



Seminar

RUBY LAL

Fellow, SCAS.

Professor of South Asian History, Emory University, Atlanta

*Lacunae: Crafting a Narrative History of
a Sixteenth Century Mughal Princess*

Tuesday, 9 February 2021, 2:15 p.m.

Due to the precautions imposed by the current Corona pandemic,
the Thunberg Hall will be closed to the public until further notice.

You are therefore invited to join the seminar via Zoom instead:

<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/68099601365>

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ABOUT RUBY LAL

Ruby Lal is Professor of South Asian History at Emory University, Atlanta. She taught previously at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. Her fields of study include feminist history and theory, and the question of archive as it relates to writing about Islamic societies in the early modern and modern world. Author of numerous articles and essays for a wider audience, her first book, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2005), won much acclaim, including numerous reviews in major international journals and magazines, such as *The New York Review of Books*, *The Economic and Political Weekly*, *Revue Historique*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*. Her second book, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2013), was reviewed extensively in academic journals and magazines dealing with broader intellectual concerns. Her recently published biography, *Empress: The Astonishing Reign of Nur Jahan* (W.W. Norton, New York, 2018), was lauded internationally and was a finalist in History for the *Los Angeles Times Book Prize* and won the *Georgia Author of the Year Award* in Biography.

While at SCAS, she will be completing her new biography – *REBEL PRINCESS: The Great Adventures of Gulbadan* (Yale University Press) – of the sixteenth century nomadic Mughal Princess Gulbadan, the sole woman prose chronicler of the untold histories of bartered women, dead children, and peripatetic women embodying the adventure of life in war zones. A key lens for thinking this biography is the question of archive and migration in the early modern Indian Ocean world.

ABSTRACT

Biography has garnered a great deal of interest in wider intellectual readership in recent years. Academic historians are increasingly considering writing in the genre of “popular history.” Such a turn is not seamless and requires learning a new craft. What are the challenges of taking on this form? What happens to the question of evidence that historians fervently guard when it comes to history-writing? Might it be the case that our beloved propositions of the “archive” – and indeed those of history and biography – are unsettled when we turn to narrating history? These are some of the questions I will address by sharing parts of my current biography of the Mughal Princess Gulbadan, the sole woman prose chronicler of sixteenth century Islamic world, whose (broken) chronicle of untold histories currently sits in the British Library. A key lens in this biography and my presentation is the question of historical archive.