

Centre for Historical Studies

M.A. and M.Phil. Lecture Course

M.A. Course No. M 314/21

M.Phil. Course No. P312/20

Course Title : Gender and Society: Women in Medieval India, 13th to 18th Centuries

For M.A. Credits : 4

For M.Phil. Credits : 2

Mode of Evaluation for M.A. : 2 tutorials (50%) + End semester Exam (50%)

Mode of Evaluation for M.Phil: 1 tutorial + 1 Term Paper + End Semester Exam

Course Instructor : Dr. Joy L.K. Pachuau

This course uses gender as a category of historical analysis, focusing on gendered relationships within medieval Indian society. With women having been rendered largely invisible in history, it seeks to construct history from their vantage-point. This would involve unpacking the concepts of “masculine” and “feminine” in medieval society, how these related to one another, how they constituted society, and a mapping of processes that had a bearing on their relative position during the medieval period of Indian history. The purpose is to demonstrate that such a history is central to building a more complete picture of the evolution of Indian society from the 13th to the 18th centuries. Implicit in this approach is the belief that a gendered perception of history may suggest a paradigmatic shift in the trajectory of medieval Indian historical developments, and perhaps alter current perceptions of the high and low points of this period.

1. Problems and Possibilities in Recovering and Representing the Female Voice

Patriarchal ideologies and male hegemony over the creation of knowledge built gender into the construction of medieval sources, both marginalizing and colouring the knowledge of women’s experiences, aspirations and worldviews. With almost all sources penned by men, retrieving women’s history has been difficult, but full of potential. The androcentricity of the Perso-Arabic works and orientalist perceptions of European travel accounts has made the task daunting; asking different sets of questions, however, and re-reading these conventional sources against the grain, as well as recovering new sources such as paintings, architectural sites, literary and medicinal texts, and archival records, and comparing the range of insights they offer, would help weave women and represent their life-worlds in medieval Indian story.

Specific Themes to be Discussed:

- a) Defining sex, gender, power, and gender relations
- b) The invisibility of women in different genres of sources, and in secondary works
- c) Nature of Perso-Arabic sources; a woman’s voice in Gulbadan Bano’s Memoirs
- d) The “other” in orientalist perceptions of European travel accounts
- e) Reflections of women in paintings and medieval literary texts

- f) Architectural sites and what they reveal on women's lives
- g) Medieval Medicinal Texts and the Female Body
- h) Court records as sources on the lower castes

2. The Evolving Notions of “Masculinity”, “Femininity”, and Politics

Medieval Indian, as much as any other society, threw up its own culturally-specific models of patriarchies, with particular notions of appropriate “masculine” and “feminine” roles and conduct. Were Razia Sultan's quick dethronement despite her competence, Rudrama Devi's upbringing and designation as a son, Rani Durgavati's training as a warrior, or Chand Bibi's self-confidence in taking on the Mughal might distinct reflections of the above? What kind of patriarchal traditions did Babur and Humayun bring to Hindustan, and what was Akbar's vision for his household and its women? How do we reconcile his progressive ideas against child marriage, polygamy, widow immolations and slavery with his officially designating women of the Mughal household as veiled (*pardeh-giyan*), and move to strictly separate courtly and domestic spaces and segregate them into a sequestered *Ahl-i-bait*? Why were Jahan Ara, Raushan Ara and other princesses not allowed to marry? And how did royal women during Jahangir, Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb and their successors respond to imperial constructions of the feminine normative? Sources indicate their contestations in diverse forms, with women resorting to multi-faceted activities to reduce their dependent status. Dabbling in politics and creating for themselves a space between the “public” and the “private” spheres was one such means of asserting their identities.

Specific Themes to be Discussed:

- a) Evolution of the notion of masculinity under medieval rulers
- b) Razia Sultan and political authority
- c) Rudrama Devi- the Female King of Warangal, Rani Durgavati of Gondwana and Chand Bibi of Ahmadnagar
- d) Akbar's transformation of the *harem* into the *Ahl-i-bait*; the role of eunuchs
- e) Mughal women's negotiations for political space - from Maham Anaga, Hamida Bano, Gulbadan Begum, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahan Ara, Roshan Ara, Dilras Bano, Zebunissa, the courtesan Lal Kumwar

3. Negotiating Patriarchy through Economic Endeavours

Generating resources for economic sustenance was another means of securing their position. Women from the royalty possessed vast material resources, participated in commercial ventures to be materially independent, engaged in constructing buildings, and even made charities from their own resources. Women from the labouring groups struggled against patriarchy and poverty simultaneously, and despite being handicapped by a gendered division of labour, denial of access to tools, lower wages and denial of control over what they helped to produce, they strove for subsistence and enhancement of their spaces. Women's bodies were valuable resources that they possessed and that men sought to control, and these were used for different ends.

Specific Themes to be Discussed:

- a) Women's work and participation in the “public” sphere: Royal women's management of jagirs, shipping and commerce, and building activities
- b) Artisanal women's gendered division of labour and its invisibility
- c) Women from agrarian and pastoral communities and their role in family economies

- d) Concubinage, prostitution, dancing girls, and women slaves
- e) Women's property rights

4. Dissent, Resistance and Protest

Equally, religion allowed a space for subversion, and the pursuit of spirituality became a powerful form of women's cathartic self-expression during the period. With the spread of devotional religions, both Vaisnavaite and Saivite, in Medieval India, many rejected familial pressures and embarked on spiritual journeys, even leading spiritual movements. Their use of the vernacular medium made them an integral part of the popular culture, and on a pan-subcontinental scale, one witnesses women saints disregarding hierarchies of gender, caste, and religion. In the process, they re-conceptualised religion and carved out a space for themselves both within and without, and above the social order.

- a) Women saints Karaikkal Ammaiyar in 7th century Tamil Nadu,
- b) Akka Mahadevi in 12th century Karnataka,
- c) Lal Ded (Lalleswari) in 14th century Kashmir,
- d) Meera Bai in 16th century Rajasthan,
- e) Bahina Bai in 17th century Maharashtra

5. Caste/Community Dimensions of Patriarchy and Gender Relations:

Gender was only one of the multiple axes of social inequality, its intersection with caste and community a widespread feature of medieval Indian society. Patriarchal structures, customs and institutions varied among different castes and tribal societies, across regions. Specific ideological and material rationale caused different social strata to develop distinct conceptions of wifehood, motherhood, love, sexuality and filial relationships. These multiple manifestations of gendered relations, characterized by distinct norms established separateness between the high-born and the low-born. Norms and traditions specific to elite Hindu and Muslim societies, and those common in the lower castes and tribal societies may appear contrasting, and the degrees of subordination varied; what remained a universal agenda, however, was the subordination of women, and the state in most cases was complicit in the accomplishment of this objective.

Specific Themes to be Discussed:

- a) Women lynchpin for integrating lineages and kinship networks: Marriage customs and women's subordination
- b) The state's enforcement of customary laws and nature of intervention in domestic matters – in Medieval Rajputana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bengal
- c) Brahmanical patriarchy in Peshwa Maharashtra-child marriages, ascetic widowhood and *Dharma Shastras*
- d) Rajput societies - female infanticide, dowry, polygamy, *ghunghat, jauhar, sati*
- e) Islamic societies, the *Qazi* and the *Shariat- meher, purda, harem*
- f) Lower castes and tribal societies -bride-price marriages, legitimacy of divorce and remarriage, widow remarriage, and customary laws-*reet, rasm, riwaj*

Readings

General:

1. Altekar, A.S. *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (Delhi, 1982).

2. Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction*, (New York, 1990).
3. Geetha, V. *Theorizing Feminism: Gender*, (Calcutta, 2002).
3. Kelly, Joan. *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, 1984).
4. Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane, *History of Women: Silence of the Middle Ages*.
5. Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*, (New York, 1986).
6. Scott, Joan W. *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, revised edition 1999).
7. Scott, Joan W. (ed.) *Feminism and History*, (Oxford, 1996).

Theme 1.

1. Ashraf, K.M. *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (New Delhi, 1970, 2nd edition). Chap. "Social Conditions".
2. Banga, Indu. "Gender Relations in Medieval India" in J.S. Grewal (ed.) *The State and Society in Medieval India*, Vol.VII, Part I, pp.443-474.
3. Beveridge, Annette Susannah. "Life and Writings of Gulbadan Begum (Lady Rosebody)", *Calcutta Review*, 106, 1898, p. 345.
4. Lal, Ruby. "Mughal India: 15th to Mid-18th Century" in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources*, vol. 1, 2003), pp.62-71. 2nd Floor: HQ1170.E51 v.1
5. Misra, Rekha. *Women in Mughal India 1526-1748*, (Delhi, 1967).
6. Mukhia, Harbans. *The Mughals of India*, (MA, USA, 2004). Chap."The World of the Mughal Family".
7. Shah, Shalini. "Representation of Female Sexuality in the Ayurvedic Discourse of the Early Medieval Period", *Studies in History*, Vol. XXII, No.1, (Jan-June 2006), pp.45-88.
8. Sinha, Nandini. "Women in Rajput, Jain and Gujjar Literary Tradition: A Note on Rajasthan" in Vijaya Ramaswamy (ed.) *Re-searching Indian Women* (Delhi, 2003).
9. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravarty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Nelson and Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Cultures*, (Urbana, 1988), pp.271-316.
10. Sreenivasan, Ramya. "Alauddin Khalji Remembered: Conquest, Gender and Community in Medieval Rajput Narratives" in *Studies in History*, vol. 18, no.2, n.s. (2002): 275-294.
11. Teltscher, Kate. *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi, 1985). Chap. "Indian Women: The Seventeenth Century European Fantasy".

Theme 2.

1. Bano, Shadab. "Marriage and Concubinage in the Mughal Imperial Family" in *Indian History Congress*, pp.10-18.
2. Brijbhushan, Jamila. *Sultan Raziya, her Life and Times*, (New Delhi, 1990).
3. Findly, E.B. "Lives and Contributions of Mughal Women" in Zeenat Ziad (ed.) *Magnificent Mughals* (Karachi, 2002).
4. Findly, E.B. *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India*, Delhi, 1993.
5. Godden, Rumer. *Gulbadan: Portrait of a Rose Princess at the Mughal Court*, (New York, 1980).
6. Habib, Irfan. "Akbar and Social Inequities: A Study of the Evolution of his Ideas" IHC 53rd session, 1993, pp.300-309.
7. Habib, Irfan. "The Family of Nur Jahan during Jahangir's Reign" in *Medieval India, A Miscellany*, Vol.I, New York, 1969.
8. Jackson, Peter. "Sultan Radiyya Bint Iltutmish" in Gavin Hambly (ed.) *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety* (New York, 1998), pp.181-197.
9. Khoury, Dina Rizk. "Slippers at the Entrance or behind Closed Doors: Domestic and Public Spaces for Mosuli Women" in Madeline C.Zilfi (ed.) *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden, 1997).
10. Krynicky, Anne Kriger. *Captive Princess: Zebunissa, Daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb* (Oxford, 2005).
11. Lal, K.S. *The Mughal Harem* (Delhi, 1988).
12. Lal, Ruby. *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge, 2005).
13. Nand, Lokesh Chandra. *Women in the Delhi Sultanate*. (Allahabad, 1989).

14. Nath, Renuka. *Notable Mughal and Hindu Women in the 16th and 17th Centuries A.D.* (New Delhi, 1990).
15. O'Hanlon, Rosalind. 'Kingdom, Household and Body: Gender and the Construction of Imperial Service under Akbar' (unpublished Paper).
16. Palit, Mriducchanda. "Powers behind the Throne: Women in Early Mughal Politics" in M. Bose (ed.) *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India* (New Delhi, 2002) pp.201-212.
17. Peirce, Leslie P. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 1993).
18. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (eds.) *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York, 2000).
19. Talbot, Cynthia. "Rudrama Devi –The Female King: Gender and Political Authority in Medieval India" in David Shulman (ed.) *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Indian Civilization in Honour of Velcheru Narayana Rao* (Delhi, 1995).

Theme 3.

1. Arora, Shashi. "The Practice of Sale of Girls and their Position in Rajasthan, 1700-1800 A.D." *Proceedings of Rajasthan History Congress*, Bikaner Session, (1984): 33-45.
2. Bano, Shadab. "Jahan Ara's Administration of her Jagirs" in IHC 66th Session, Santiniketan, 2006, pp.157-163.
3. Bano, Shadab. "Women Slaves in Medieval India" in IHC 65th Session, Bareilly, 2004, pp.116-124.
4. Blake, Stephen. "Contributors to the Urban Landscape: Women Builders in Safavid Isfahan and Mughal Shahjahanabad" in Hambly. (ed.) *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp.407-428.
5. Dalal, Urvashi. "Women's Time in the *Havelis* of North India" in *The Medieval History Journal*, vol.2, (2), 1999, pp. 277-308.
6. Findly, E.B. 'The Capture of Maryam-us-Zamani's Ship: Mughal Women and European Traders' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.108, No.2, (1988), pp.227-238.
7. Habib, Irfan. "Exploring Medieval Gender History" Symposia Paper No.23, IHC, 61st Session, Calicut 2000.
8. Kozłowski, Gregory C. "Private Lives and Public Piety: Women and the Practice of Islam in Mughal India" in Hambly (ed.) *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp. 469-488.
9. Malik, Z.U. "Profile of Slave Girl Munni Begam, Widow of Mir Jafar" in Pawar (ed.) *Women in Indian History*, pp.111-125.
10. Moosvi, Shireen. "Work and Gender in Pre-Colonial India' Paper presented to the 11th International Economic History Congress, Milan, Italy, 11th-16th Sep.1994.
11. Mukund, Kanakalatha. "Turmeric Land: Women's Property Rights in Tamil Society since Early Medieval Times" in Kumkum Roy (ed.) *Women in Early Indian Societies* (Delhi, 1999), pp.123-140.
12. Orr, Leslie. "Women's Wealth and Worship : Female Patronage of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism in Medieval Tamil Nadu in Mandakranta Bose (ed.) *Faces of the Feminine*, 124-147.
13. Ramaswamy, Vijaya. "Aspects of Women and Work in Early South India" in Kumkum Roy (ed.) *Women in Early Indian Societies*, pp.150-174.

Theme 4.

1. Bayly, Susan. *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (Cambridge, 1992).
2. Dutta, Ranjeeta. "The Politics of Religious Identity: A Muslim Goddess in the Srivaisnava Community of South India" in *Studies in History*, vol.19, no.2, n.s. (2003): 157-184.
3. Feldhaus, Anne. "Bahina Bai: Wife and Saint" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol.50, No.4, (Dec. 1982), pp.591-604.
4. Grewal, J.S. *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy*, (Shimla, 1993).

5. Martin, Nancy. "Mirabai in the Academy and the Politics of Identity" in M. Bose (ed.) *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*, pp. 162-182.
6. Mukta, Parita. *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai* (New York, 1994).
7. Mulatti, Leela. *The Bhakti Movement and the Status of Women: A Case-Study of Virasaivism* (New Delhi, 1989).
8. Orr, Leslie. "Women in the Temple, the Palace and the family: The Construction of Women's Identities in Pre-colonial Tamil Nadu" in Kenneth Hall (ed.) *Structure and Society in Early South India: Essays in honour of Noboru Karashima* (New Delhi, 2001).
9. Orr, Leslie. *Donors, Devotees and Daughters of God: Temple Women in Medieval Tamil Nadu* (New York, 2000).
10. Ramaswamy, Vijaya. *Divinity and Deviance: Women in Virasaivism* (Delhi, 1996).
11. Ramaswamy, Vijaya. *Walking Naked: Women, Society, Spirituality in South India* (Shimla, 1997).
12. Sangari, Kumkum. "Mirabai and the Spiritual economy of Bhakti", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 7 and July 14, 1990.
13. Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita (eds.) *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present* (New York, 1991-93).
14. Toshkhani, S.S. (ed.), *Lal Ded: The Great Kashmiri Saint-Poetess* (Delhi, 2002?).
15. Zelliott, Eleanor and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar (eds.) *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon* (New Delhi, 2005).
16. Zelliott, Eleanor. "Women Saints in Medieval Maharashtra" in M. Bose (ed.) *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India* pp.192-200.

Theme 5.

1. Chakravarti, Uma. "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy: Gender, Caste, Class and State" *Economic and Political Weekly*, .27, (14), 1993, 579-85.
2. Chakravarti, Uma. "Gender, Caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood" in Martha Alter Chen ed. *Widows in India: Social Neglect and Public Action*, (New Delhi, 1998), pp. 63-92.
3. Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (Delhi, 2003).
4. Chatterjee, Ratnabali. "Veiled and Unveiled: Women in Medieval Bengal" IHC 62nd Session, Bhopal, 2001, pp.1-39.
5. Chowdhry, Prem. "Popular Perceptions of Widow Remarriage in Haryana: Past and Present" in Bharati Ray (ed.) *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women* (Delhi, 2001), 37-66.
6. Feldhaus, Anne. (ed.), *Images of Women in Maharashtra Society* (Albany, 1998).
7. Fisher, Michael. "Women and the Feminine in the Court and High Culture of Awadh, 1722-1856" in Hambly (ed.) *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp.489-519.
8. Guha, Sumit. "An Indian Penal Regime: Maharashtra in the Eighteenth Century." *Past and Present*, 147, (1995), pp.101-126.
9. Hasan, Farhat. *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572-1730*, (Cambridge, 2004), Chap. "Women, Kin and Shariat".
10. Joshi, Varsha. *Polygamy and Purdah: Women and Society among Rajputs*, (Jaipur, 1995).
11. Kadam, V.S. "The Institution of Marriage and Position of Women in Eighteenth Century Maharashtra", *I.E.S.H.R.* 25, (3), 1988, pp.341-369.
12. Moosvi, Shireen. "Travails of a Mercantile Community: Aspects of Social Life at the Port of Surat", IHC 52nd session, 1992.
13. Sahai, Nandita Prasad. *Politics of Patronage and Protest: State, Society and Artisans in Early Modern Rajasthan* (New Delhi, 2006), Chapter "Artisanal Jatis, Jati Panchayats, and the State".
14. Singh, Dilbagh. "Regulating the Domestic: Notes on the Pre-Colonial State and Family" *Studies in History*, Vol. 19, No.1, (Jan-June 2003), pp.69-86.
15. Zaidi, Sunita. "Women or Muslim Women in Medieval India" in Hajira Kumar (ed.) *Status of Muslim Women in India* (Delhi, 2002).

