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Online Workshop, 28-30 May 2025

## **Trans/Religion in South Asia**

This online workshop aims to expand our knowledge and understanding of what trans *and* religion might be and do in and across various South Asian contexts. Trans offers a mode of analysis that is not only concerned with gender identities but also explores the crossings and shifts that often characterize the contact between gender and religion and urges us to think with multiplicities, aggregated embodiments, affects, techniques, and limitless number of possible attachments (Aizura et al. 2020). We are particularly interested in the discursive and embodied enactments of gender in religious traditions and practices—and their many doings in religion, spirituality, kinship, gender, sexuality, class/caste, nationalism/s or beyond. We consider the ways in which religious practices have been central to affirming gender nonconforming identities and community worldmaking, as observed among *hijras* in Bangladesh (Hossain 2012 and 2018), *hijras* and/or *kinnars* in India (Nanda 1998; Reddy 2005; Bevilacqua 2022), *khwaja siras* in Pakistan (Jaffer 2017; Pamment 2019), and *tirunankais* and *jogappas* in South India (Craddock 2023 and 2024; Ramberg 2017). We are also interested in the ways in which transitory acts of gender form part of specific religious disciplines, as in the case of *sakhis* (van der Veer 1987), *bauls* (Lorea 2018), ‘cross-dressing’ Sufis (Anjum 2014; Ewing 1997, 1984, 2021), and religious festivals (Choudhary 2010; Kuriakose 2018; Flueckiger 2020).

Recognizing how secular epistemologies have often worked to diminish our understanding of both trans and religion (Strassfeld 2019 and others), we invite a capacious consideration of imaginative ways of worlding gender by exploring understudied dimensions of religiosity, often rooted in local contexts. At the same time, we invite questions of how religious mythologies and practices can be mobilized for claiming the rights of gender non-conforming subjects (see Nagar, DasGupta 2023), sometimes reifying hegemonic constructs (Upadhyay, 2020), or moving “elsewhere” (Dutta 2022; Kasmani 2022).

Some key questions this workshop aims to address include (but are not limited to):

- How have South Asian religious traditions historically understood and justified the existence of gender nonconforming individuals?
- What roles do mythologies and sacred texts play in shaping societal views on gender fluidity within South Asian religious contexts?
- What cultural or spiritual significance is attached to the adoptions of gender-nonconforming roles during religious festivals?

- In what ways do femininities and masculinities acquire symbolic meaning for individuals who embody gender shifts within religious contexts?
- To what extent does religion influence the personal and social identity formation of individuals within gender nonconforming communities?
- How has caste/class traditionally influenced the practice of gender shifts in religious practices?
- In what ways have South Asian religions adapted their perspectives and practices in response to contemporary gender-related social and/or legal changes?
- How have gender nonconforming communities reinterpreted or reshaped traditional religious practices to reflect their experiences and identities?
- How do gender nonconforming individuals perceive their roles within religious communities, and what challenges or affirmations do they encounter?
- Under what conditions do religious practices involving gender shifts reinforce heteronormative roles and ideologies, and when might they serve as a means of empowerment or emancipation?
- Given the close ties between religion and politics in South Asia, to what extent can religion be leveraged as a tool for advocacy or agency by gender nonconforming individuals?

We are looking for contributions that expand our knowledge and understanding of the intersections of trans and religion in South Asia, by exploring this subject historically and/or ethnographically and/or discursively. The workshop welcomes paper presentations and/or creative responses (films, visual art, theater, etc.), coming from a wide variety of disciplines—religion, history, anthropology, theater and performance studies, gender and sexuality studies, sociology, geography, and law. We anticipate the workshop will result in other gatherings through the coming year, including a panel proposal for the UCR Conference on Queer and Trans Studies in Religion (Feb 2026) and publication.

The **deadline** for abstract submission is **30 January 2025**.

The **abstract** should be of 250 words, include **5 keywords**, and contain a **short bio** of the author.

Please send submissions to

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**Decisions** will be communicated by **28 February 2025**.

To facilitate productive exchanges, we kindly request each presenter to submit a **3,000-word draft by late April**.

The workshop timings will depend on contributors' time zones.