FEMALE RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND DYNAMICS OF FEMALE AGENCY IN RELIGIOUS SETTINGS IN SOUTH ASIA

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In most mainstream religious traditions, women are excluded from positions of religious and ritual leadership. Recently this situation has started to change: in an increasing number of contexts, women can and do undergo monastic and priestly education; they can receive ordination/initiation as Buddhist nuns and Hindu priestesses; and they are accepted as ascetic religious leaders. Still these processes largely take place outside or at the margins of traditional religious institutions. Yet women are starting to establish new religious trends, occupying positions of religious leadership on par with men. In some cases, this process takes place in collaboration with male counterparts of the women leaders, in others against their will. In traditional settings, notably the gender of the female religious leaders constitutes the new element, which may This workshop sets out to look at the historical background, contemporary trajectories, and impact of the emergence of new powerful female agencies in these conservative religious traditions – a change, which paradoxically takes place while women’s rights in modern and liberal settings are being curtailed. Which strategies do the women employ that allow them to integrate in a tradition that excludes them? Who are the agents behind these processes? Who decides which elements of text and practice are essential and which are subject to negotiation? What is appropriated, or rejected by the new actors? How do the processes of negotiation unfold? What are the competing agendas of the diverse stakeholders, including men involved in the processes? We welcome contributions around these, but also other questions on the theme.

The workshop serves as a forum for discussion of female religious and ritual leadership in South Asian religious traditions.

Sunday, July 26th • 14:00 - 18:00 followed by Reception Dinner
Monday, July 27th • 09:00 - 17:00
South Asia Institute, Room tba.