

CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE FAMILY IN INDIAN RELIGIONS AND CULTURES -- W

ANS 372K/ANT 322O/R S 341M/WGS 340

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AIM AND SCOPE OF COURSE

This course will provide you with a comprehensive historical overview of gender issues as they are represented in the great textual traditions of South Asia (these categories include Vedic materials, medical literature, treatises on law and sexual behavior, and texts that outline the great debates over questions of gender identity and salvation preserved for us in certain Jaina and Buddhist materials). To make these classical texts more relevant, readings in recent anthropological studies of religion, performance, and kinship will also be included to enable you to trace recurring themes, images, and symbols. You will thereby gain a sense of continuity of traditions and attitudes as well as generative innovations and contemporary variants and divergences within them.

We will begin with a study of the Vedas, the oldest extant texts produced by Indo-Āryan culture, considered to be foundational texts by most modern strains and sects of Hinduism. We will look at various creation narratives and descriptions of ritual, paying particular attention to sexual symbolism in Vedic poetry, as well as gender roles and sexuality associated with Vedic ritual. We will then explore different legal and moral aspects of gender roles, sexuality, and identity in classical India, followed by an examination of the ways in which gender identity is formulated in early Sanskrit texts from the *Āyurvedic* traditions of North India. We will read studies of Indian sexuality, and will then move to the southern part of the subcontinent, where we will look at an ethnographic study of living *Devadāsī* communities in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, followed by a study of pleasure and desire within the bounds of a village family in contemporary Tamilnadu. We will then explore some of the more sexually “marginalized” communities in India by examining current writing on gay and lesbian issues, and through a reading of Gayatri Reddy’s scholarship on Hijras (“eunuchs”). We will then consider texts that probe the intriguing and complex relationship between sexuality and spiritual salvation, particularly within Buddhist and Jaina contexts.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular attendance. Please do not miss class! It's as simple as that. I will be taking attendance, but we are not going to count it towards your final grade because of our current circumstances. This course will be taught entirely on Zoom (you can access the class Zoom link via the Canvas course page). I will be teaching the course synchronously, but I will be recording all of our sessions just in case you fall ill or need to revisit materials in lecture.

Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited: No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course.

Class Recordings: Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings. If you are for whatever reason uncomfortable with participating in Zoom sessions with your video on, that is just fine. You can leave the space black with your name, or you can put up a photo of yourself (or your pet). Please don't use Zoom backgrounds! Too many backgrounds operating at once will cause the course to crash.

COVID Caveats: To help keep everyone at UT and in our community safe, it is critical that you report COVID-19 symptoms and testing, regardless of test results, to University Health Services, and faculty and staff report to the HealthPoint Occupational Health Program (OHP) as soon as possible. Please see this [link](#) to understand what needs to be reported. In addition, to help understand what to do if a fellow student in the class (or the instructor) tests positive for COVID, see this [University Health Services link](#).

2. Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities. Students who require special accommodations must get a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students. This letter should be presented to the instructor at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made at that time.

4. Religious Holidays. If you find that you must miss a class due to the observance of a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the work you have missed provided that you give me at least one week's notice prior to your absence.

5. Readings. The main readings will be assigned from the texts listed below. Your textbooks are available for purchase at the University Co-op Bookstore, but if you are on

a budget, feel free to patronize Amazon or other on-line sources. You'll be able to find many of your textbooks on line at a significantly better price. I will be supplementing your textbooks with additional articles, translations, and short essays, which I will send out to you via the "Announcements" function on Canvas.

Required books:

Reddy, Gayatri. *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. Chicago.

Jamison, Stephanie W. *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India*. Oxford.

Vatsyayana. *The Kāmasūtra of Vatsyayana* (Doniger trans.). Oxford.

Trawick, Margaret. *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family*. California.

Soneji, Davesh. *Unfinished Gestures*. Chicago.

I will send you additional readings over the "Announcements" function in Canvas.

3. Exams. There will be two exams. Both the mid-term and the final will be take-home, open-book exams that will require you to produce a brief, critically argued paper.

4. Papers. You will be required to write a 15- to 20-page paper on the topic of your choice, though you must secure my prior approval before you start writing. A paper proposal (one paragraph will suffice) and a preliminary list of sources will be due **in class on Monday, April 5th**. The final draft of your paper will be due **on Monday, May 10th**. You will also be asked to produce two short (3- to 5-page) reaction essays (I will send you a selection of prompts).

GRADES

Grades are absolutely non-negotiable – I refuse to tolerate any whining about grades. I do NOT give extra credit. I do NOT issue incompletes, unless you are desperately ill and can provide me with a doctor's note. The research paper will count as 30% of your final grade. The two short reaction papers will each count as 10%, and each exam will count as 25%.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1:

January 20th: Orientation and introduction to the course.

January 22nd: "The Problem: How do we Study Gender in Vedic and Classical Indian Texts?" Read Jamison, pp. 3-26.

WEEK 2:

January 25th: "The Place of the Wife in Vedic *Śrauta* Ritual." Read Jamison, pp. 29-53.

January 27th: "Sexuality in Vedic Ritual." Read Jamison, pp. 53-149. Also read Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, pp. 257-264 (I will send you the Doniger reading over Canvas).

January 29th: Discussion over the Jamison and Doniger readings thus far. Please come prepared with questions and concerns.

WEEK 3:

February 1st: "Women and Marriage in the Vedic Period." Read Jamison, pp. 207-250. Also read Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, pp. 289-292 (I will send you the Doniger reading over Canvas).

February 3rd: "Women and Marriage in the Early Classical Period." Read Doniger and Smith, *The Laws of Manu*, pp. 43-49 (I will send you the Doniger and Smith reading over Canvas).

February 5th: Discussion over the Jamison and Doniger and Smith readings on the eight types of marriage. Please come prepared with questions and concerns.

WEEK 4:

February 8th: "Purity, Pollution, and Sex in Vedic and Legal Literature." Read Doniger and Smith, *The Laws of Manu*, p. 78, vss. 40-44, pp. 113-116, vss. 132-169, pp. 189-193, vss. 352-385, and pp. 197-220, vss. 1-200. Also read Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, pp. 29-32, and Olivelle, *Upanisads*, pp. 88-93. (I will send you the Doniger and Smith and Olivelle readings over Canvas).

February 10th: "The Medicalization of Gender in Early Indian Medical Literature." Read Selby, "The Color of Gender: On Conception and Sex Determination in the *Caraka* and *Suśruta-samhitās*." (I will send you my essay over Canvas.)

February 12th: "Categories of Queerness in Early Classical India." Read Sweet and Zwilling, "The First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queerness in Classical Indian Medicine." (I will send you the Zwilling and Sweet article over Canvas.)

WEEK 5:

February 15th: "Blood Pollution Related to Menstruation in Classical Indian Literature." Read Leslie, "Some Traditional Indian Views on Menstruation and Female Sexuality" (I will send you the Leslie article over Canvas). **I WILL DISTRIBUTE PROMPTS FOR YOUR FIRST REACTION PAPER TODAY.**

February 17th: "Early Medical Understandings of Sexual Difference." Read Selby, "On Anatomical Enumeration and Difference in Early Sanskrit Medical Literature" (I will send you my article over Canvas).

February 19th: "On Conception and Childbirth in Early Sanskrit Medical Literature." Read Selby, "Narratives of Conception, Gestation, and Labour in Sanskrit *Āyurvedic* Texts" (I will send you my article over Canvas).

WEEK 6:

February 22nd: "On Female 'Sexual Deviance I.'" Read Mitra, "Introduction: Excess, A History" (I will send you the Mitra excerpt over Canvas). **FIRST REACTION PAPER DUE IN CLASS.**

February 24th: "On Female 'Sexual Deviance' II." Read Mitra, "Origins: Philology and the Study of Indian Sex Life" (I will send you the Mitra excerpt over Canvas).

February 26th: **NO CLASS TODAY (I HAVE PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS.)**

WEEK 7:

March 1st: "So what is this Text FOR, Anyway? An Introduction to the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana." Read Vātsyāyana, Doniger translation, pp. 3-103.

March 3rd: "Sex Outside Marriage in the *Kāmasūtra*." Read Vātsyāyana, Doniger translation, pp. 104-172.

March 5th: Discussion on the *Kāmasūtra*. Please prepare your questions and concerns. **MIDTERM QUESTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED. EXAMS DUE IN CLASS ON MARCH 12TH.**

WEEK 8:

March 8th: "Is Celibacy Sexuality? The Strange Case of Mahātma Gandhi." Read Sudhir Kakar, "Gandhi and Women" (I will send you the Kakar essay over Canvas).

March 10th: "Rewriting the Past and Scripting Reform." Read Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?" (I will send you the Chakravarti article over Canvas).

March 12th: "Introducing the Figure of the 'Temple Dancer.'" Read Soneji, "Introduction: On Historical, Social, and Aesthetic Borderlands," pp. 1-25. **MIDTERM EXAMS DUE IN CLASS.**

WEEK 9:

NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK.

WEEK 10:

March 22nd: "Introduction to the Tanjore Quartet." Read Soneji, "Producing Dance in Colonial Tanjore," pp. 27-69.

March 24th: "On the Transformation of *Nautch*, Part I." Read Soneji, "Whatever Happened to the South Indian Nautch?," pp. 70-111.

March 26th: "On the Transformation of *Nautch*, Part II." Read Soneji, "Subterfuges of 'Respectable' Citizenship: Marriage and Masculinity in the Discourse of *Devadāsī* Reform," pp. 112-160.

WEEK 11:

March 29th: "Into Poverty and Nostalgia." Read Soneji, "Performing Untenable Pasts: Aesthetics and Selfhood in Coastal Andhra Pradesh," pp. 189-226.

March 31st: Discussion over Soneji. Please bring your questions and concerns.

April 2nd: "Margaret Trawick Confesses! The Anthropologist Places Herself in a Tamil Family." Read Trawick, pp. 1-52.

WEEK 12:

April 5th: "The Vocabulary of Tamil Familial Relations." Read Trawick, pp. 53-88.

April 7th: "Layers of Love, Language, and Conflict." Read Trawick, pp. 89-116.

April 9th: "Kinship, Desire, and Webs of Exchange in the South Indian Family." Read Trawick, pp. 117-186. **RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSALS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES DUE. NO EXCEPTIONS, PLEASE.**

WEEK 13:

April 12th: "Intimacies, Rivalries, and Relationships in the Tamil Family." Read Trawick, pp. 187-214.

April 14th: "On the Lives of Tamil Children." Read Trawick, pp. 215-260.

April 16th: "AIDS and Public Health in India." Read Lawrence Cohen, "Postcolonial India and the Enormity of AIDS" and the related article on AIDS in India from *The New Yorker*. (I will send you both of these pieces via Canvas.)

WEEK 14:

April 19th: "Gender, Modern Medicine, and Transplantation." Read Lawrence Cohen, "The Man with Four Kidneys: Indian Organs and the Space of the Ethical." (I will send you Cohen's essay over Canvas.)

April 21st: "The Hijra as Ethnographic 'Subject' and Questions of Identity." Read Reddy, pp. 1-43.

April 23rd: "The Hijra Body." Read Reddy, pp. 44-98, and Cohen, "The Pleasures of Castration," course packet.

WEEK 15:

April 26th: "Hijras in Ritual and Performance Contexts." Read Reddy, pp. 99-141. **I WILL DISTRIBUTE PROMPTS FOR YOUR SECOND REACTION PAPER TODAY.**

April 28th: "Hijra Constructions of Kinship and the Family." Read Reddy, pp. 142-185.

April 30th: "Gender and Buddhist History." Read Sponberg, pp. 3-36 and Cabezón, pp. 181-214 (I will send you both of these pieces via Canvas).

WEEK 16:

May 3rd: "The Female Body as Horrific Terrain in Early Indian Buddhism." Read Wilson (I will send you the Wilson excerpt via Canvas). **SECOND REACTION PAPER DUE IN CLASS.**

May 5th: "The View from the Nunnery: Voices of Buddhist Female Renouncers." Read Wilson and excerpts from the *Theri-gatha* (I will send you both of these pieces via Canvas).

May 7th: "Gender Trouble: An Introduction to Gender Issues in the Jain Tradition." Read Jaini and Zwilling and Sweet, "'Like a City Ablaze': The Third Sex and the Creation of Sexuality in Jain Religious Literature" (I will send you both of these pieces via Canvas). **FINAL EXAM QUESTIONS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED.**

THE FINAL DRAFTS OF YOUR RESEARCH PAPERS WILL BE DUE ON MONDAY, MAY 10TH BY 5 P.M.

YOUR FINAL EXAM PAPERS WILL BE DUE IN MY OFFICE ON MONDAY, MAY 17TH, BY 5 P.M.