

Merin Shobhana Xavier

*Assistant Professor
School of Religion
Queen's University*

Academic Degrees

- 2015 Ph.D., Religion and Culture (with specialization in Sufism in North America and South Asia), Laurier-Waterloo University, Waterloo, ON
Dissertation Title: *Masjids, Ashrams and Mazars: Transnational Sufism and the Bawa Mubaiyaddeen Fellowship.*
Supervisor: Dr. Meena Sharify-Funk
- 2010 M.A., Humanities (with area specialization in Sufism in South Asia) York University, Toronto, ON
Major Research Paper Title: *Women in Contemporary South Asian Sufism: Gender, Embodiment, and Ritual Performance.*
Supervisor: Dr. Amila Buturovic
- 2009 BA with honours (specialized in Religious Studies) York University, Toronto, ON
- 2009 B. Ed (Religious Studies teachable) York University, Toronto, ON

Academic Appointments

- 2018- Assistant Professor, School of Religion, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario
- 2017-2018 Visiting Scholar, South Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
- 2017-2018 Assistant Professor, Philosophy and Religion, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York
- 2015-2017 Visiting Assistant Professor, History and Religious Studies, Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania
- 2014-2015 Instructor, Religion and Culture, Wilfrid Laurier, Waterloo, ON
- 2011-14 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON
- 2012 Research Assistant, for Dr. Meena Sharify-Funk, Kitchener, ON
- 2009-10 Research Assistant, for Dr. Priscilla Uppal, York University, Toronto, ON

Academic Honours and Awards

- 2019-20 School of Graduate and Postgraduate Studies John G. Freeman Faculty Excellence Award
- 2019 Nominated for W.J Barnes Teaching Award, Queen's University

2015	Award for Outstanding Work at the Graduate Level, Wilfrid Laurier University
2015	Nominated for a Medal of Academic Excellence in Doctoral Dissertation, Wilfrid Laurier University
2015	The Larry Toombs Award for Outstanding Teaching Assistant, Wilfrid Laurier University
2014	Fall Researcher Award, Wilfrid Laurier University
2009	Vanier Vingt-Deux Honour Roll Award, York University
2009	Dean's Honour Roll, York University

Academic Scholarships

2014-15	Ontario Graduate Scholarship, \$15 000
2013-14	Ontario Graduate Scholarship, \$15 000
2012-13	Ontario Graduate Scholarship, \$15 000
2013	Travel and Research Award Wilfrid Laurier, \$1250
2012	Travel and Research Award Wilfrid Laurier, \$1000
2011	Graduate Fellowship, Faculty of Graduate Studies \$ 12 000
2009	Graduate Scholarship York Graduate Studies \$14 000

Research Funding/Fellowships

2020	Fondazione Giorgio Cini Foundation Residential Fellowship, Venice, Italy (postponed to Spring 2021).
2020	SARS CoV-2/COVID-19 Research Funding, Queen's University, (Co-Investigator), \$20, 000.
2019	Center for Islam in the Contemporary World Shenandoah University Research Grant, \$1550
2018	Queen's University Institutional SSHRC Grant, \$2500
2014	Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion Doctoral Travel Scholarship, \$1500

Teaching Funding/Fellowships

2019	Wabash Center Fellowship \$5000
2019	Queen's University Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigeneity Fund \$3000

Publications

Monograph: 1
 Co-authored monograph: 1
 Articles in referred journal: 5
 Chapters in Edited Volume: 3
 Article in online referred journal: 1
 Articles under review: 2
 Forthcoming Chapters in edited volume: 4
 Forthcoming Encyclopedic contributions: 2
 Non-refereed publications: 2

Book reviews: 2

Monograph

Sacred Spaces and Transnational Networks in American Sufism: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and Contemporary Shrine Cultures. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2018.

Co-Authored Monograph

Contemporary Sufism: Piety, Politics, and Popular Culture. (Co-authored with Meena Sharify-Funk and William Rory Dickson). New York: Routledge, 2017.

Articles in Refereed Journal

“Lighting Incense and Oil Lamps during *Jum’ab*: Hindu-Sufi Devotions in Contemporary Northern Sri Lanka” in Special Edition of Hindus and Others: A Sri Lankan Perspective in *The South Asianist: The Journal of South Asian Studies*. Vol 6. No 1. 2018 pp. 46-75.

“The Mysteries of the Universe: The Tamil Muslim Intellectualism of M. C. Siddi Lebbe” (Co-authored with Alexander McKinley) *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. December 2017 pp. 1-18.

“Caught Between Rebels and Armies: Competing Nationalisms and Anti-Muslim Violence in Sri Lanka” (Co-authored with Amarnath Amarasingam) for special issue of *Islamophobia Studies Journal* Vol. 7, pp. 22- 43. February, 2016.

“*Négociation du sacré à Philadelphie: soufismes concurrents au sanctuaire de Bawa Muhaiyaddeen* [Negotiating the Sacred in Philadelphia: Concurrent Sufisms in the *Mazār* of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen]” (Co-authored with William Rory Dickson) in *Social Compass*. 62 (4), pp. 584-597. December 2015.

“The *Insan Kamil* of Bawa: Metaphysics of a Tamil Sufi Sheikh.” *The Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities* Vol. 39, pp. 51-66, 2013.

Chapters in Edited Volumes

“Gendering the Divine: Women, Femininity, and Queer Identities on the Sufi Path” in *Routledge Handbook of Islam and Gender* edited by Justine Howe. New York: Routledge, 2021.

“The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship: Diverse Identities and Negotiated Spaces” in *Varieties of Sufism in America: Islam, Sufi Orders and Authority in a Time of Transition* edited volume by Marcia Hermansen and Elliot Bazzano. New York: SUNY Press, 2020: 55-84.

“Disordering and Reordering Sufism: North American Sufi Teachers and the *Tariqa* Model” (co-authored with William Rory Dickson) in *Global Sufism: Boundaries, Narratives and Practices* edited volume by Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino. Hurst Publishers and Oxford University Press. 2019:137-156.

Article in Online Referred Journal

“An American Sufi Shrine, Bawa’s *Mazar* in Coatesville, Pennsylvania” and “From Illuminated Rumi to the Green Barn: The Art of Sufism in America,” Object Narrative, in *Conversations: An Online Journal of the Center for the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion*: Yale University, 2016.

Articles Under Review

“The Deconstruction of Dafther Jailani: Muslim and Buddhist Contests of Original History in Sri Lanka” (co-authored with Alexander McKinley) submitted to *History of Religions*.

“Is Sufism a New Religious Movement? Typological Reflections” (co-authored with William Rory Dickson) submitted to *Religion Compass*.

Forthcoming Chapters in Edited Volumes

“Western Sufi Institutions and Practices” in *Handbook of Sufi Studies* edited by Marcia Hermansen & Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh (Brill).

“Consuming Sufism: Rumi and the Making of a Cultural Icon” in *Bloomsbury Handbook of Muslims and Popular Culture* edited by Hussein Rashid and Kristian Petersen (Bloomsbury Press).

“Diasporic Sacred Spaces: The Case of Boundary Making at an American Sufi Shrine” in *Oxford Handbook of Religious Space* edited by Jeanne Kilde (Oxford University Press).

“Sufi Networks and Gender in South Asia” in *Routledge Handbook on Islam in Asia* edited by Chiara Formichi (Routledge).

Forthcoming Encyclopedic Entries or Reference Tools

“Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen” *Encyclopedia of Islam* edited by Alexander Knysch. (Brill).

“North American Muslim Geography” in *Bloomsbury Religion in North America (BRINA)* co-edited by Hussein Rashid and Huma Mohibullah.

Book Reviews

2020 *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family and Society* by Zahra Ayubi in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

2020 *Peaceful Families: American Muslim Efforts Against Domestic Violence* by Juliane Hammer in *American Religion*. Indiana University Press. 1, no 2. Pp. 157-160.

Non-Refereed Publications

2018 “Sacred Spaces and Transnational Networks in American Sufism: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and Contemporary Shrine Cultures” in *The Maydan*, April 10.

2012 “Sufism and Pop Culture: Understanding Sufi Art” in *Enlightenment Through the Ages*.

Academic Conference Papers and Panel Presentations (22)

Papers in refereed conferences: 22

International: 11

National: 11

Papers in Refereed Conferences

Papers in Refereed International Conferences:

- 2019 “Contentious Sufi Bodies: Shrines and their Detractors in Post-War Sri Lanka” for *Sufism and the Body Conference*, Utrecht University, September 12-13.
- 2018 “Between Religious Contestations and Accommodations: Sufi Shrines in Post-War Sri Lanka” for *Symposium on Tombs, Shrines, Samadhis and Relics at South Asia Conference*, Madison, Wisconsin, October 11.
- 2017 “Disordering and Reordering Sufism: North American Sufi Teachers and the *Tariqa* Model” (co-presented with William Rory Dickson) for *Transnational Sufism in Contemporary Societies*, Giorgio Cini Foundation, Venice, Italy, November 9-11.
- 2016 “Transnational Pilgrimages: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and Shrines” at Pilgrimage Symposium William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Virginia. September 30 to October 2.
- 2015 “From Jaffna to Pennsylvania: Piety and Practice at the Shrines of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen” at the annual American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, Georgia. November 22.
- 2015 “Lighting Incense and Oil Lamps during *Jum’ab*: Hindu-Sufi Practices in Contemporary Jaffna, Sri Lanka” paper presented for conference Hindus and Others in South Asia and Overseas. Paris, France, February 17.
- 2014 “At the Grave of Bawa: Sufism, Shrines and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship in North America” paper presented for a panel on “Sufi Shrines” at the 1st Global Conference on Sacred Journeys, Oxford, England, July 9th-11th.
- 2014 A Sufi Community in Philadelphia, forum panelist at the Association for Asian Studies, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 28th.
- 2013 “Tracing the Metaphysics and Cosmology of a Tamil Sufi Sheikh: Encountering the *Insan Kamil of Bawa*” paper presented for a panel on “Global Sufism” at annual American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, Maryland, November 24.
- 2013 “Praying in Arabic and Singing in Tamil: A Sufi *Urs* in Toronto” paper presented for a panel on “South Asian Diaspora” at the annual South Asian Studies Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, October 19.

2012 “Being Tamil in Philadelphia: The Influence of Sri Lanka on the Development of North American Sufism” paper presented for the Center of Islamic Studies at the National Association of African American Studies, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, February 14.

Papers in Refereed Canadian Conferences:

2017 “Piety and Religiosity at the Tomb of Sufi Saints: Sufi Shrines and the Public Sphere” paper presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of religion, Toronto, Ontario. May 21st.

2015 “Negotiating the Sacred in Philadelphia: Competing Sufisms at the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Shrine” (Co-presented with William Rory Dickson) paper presented at the roundtable Transnational Identity and Religious Practice in North America. Ottawa, Ontario, June 1st.

2015 “Caught Between Rebels and Armies: Competing Nationalisms and Anti-Muslim Violence I Sri Lanka” (Co-presented with Amarnath Amarasingam) paper presented for panel Complicating Tamil-ness at Home and in Diaspora. Toronto, Ontario, May 1st.

2014 “At the Grave of Bawa: Sufi Spaces and the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship in North America” paper presented for “Outside the Box: Reimagining Sufism in North America” at Congress 2014, Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, Brock University, May 25.

2014 “the Sufism of Bawa: Islamic Mysticism in Contemporary Sri Lanka” paper presented for “Belonging to the Divine” panel at Tamil Studies Conference, University of Toronto, May 17.

2013 “Praying in Arabic and Singing in Tamil: A Sufi *Urs* in Toronto” paper presented for “Modern Islam” panel for Congress 2013, Canadian Study for the Society of Religion, University of Victoria, June 2.

2013 “Tracing the Sufi Metaphysics and Cosmology of a Tamil Sufi Sheikh: Encountering the *Insan Kamil* of Bawa in North America” paper presented on the “Embodiment and Transformation” panel for the Islamic Studies McGill Graduate Symposium, May 4th.

2012 “Talking about Religious Presences Instead: Understanding Religious Identities of Students for Meaningful Pedagogical Practices” paper presented “Religion and Education” panel at Eastern Regional American Academy of Religion, Waterloo, May 5th.

2012 “Talking About Religious Presence Instead” paper presented at the “Education and Religion” at the Annual Religion and Public Life Conference, Waterloo, March 17.

2010 “Sufism on my Ipod: The Globalization of Modern Sufis, Trends in Contemporary Film and Musical Culture” paper presented at the Humanities Conference, Toronto, May 4th.

2010 “Sufism on my Ipod: The Globalization of Modern Sufism, Trends in Contemporary Film and Musical Culture” paper presented at the International Conference on Media, Religion and Culture, Toronto, August 11th.

Responses at Academic Conferences and Colloquia (1)

- 2018 Response to papers of “Islam, Gender, Women Unit and Teaching Religion Unit: Teaching about Islam, Gender, and Women” American Academy of Religion. November 19.

Plenary Addresses and Academic Lectures (4)

- 2018 “Sufi Shrines in Sri Lanka”, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. Eastern University. June 21.
- 2018 “From Sri Lanka to America: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and Contemporary Transnational Sufism” for South Asia Program, Cornell University, April 9.
- 2015 “Maryam to Bawa: Pilgrimages and Shrines in the Fellowship Communities” for the Center for Global Islamic Studies, Lehigh University. November 9.
- 2015 “Sufism in North America” for the Middle Eastern Studies and Religion Program. New York, Bard College. April 21st.

Participation in Academic Workshops (6)

- 2018-19 Early Career Workshop, Wasbash Center, Crawfordsville Indiana.
- 2016 *Pre-Tenure Faculty Workshop*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, VA, May 25-26.
- 2015 *The Many Histories of the Present: Past and Possibilities in the Muslim World*, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, April 17-19.
- 2014 *Modern South Asia Workshop*, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, April 5-6.
- 2013 *Whose Religion? Education about Religion in Public Schools*, SSHRC Funded Workshop, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, November 4-6th.
- 2012 “*Intersections*” *Sri Lanka Graduate Conference*, Pre-dissertation Development Workshop, Stanford University, California November 8-9th.

Guest Lectures (8)

- 2019 “Sufi Dress” for Dr. Pamela Dicky Young’s Religion and Dress, Queen’s University, Kingston, ON, March.
- 2015 “Bawa’s Communities” for Dr. SherAli Tareen’s Islamic Mysticism via Skype for Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, April 6.
- 2015 “Islam in the Americas: Slavery, Immigration and Seekers” for Dr. Jason Neelis’ Religions in the America at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, March 31st.

- 2015 “Introduction to Sufism” for Dr. Meena Sharify-Funk’s Religious Heritage of Islam at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo February 24th and 26th.
- 2014 “Islam in the Americas: Slavery, Immigration and Seekers” for Dr. Marybeth White’s Religion in the Americas at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, February 27.
- 2013 “Islam and Women” for Dr. Doris Jakobsh’s Gender and Religion course at Waterloo University, Waterloo, November 19th.
- 2013 “Sufism and Violence: Divergent Tendencies” for Dr. Amaranth Amaringsam Religion and Violence course, Wilfrid Laurier, Waterloo, October 3.
- 2013 “Tamils and Sinhalese: The Psychological Construction of Tamils as Others in Sri Lanka” for Dr. Kris Klassen’s Evil and its Symbols, Wilfrid Laurier, March 5.
- 2012 Lecturer on “Women as Seekers: Medieval Christian Traditions and the Reading of Paulo Coelho’s the Valkyries” for William Rory Dickson’s Stories and the Sacred, Wilfrid Laurier, April 5.

Public Speaking and Community Service

- 2014 Facilitator, consultant and master of ceremonies for *the Sufi Path: Encounters at the Caranvanesari, an evening of Sufi poetry and music*. Hosted by Sri Lanka without Borders. Toronto, Canada. March 1st.
- 2012 Speaker for Spiritual Heritage Education Network. *North American and South Asian Sufism*, Kitchener, Ontario, September 29th.
- 2015 Master of Ceremonies for Inter-Cultural Dialogue Institute Friendship Dinner. Hosted by Inter-Cultural Dialogue Institute Kitchener-Waterloo, Kitchener, Canada. November 27.
- 2012 Panelist on *Muslim Women and the London Olympics*, Television Program TVi Toronto, Ontario.
- 2013 PhD Representative for Religion and Culture Hiring, Wilfrid Laurier University.

LANGUAGES

Tamil (Reading, writing and speaking)

Training

- “Tamil: Graduate Exam Reading Preparation” University of Toronto, January-March 2014. Instructor Dushy Balamohan.
- “Tamil” University of Toronto Scarborough, May-July 2014. Instructor, Dushy Balamohan.

Arabic (primary reading)

Training

Modern Standard Arabic. International House Cairo, International Language Institute. August 2016

Introduction to Arabic. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London Language Centre. Instructor, Fatima Dabboussi. May-June 2011.

PROFESSIONAL

Committees and Memberships in Professional Associations and Activities

- 2018- AAR Steering Committee member, Islamic Mysticism Group
- 2017- Co-host of *New Books in Islamic Studies* for New Books Network Podcast Series.
- 2017- Elected Director, *American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies*
- 2017- AAR Steering Committee member, Transnational Religious Expression: Between Asia and North America Seminar
- 2011- Member, *American Academy of Religion*
- 2011- Member, *Canadian Society for the Study of Religion*
- 2011- Member, *American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies*

Graduate Supervision (in progress)

Jacqueline Giesbrecht, “Sacredness, Accessibility, and Inclusion: Disability Advocacy in the Christian Church”, School of Religion, MA, Queen’s University.

Amal Haroon, “Gender Inequality in the Muslim Community and its Relation to Violence against Muslim Women”, Gender Studies, MA, Queen’s University.

Graduate Supervision Committee Member (in progress)

James Kwateng-Yeboah, “African Pentecostal Immigrants in Toronto: Assessing Migrants’ Aspirations and Identities”, Cultural Studies, PhD. Queen’s University.

Saira Chhibber, “Snake Women, Poison Damsels and Narratives of Revenge: Myth, Horror and the Social Construction of Gender in Hindi Media”, Cultural Studies, PhD. Queen’s University.

Craig Rogalsky, “Countering Violent Extremists- Islamic World Methodologies”, Cultural Studies, PhD. Queen’s University.

Graduate Student Examining Committees

Internal examiner, Sanober Umar, “Racializing Subalternity: Space, Caste, and Gender in Muslim Mohallas of Lucknow” (1947-1993), History, PhD, defended April 6, 2020, Queen’s University.

Internal examiner, Jennifer Lemche, “Is Daoism Green? Engaging Daoist Responses to Environmental Challenges in China”, Cultural Studies, PhD, defended February 19th, 2019. Queen’s University.

Internal examiner, Rawaa Bakhsh, “Evident Tropes in Contemporary ‘Islamic Art’”, Cultural Studies, PhD. Defended August 13, 2019. Queen’s University.

Second reader, Katrina Rosie, “The Evolution of Christian Commemorative Meals: Conversations Between Ritual and Theology”, Masters in Religion, MA. August 2019. Queen’s University.