scholarly approaches to the Christian tradition. This includes a range of approaches, from feminist historiography of early and medieval Christianity to feminist interpretations of the Bible and radical, even post-Christian, propositions for a more female-inclusive Christian theology and vision.

The second half of the semester focuses on the place of women and gender issues in the Hindu religious traditions of India. No previous study of Hinduism is assumed; students will acquire the relevant background knowledge as we learn about the gender roles and norms of classical Hinduism, the Hindu goddess tradition and its relevance for women, gender crossings in Hindu devotional traditions, the use of feminine imagery in Indian nationalist politics, and the power of storytelling to shape people’s lives – whether rural Indian women in the late 20th century, or audiences of the great Sanskrit epics in the first millennium CE.

**Learning Outcomes**

This course will familiarize students with the study of religion as an academic discipline, and with women and gender studies as an analytical lens through which one can examine a range of human phenomena. Students will gain the competence and the vocabulary for discussing and comparing the two religious traditions studied in this course, Christianity and Hinduism. Together we practice the close critical reading of both primary and secondary sources, and hone our critical thinking and presentation skills through class discussion and short writing assignments.
Requirements

- Participation, including regular class attendance, participation in class discussion, and weekly Blackboard postings: 25%
- Three short papers in the course of the semester (25% each) = 75%

Participation. I expect active participation every day of class. Your contributions in class should reflect careful and thoughtful reading the assigned materials, and active engagement with the ideas.

Starting in the second week of the class, you will post on Blackboard each week a short analysis (1-3 paragraphs) of some aspect of the readings – either discussing a particular passage or theme from the readings, or raising critical questions about them. Half of the class will post by 9pm the Sunday night before every Monday class; the other half will post by 9pm the Tuesday before Wednesday’s class. All students are expected to read the postings before class. The students who have posted for a given class may be asked to share an observation or a question about the material as part of class discussion.

If you experience any difficulties with the class, please come speak with me as soon as you recognize them. If, for example, you are anxious about speaking in class, we can talk about ways for you to minimize your anxiety while finding ways to participate.

Short papers. These will be 4-6 pages in length and are due via email (stuartmj@sc.edu) by 5pm on the days when they are due: 2/21, 3/28, and 4/25. Prompts/topics for the papers will be provided at least two weeks before the deadline. There is no final paper and no final exam.

Writing is an important aspect of this course. We will discuss some element of strong writing in class before and after each paper, and each paper will be returned with detailed feedback on ways to further improve.

Grading Scale
100-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-80 B; 7977 C+; 7670 C; 6967 D+; 6660 D; 59 and below F

Course Materials

Required readings:
- Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women
- William Buck, Ramayana
- Rabindranath Tagore, The Home and the World
- Ann Gold and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India

All other readings are accessible as e-readings on Blackboard (BB)
Course Policies

Academic Integrity
The University of South Carolina has clearly articulated its policies governing academic integrity and students are encouraged to carefully review the policy on the Honor Code in the Carolina Community. Any deviation from these expectations will result in academic penalties as well as disciplinary action. The area of greatest potential risk for inadvertent academic dishonesty is plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, paraphrasing or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement.

Attendance
Prompt and regular attendance is crucial for success in the course. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. We will follow the university’s policy regarding attendance and the effect of unexcused absences on a student's course grade. If you are absent for an excusable reason, be sure to present the needed documentation to the instructor immediately upon your return (e.g., if you are absent for a legitimate medical reason, bring a doctor's note as soon as you come back to class). The University attendance policy specifies that students may miss up to 3 class meetings (10% of class time) without penalty. The 4th absence will result in a grade penalty of one letter grade for your class participation grade. The 5th absence will result in a deduction of 2 letter grades; and so on.

Classroom Conduct
All cell phones are to be turned off or silenced during class; there is no text messaging, web browsing, etc., during class. Please come to class on time, and be respectful of everyone else in the class. Refrain from personal attacks or demeaning comments of any kind. Disrespectful or disruptive behavior, such as talking out of turn, may result in dismissal from class and/or an academic penalty.

Accommodating Disabilities
Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Office of Student Disability Services: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Student Disability Services.
Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction

1/13 (M) Studying Religion through the Lens of Gender/Women’s Studies
  • Rita Gross, “Defining Feminist, Religion, and the Study of Religion” (BB)

1/15 (W) Sex and Gender: Defining Our Vocabulary
  • Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (BB)

PART I: FOCUS ON THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Week 2: Feminist Biblical Interpretation

1/20 (M) MLK Day -no classes

1/22 (W) Retrieving Women’s Contributions to Christian History
  • Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, Ch. 1: “Toward a Feminist Critical Hermeneutics,” pp. 3-36 (BB)

Week 3: Radical Christian (or Post-Christian) feminist theology

1/27 (M) Beyond God the Father: Challenging Judeo-Christian God-Language
  • Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, Ch. 1: “After the Death of God the Father” (BB)

1/29 Return of the Goddess
  • Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Return of the Goddess” (BB)
  • Carol Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess” (BB)

Week 4: Women in Early Christianity

2/3 (M) Women and Gender Issues in the Jesus Movement
  • Mary Rose D’Angelo, “(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospels,” pp. 129-49 (BB)
  • Matthew 1-2, 27-28; Mark 5, 15-16; Luke 1-3, 10:38-42, 24; John 2, 4, 11:1-12:8, 19-20
  • The Gospel according to Mary (http://www.gnosis.org/library/marygosp.htm)
  • The Gospel of Philip, selections (http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~sshoemak/426/texts/gospel_of_philip.htm)
  • Mary Rose D’Angelo, “Reconstructing ‘Real’ Women in Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene,” pp. 105-25 (BB)
  • Recommended:

2/5 (W) Mary Magdalene, Female Disciple and Witness
Week 5: Women’s mysticism in the Christian Middle Ages

2/10 (M) Religious Women in the Medieval Period
• Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Ch. 1

2/12 (W) Soul Food: Food as a Female Concern
• *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Ch. 3-4

Week 6: Women’s Mysticism Continued

2/17 (M) Food as Control
• *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Ch. 6-7

2/19 (W) Whose Symbols?
• *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Ch. 10

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE FRIDAY 2/21 BY 5PM

PART II: FOCUS ON THE HINDU TRADITION

Week 7: Women in Hinduism

2/24 (M) Introducing the Hindu Tradition

2/26 (W) Gender Roles in Early Hinduism
• Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 56-67 (BB)
• Selections from *Manu’s Code of Law*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (Ch. 2-5; 9.1-103) (BB)
Week 8: Divine Femininities: Hindu Goddesses

3/3 (M) Divine Femininities: Hindu Goddesses

• Gavin Flood, “The Goddess and Śākta Traditions,” pp. 174-197 (BB)

• Devī Mahātmya – available online: http://sdbbs.tripod.com/devi.html 3/5 (W)

The Goddess and Women’s Power

• Tracy Pintchman, “Is the Hindu Goddess Tradition a Good Resource for Western Feminism?” pp. 187-200 (BB)

* * SPRING BREAK * *

Week 9: Gender Relations on an Epic Scale

3/17 (M) The Story of the Perfect Man and the Perfect Woman…

• William Buck, Rāmāyaṇa, pp. 3-175 3/19 (W)

Rāmāyaṇa Continued

• Rāmāyaṇa, pp. 176-292

Week 10: The Many Rāmāyanas

3/24 (M) Rāmāyaṇa Continued

• Rāmāyaṇa, pp. 374-432 3/26 (W) Retellings of Sītā’s story
• Linda Hess, “Rejecting Sītā: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man’s Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife” (BB)
• V. N. Rao: “A Rāmāyaṇa of Their Own: Women’s Oral Tradition in Telugu” (BB) Film clip: Sītā Sings the Blues (Nina Paley, 2009)

SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE FRIDAY 3/28 BY 5 PM Week 11: Gender Transformations in bhakti
3/31 (M) Bhakti (devotional) Hinduism

• Nancy M. Martin, “North Indian Hindi Devotional Literature” (BB) 4/1 (W)

Singing the Love of Krishna: Mīrābāī and Śūrdās

• John Stratton Hawley: “Krishna and the Gender of Longing,” pp. 165-178 (BB)

• John Stratton Hawley, The Memory of Love: Śūrdās Sings to Krishna, selections (BB)

• A. J. Alston (trans.), The Devotional Poems of Mīrābāī, selections (BB)

Week 12: Women in the Indian Independence

4/7 (M) India’s Independence, Women’s Independence

• Rabindranath Tagore, The Home and the World, pp. 7-89 4/9 (W) Woman as India/Woman as Tradition

• Tagore, The Home and the World, pp. 90-184 Film clip: Devī (Satyajit Ray, 1960)

Week 13: Women’s Narrative Traditions in Rural Rajasthan

4/14 (M) Storytelling Women’s Lives

• Ann Gold and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India, Ch. 1-3

4/16 (W) Gender, Power, and Subversion

• Listen to the Heron’s Words, Ch. 4, 7 Film clip:

Dadi’s Family

Week 14: Gender and Religious/Spiritual/Political Authority in India

4/21 (M) Female Gurus and Ascetics


4/23 (W) Women’s Voices in Hindu Nationalism

• Kalyaki Devaki Menon, “Passionate Renouncers: Hindu Nationalist Renouncers and the Politics of
Hindutva,” pp. 141-169 (BB)
THIRD SHORT PAPER DUE FRIDAY 4/25 BY 5PM Week 15: Concluding Reflections

4/28 (M) Final discussion and wrap-up