Asian and Middle Eastern Seminar
1pm-3pm ● February 17, 2023 ● Fox Center

Moderators: Devin Stewart, Courtney Freer, and Petra Creamer; Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies

Vocal Guising in the Srngara Songs of Tallapaka Annamayya
Harshita Kamath, Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies

The Telugu poet Tallapaka Annamayya (1424-1503 C.E.) composed thousands of lyrical love songs to the god Venkatesvara of Tirumala, the most popular Hindu temple in the world today. Annamayya’s convention of taking on the female voice to speak to his god—a practice that I refer to as vocal guising—is commonplace in South Asian literature. In employing the practice of vocal guising, Annamayya seamlessly integrates bhakti (devotion) and srngara (eroticism) in his lyrical songs. However, Annamayya’s use of vocal guising can also be viewed as an act of power; as a brahmin male poet affiliated with the famed Tirumala temple, Annamayya authors and authorizes a particular vision of female sexual experience through his poetic voice. Focusing on the srngara (erotic) songs of Annamayya’s corpus, I trace the workings of bhakti-gender-power articulated within the text and by the descendants, performers, and devotees who interact with the text.

The End of the Islamist Advantage?: Bringing in the “Forgotten” Islamists of the Gulf
Courtney Freer, Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies

Existing scholarship has documented the extent to which Sunni Islamists enjoy a unique advantage in electoral settings across the Middle East, whether due to their ability to implement social welfare networks, their skill in attracting followers on the basis of a religious ideology which governments are hesitant to repress, or their power to play on religiosity to mobilize electoral support. In the decade since the Arab Spring after initial electoral victories in Tunisia and Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has been designated a terrorist organization in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, and elsewhere. What was once considered an advantage, then, seems to have become a political liability for Sunni Islamist groups. The Muslim Brotherhood’s brand has become less linked to its history of service provision and ideological guidance and instead is increasingly associated with radical Islamist movements. This study investigates the extent to which the Gulf states witnessed a similar development. It examines both Shii and Sunni Islamist responses to new global challenges to assess whether their ideological stance has shifted in the wake of the Arab Spring.

This seminar will meet on the following Fridays during the fall and spring semesters: November 11th from 3pm-5pm; February 17th and March 31st from 1pm-3pm at The Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry. For more information, please contact Devin Stewart @ dstewar@emory.edu.

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