

2022 Paula J. Giddings Best Article Award

Winner

Rumya S. Putcha for her article “The Mythical Courtesan: Womanhood and Dance in Transnational India,” *Meridians* 20:1

Bio: Rumya S. Putcha is assistant professor in the Institute for Women’s Studies and the Hugh Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia.

Abstract: This article interrogates how and why courtesan identities are simultaneously embraced and disavowed by Brahmin dancers. Using a combination of ethnographic and critical feminist methods, which allow the author to toggle between the past and the present, between India and the United States, and between film analysis and the dance studio, the author examines the cultural politics of the romanticized and historical Indian dancer—the mythical courtesan. The author argues that the mythical courtesan was called into existence through film cultures in the early twentieth century to provide a counterpoint against which a modern and national Brahmanical womanhood could be articulated. The author brings together a constellation of events that participated in the construction of Indian womanhood, especially the rise of sound film against the backdrop of growing anticolonial and nationalist sentiments in early twentieth-century South India. The author focuses on films that featured an early twentieth century dancer-singer-actress, Sundaramma. In following her career through Telugu film and connecting it to broader conversations about Indian womanhood in the 1930s and 1940s, the author traces the contours of an affective triangle between three mutually constituting emotional points: pleasure, shame, and disgust.

Read the article: doi.org/10.1215/15366936-9554200

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Honorable Mention

Evelyn Asultany for her article “How Hate Crime Laws Perpetuate Anti-Muslim Racism,”
Meridians 20:2

Bio: Evelyn Alsultany is associate professor of American studies and ethnicity at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11* (2012) and coeditor of *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* (2011) and *Between the Middle East and the Americas* (2013).

Abstract: This essay focuses on two cases in which Muslim youth were murdered yet law enforcement refused to classify the murders as hate crimes. It examines the 2015 murders of Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Razan Abu-Salha in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and the 2017 murder of Nabra Hassanen in Reston, Virginia. This author argues that the denial of these cases as hate crimes contributes to the diminishment of anti-Muslim racism and should be understood as a form of racial gaslighting—a systematic denial of the persistence and severity of racism. In conversation with those advocating for rethinking the criminal justice system through prison abolition and restorative justice, it posits that seeking state recognition for hate crimes cannot provide justice given that the state is responsible for constructing Muslims as a national security threat. It explores how anti-Muslim racism is upheld through extremely narrow and problematic definitions of racism and hate crimes, through an approach to hate crimes that prioritizes punishment over civil rights, and through creating a dilemma for Muslim communities who must seek recognition of anti-Muslim racism from the same state that enacts surveillance and violence on them.

Read the article: doi.org/10.1215/15366936-10059079