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CRD10. ANTHROPOLOGY OF GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

ROUND TABLE TITLE:

RELIGION, WOMEN AND CULTURAL CAPACITY

CHAIR AND MODERATOR: PROF ANJALI KURANE

CO-CHAIR: DR CHRIS OPESEN

CONVENOR: PROF ITISHREE PADHI

ABSTRACT

Religion is a complex system of rituals and beliefs that is instrumental in shaping individual identities and community linkages through a mesh of intangibles comprising of values, norms, sanctions, and ideas. Its actions work upward and outward throughout the cultural fabric. At times they thread so finely into the total pattern of culture that it is impossible to say where the sacred ends and mundane begins. Hoebel (1958) aptly observed that Religion is variable, intertwined with so many phases of culture. Feminist studies and anthropological enquiry has repeatedly drawn attention to women often becoming objects of ritual taboo, resulting in phased seclusion. In recent years, far more attention is being focused on studying conflicting relationship between religion and women. Frequently generalized and hypothetically approached, researchers have discussed both religion and gender from a variety of different angles which many times raise eyebrows and compel us to rethink, reimagining women, religion, sexuality in family with its cultural capacity (Saba-2005, Lewis-1971). These works question women's ascribed status and role in the given society. These studies also document how women resist various forms of domination, and how they are being hindered or helped by their faith.

The cultural construction of masculinity and femininity frames religion as a source of prejudice and discrimination and furthers gender inequality. Women are viewed as subjects neglected, ignored, and undervalued. Religious institutions prescribe rules for women, norms, and practices in specific reference to rituals if not necessarily prayers. This contributes to gender marginalization and creates an agency that justifies women's subordination to males in social, economic, and political realms. It works as a catalytic agent to affirm and reinforce patriarchal dominance. Some studies are trying to explore feasibility of religion in reversing engrained negativity. Activists and researchers are exploring possibilities of elevating status of women by empowering them and religious institutions. Institutionalized religions and their citadels have power to provide opportunities to women in expanding their roles, actively involving them in socio-economic, political, health, welfare, and public policies.

In this Round Table, it is intended to debate and discuss these themes through research conducted with various approaches and methods, in different ethnographic fields and religions with a global perspective.

Keywords: Women, religion, cultural capacity. gender.

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