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 nuns and 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 be rejected, embraced, or accommodated.

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.

Online workshop with presentations, round tables, and discussions, hosted by the Department of Cultural and Religious History of South Asia, South Asia Institute, Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies, Heidelberg University.

**Dates:** August 10 to 14, 2020

We welcome presentations from scholars of all career stages.

Please apply until June 15th to: huesken@uni-heidelberg.de

Applications should include: title, abstract (200 words), presenter’s name, affiliation, and contact data.

Attendants’ (free, yet obligatory) registration: meera.sridhar@sai.uni-heidelberg.de