

## SEMESTER AT SEA SPR. '10 SYLLABUS **WOMEN AND POWER IN INDIA**

Discipline: History Classroom 8  
Semester and Year: Spring 2010 B days, 1530-1645  
HISA 3121: **Women and Power in India**  
Upper or Lower Division: Upper  
Faculty Name: Rich Barnett

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course addresses women's roles and statuses, means of gaining and using power, and contributions in political and other realms, during four millennia of South Asian history. With emphasis on the modern, but with relevant background in Indian mythology, classical history and literature, medieval Islamic chronicles, autobiographies, and eyewitness accounts, we will examine original sources, social science studies, fictional works, and secondary material on the following issues: ✓origins, persistence, and revision of socially and religiously constructed gender identities; ✓typologies of autonomy vs. dependence, security vs. risk, oppression vs. liberation; ✓ancient, medieval, and modern women as political actors and exemplars; ✓female infanticide, self-immolation of widows, and bride-burning; ✓education, health and workplace; ✓Western and Asian feminisms; and ✓women power brokers in what is now India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. No previous acquaintance with South Asia, or with history, is assumed.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course we will read and write about, report on, and discuss topics concerning South Asian women, assessing the various ways in which they exercised power (or not) and—either colludingly, unthinkingly, or defiantly—how they defined their roles in history.

### TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE:

#### **B1. Introduction to the course, classmates, and instructor**

##### Class reading:

Burton Stein, "Introduction," in A History of India (1998), PH-COPY unit 1.  
Bumiller, ch. 1, "Arrival & Introduction," 3-23.  
Forbes, 1-9.

#### **B2. An historical template; our first short story**

##### Class reading:

Forbes, 10-31.  
Iyengar, "The Library Girl," PH-COPY unit 2.

#### **B3. Gender roles, gender statuses: an introduction**

##### Class reading:

Forbes, 32-63.  
Haeri, xxi-xxxiv.

#### **B4. Women in agrarian settings, part 1**

##### Class reading:

Shama Futehally, "The Meeting," pp. 136-143, in Lakshmi Holmstrom, ed.,  
The Inner Courtyard PH-COPY unit 4.  
Haeri, chapter 4, "Legitimacy: in the Boots of a Feudal Lord," pp. 169-225.

**Night Video: "Dadi's Family."** Dadi, "Grandmother," manages an extended farming family. Women in this film—whose dialogue has to be listened to with focused attention—discuss family conflict, work in the fields and at home, and being a stranger in the husband's family.

**B5. Women in Ancient India**

Class reading:

“Ancient India: Rama and Sita,” in Jane Slaughter et al., Sharing the World Stage: Biography and Gender in World History (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 122-140 PH-COPY unit 19.  
Kirit K. Shah, The Problem of Identity: Women in Early Indian Inscriptions (OUP India, 2001), “Prologue,” pp. 1-31 PH-COPY unit 7.

**Report** Vatsyayana, The Kama Sutra, Book One only (not the naughty bits, which are in II and III).  
With instructor.

**B6. Heroine-ism & Public Rituals in Medieval & Early Modern India, part 1**

Class reading

G. Hambly, “Becoming Visible: Medieval Islamic Women in Historiography and History,” pp. 2-27, in Gavin Hambly, ed., Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998): FROM PH-COPY:Unit 8.

**Report** G. Hambly, “Armed Women Retainers in the Zenanas of Indo-Muslim Rulers: the Case of Bibi Fatima,” pp. 429-468. PH-COPY, Unit 11.

**Report** Richard M. Eaton, “Women’s Grinding and Spinning Songs of Devotion in the Late Medieval Deccan,” in Barbara D. Metcalf, ed. Islam in South Asia in Practice (Princeton University Press, 2009), 87-92. With instructor.

**B7. Heroine-ism in Medieval & Early Modern India, part 2**

Class reading

Richard B. Barnett, “Embattled Begams: Women as Power Brokers in Early Modern India”, 521-36 in Gavin Hambly, ed. PH-COPY unit 10.

**Report** Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Sultana’s Dream, and Selections from The Secluded Ones, with instructor.

**Quiz #1, 20 minutes** You have a choice of 15 out of c.30 terms from reports, videos, discussion, and readings. Identify each item briefly, and then state its historical importance.

**B8. Women in South Asia and Western feminist thought**

Class reading

Haeri, chapter 1, “Stating the Problems: Theoretical Contemplation,” pp. 3-44.  
Sara Suleri, “Excellent Things in Women,” in Sara Suleri, Meatless Days (University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 1-20 PH-COPY unit 6.

**Report** Martha Nussbaum, Sex and Social Justice (Oxford: OUP, 1999) [Note: endnotes are in addition to the listed page numbers, and must also be read.] “Introduction: Feminism, Internationalism, Liberalism,” pp. 3-25; “Women and Cultural Universals,” pp. 29-54; “Religion and Women’s Human Rights,” pp. 81-117  
With instructor.

**B9. Women in agrarian settings, part 2**

Class reading

Bumiller, ch. 4, “Beyond the Veil: the Women of the Village of Khajuron,” 75-100.  
Susan Wadley, “Women and the Hindu Tradition,” in Jacobson and Wadley, Women of India: Two Perspectives, pp. 111-136 PH-COPY unit 12.

**B10. Women Nationalists and Gandhians**

Class reading:

Forbes, 64-156.

**Report** Bharati Ray, "The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-29," in Bharati Ray, ed., From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women (Delhi: OUP, 1997), pp. 174-218. With instructor.

**B11. Typologies of Oppression and Liberation**

Class reading:

Ismat Chughtai, "Tiny's Granny," Kali for Women, ed., Truth Tales (New York: Feminist Press, 1990), pp. 147-159 PH-COPY unit 5.

Bumiller, ch. 5, "No More Little Girls: Female Infanticide Among the Poor of Tamil Nadu and Sex-Selective Abortion among the Rich of Bombay," 101-124.

**Report** Himani Bannerji, "Attired in Virtue: the Discourse on Shame (lajja) and Clothing of the *Bhadramahila* in Colonial Bengal," in Bharati Ray, ed., From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women (Delhi: OUP, 1997)pp. 66-106.  
With instructor.

**B12. Purdah: the Whys and Wherefores**

Class reading:

Hannah Papanek, "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter," in Papanek and Minault, Separate Worlds: Purdah in South Asia, 4-51, PH-COPY unit 17.

**Report** Robin and Peter M. Jeffrey, "A Woman Belongs to Her Husband: Female Autonomy, women's work and childbearing in Bijnor," in Alice W. Clark, ed., Gender and Political Economy: Explorations of South Asian Systems (Delhi: OUP, 1993), 66-114.

**B13. Marriage as tragedy, marriage as bliss**

Class reading

Haeri, chapter 5, "Marriage: Making a Culture of Her Own," pp. 229-304.

Elizabeth Bumiller, chapter 2, "Wedding First, Love Later."

Ismat Chughtai, "Chauthi ka Jaura," pp. 74-88 PH-COPY unit 3.

**Night Video** "Saheri's Choice" A rural preteen is betrothed to a man she detests, and flees to the city to live an alienated life of poverty and risk 27 minutes

**B14. Women in the History of the Raj**

Class reading:

Haeri, chapter 2, "Identity: Contested Visions of Womanhood and Society," pp. 46-106.

Bumiller, ch. 6, "Towards, Equality: The Indian Women's Movement," 125-146.

Forbes, 157-222.

**B15. Women in Agrarian Settings, Part III**

**Night Video “The Hidden Story: A Quest for Women’s Unrecorded History”** (58 minutes, 1995). First-person narration of the lives of four peasant women from different parts of India; also interactions between urban and rural women.

**Quiz #2, 20 minutes as described above.**

**B16. Bride-burning and sati (self-immolation of widows)**

Class reading:

Bumiller, ch. 3, “Flames: a Bride Burning and a Sati,” 44-74

**Report** Veena Oldenburg, “The Roop Kanwar Case: Feminist Responses,” in John S. Hawley, ed., Sati: the Blessing and the Curse (New York, OUP, 1994), pp. 101-130.

**Report** Ashis Nandy, “Sati as Profit vs. Sati as Spectacle: the Public Debate on Roop Kanwar’s Death,” in John S. Hawley, ed., Sati: the Blessing and the Curse (New York, OUP, 1994), pp. 131-173.

**B17. Mobilization, Liberation, Politics**

Class reading

Haeri, chapter 3, “Violence: Woman’s Body, Nation’s Honor,” pp. 107-168

Bumiller, ch. 7, “‘Indira is India, and India is Indira’: Mrs. Gandhi and Her Legacy for Indian Women in Politics,” 147-178

**Report** Robin and Patricia Jeffrey, “A Woman Belongs to her Husband: Female Autonomy, Women’s Work, and Childbearing in Bijnor,” in Alice W. Clark, ed., Gender and Political Economy: Exploration of South Asian Systems (Delhi: OUP, 1993, pp. 66-114.

**B18. Women and Modernity: Mobilization and Opportunity**

Class reading

Forbes, 223-254

**Report** Marcia Hermansen, “Two Sufis on Molding the New Muslim Woman: Khwaja Hasan Nizami (1878-1955) and Hazrat Inayat Khan (1882-1927),” in Barbara D. Metcalf, ed., Islam in South Asia in Practice, (Princeton U Press, 2009), pp. 326-338. With instructor.

**B19. Night Video: “16 Decisions” 59 minutes** Bangladeshi women participate in a cooperative banking system just for them, which however involves some serious life choices.

**B20. Women in struggle: revolutionaries, prophets and heretics**

Class reading

Antoinette Burton, “Memory Becomes Her: Women, Feminist History, and the Archive,” in Antoinette Burton, Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India (OUP, 2003), chapter one, PH-COPY unit 13.

Bumiller, chapter 9, “Poets and Revolutionaries: Three women of Calcutta, 201-229”

**B21. Muslim Women and Shari’ah Law**

Class reading

Haeri, ch. 7, "Religion: Reinterpreting the Text, Reinventing the Self," pp. 348-404  
"The Foundations of Islam: Aisha bint Abu Bakr (614-678) and Ali ibn Abu Talib (599-661), in Jane Slaughter et al., Sharing the World Stage: Biography and Gender in World History (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008) pp. 190-207 PH-COPY unit 19.

**Report** Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an (Austin: U. Texas Press, 2002), chapter 1, "The Qur'an and Muslim Women," pp. 1-30. This book is on shipboard reserve.

**Report** Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an chapter 5, "The Qur'an, Sex/Gender, and Sexuality: Sameness, Difference, Equality," pp. 129-166. Shipboard reserve.

**B22. The Horror and Violation of Partition**

**Report** Ritu Menon and Kamila Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), chapters 1 and 2, "Speaking for Themselves: Partition History, Women's Histories," and "Honourably Dead: Permissible Violence against Women," pp. 1-64. Book is on shipboard reserve.

**B23. Muslim Women and Shari'ah Law in India and Pakistan**

Class reading

Haeri, "Conclusion," pp. 405-411  
Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, Women of Pakistan, ch. 7, "Legally Reducing Women's

**Report** Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an, chapter 6, "The Family and Marriage: Retrieving the Qur'an's Egalitarianism," pp. 167-201.

**Report** Sylvia Vatuk, "A Rallying Cry for Muslim Personal Law: The Shah Bano Case and its Aftermath," in Barbara D. Metcalf, ed., Islam in South Asia in Practice,

**Report** Rokeya Begum, "Incidence of Polygyny among Muslims in India," in Haseena Hashia, ed., Muslim Women in India Since Independence (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1998), pp. 129-139. With instructor.

**Review, revision, and recapitulation**

**Sunday, 2 May 2010 Final exam**

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS**

Shahla Haeri, No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women (Syracuse, 2002).

Elizabeth Bumiller, May You be the Mother of a Hundred Sons (New York & Delhi, 1990)

Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India (DELHI: Cambr. Univ. Press, 1998)

PHOTOCOPY PACKET (TO BE PROVIDED BY THE INSTRUCTOR AND PURCHASED ON THE SHIP.)

### RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, eds., Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition  
(Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998)

Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the  
Qur'an (Austin: U. Texas Press, 2002)

Monica Das, ed., Her Story so Far: Tales of the Girl Child in India (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003)

FOUR VIDEOS/DVD'S (students do not need to purchase these)

Dadi's Family

Sixteen Decisions

Saheri's Choice

The Hidden Story: A Quest for Women's Unrecorded History

### FIELD COMPONENT

The following are flexible enough to be either an FDP or Independent Practica. Students may suggest amendments, additions, or new topics altogether, with timely approvals from the instructor.

As we sail from Vietnam to India, the class will claim and develop individual projects that fit the areas of India which they plan to visit. These might involve living briefly with an Indian family and reporting about gender roles and transactions, talking in focused ways with professional, agricultural, manual laboring, or middle-class women about their lives. I list a few templates for such projects. Results will be presented in oral report form in class, ten minutes each. Each of these projects will count for 10% of the course grade; you should thus choose two.

1. Interview at least one prominent female (in any realm, including managing a road-building crew of women) for at least half an hour, about how she faced and overcame the cultural constraints that normally limit women's roles in India. Use interpreter if necessary. Get her to be as specific as possible, but do not ask intrusive personal questions. (This project is limited to female classmates; with very few exceptions within highly cosmopolitan settings, unrelated males should not approach Indian women.)
2. Male classmates: assess a specific set of gender roles (work, child rearing, money handling, shopping, dealing with merchants and beggars) within at least two contrastive class contexts, e.g. working-class or dalit families, vs. service gentry or professional or merchant families. Although this might sound like a daunting task, you will be surprised to discover how willing Indians are to talk to visitors about their lives. Try opening up a casual chat with a storekeeper, and making it more focused over time. Use interpreters if necessary, but find out if the person doing the translating is related or connected in any way with the interviewee, to avoid bias.
3. Find a public place for which men and women line up in different queues, such as a train ticket office or post office. Ask for anecdotal support or criticism of such a practice from both genders. This would work best in a male-female team of classmates. Take time to develop interviewee viewpoints.
4. Locate a woman doctor's office (in India it will be called a "surgery.") Find out as much as you can

about whether or not the medical treatment women and girls obtain there is related to their social status as women (as opposed to their genetic or medical situations). Examples of this issue are malnutrition, elective treatments or operations, or spousal abuse.

5. Women classmates: get to know a woman with children, and find out if you can about her views, and any experiences she has heard about, on birth control. Do not ask about sexuality, which is a taboo subject. You might ask about whether or not daughters will reach a certain level of advancement in school, when they are allowed to eat (after their brothers?), and what work they are expected to do, if any, outside the home as adults.

6. Find out as much as possible about female heroines within the ancient, medieval, or modern historical periods of the Tamil-speaking or Malayalam-speaking regions (Chennai and Cochin, respectively). Assess how contemporary behaviors are shaped in reference to such heroines. Try to restrict this discourse to actual historical figures, rather than female characters in epic literature, or goddesses.

#### METHODS OF EVALUATION

Evaluation will rest on class discussion (20%), **ten-minute presentations** on individually-assigned readings (20%), , and two quizzes (20%), field assignments or FDP's (20%), and a final exam (20%). **No presentations may be postponed without either 24 hours' advance notice or a life-changing emergency.** Presenters will prepare a one-page outline of their oral presentations, copied and distributed to classmates. Signups for oral presentations must be on my syllabus copy only, to avoid duplicate choices. Write your name clearly on the LEFT margin of my syllabus copy to sign up.

Note: the purpose of oral presentations is to impart the content of more source materials, and hence information, to classmates. But your assessment and evaluation is just as important as conveying the author's purpose, style, method, and degree of success. Your 10-minute talks must be polished, edited, original, pledged contributions.

**The importance of informed discussion** Class participation, focusing on and asking questions about the readings and presentations, is vital to the success of this course, so diligence in reading all assignments in advance is expected without exception. All are very strongly urged to read ahead of the topics. Asking in an uninformed way about something that is clearly presented in the readings or reports will blatantly reveal what you have not done, and will reduce our level of comfort. Moreover, class attendance is vitally important—for each unexcused absence beyond two, the course grade will therefore be reduced by 20%.

Class participation will be assessed according to the hierarchical standards of the UVa Teaching Resource Center, attached and included here by reference.

**Class Participation** each week will be evaluated according to a system worked out by the Teaching Resource Center.

Participation is graded on a scale from 0 (lowest) through 4 (highest), using the criteria below. The criteria focus on what you demonstrate and do not presume to guess at what you know but do not demonstrate. This means we expect you to participate in discussions! This is because what you offer to the class is what you and others learn from. I expect the average level of participation will satisfy the criteria for a "3".

0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absent</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present, not disruptive</li> <li>• Tries to respond when called on but does not offer much.</li> <li>• Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic facts, but does not interpret or analyze them.</li> <li>• Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from the case or reading), without elaboration or very infrequently (perhaps once a class).</li> <li>• Contributes to a moderate degree —when called on.</li> <li>• Demonstrates sporadic involvement.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates good preparation: knows case or reading facts well; has thought through implications of them.</li> <li>• Offers interpretations and analysis of case material (more than just facts) to class.</li> <li>• Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion.</li> <li>• Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed case exceptionally well, relating it to readings and other material (e.g., readings, course material, discussions, experience, etc.).</li> <li>• Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of case material, e.g., puts together pieces of discussion to develop new approaches that take the class further.</li> <li>• Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material, etc.</li> <li>• Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement.</li> </ul>

