



## ZMO-Kolloquium

**“Agency” reconsidered: between life worlds and world order**

**Thursday, 30 September 2010, 6 pm**

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### **Her Own Will and Consent: A Strange Route to Women’s Rights in 19th Century India**

**Lecture by Prof. Tanika Sarkar**

#### **Venue**

Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

The lecture will explore the construction of a notion of the woman’s agency within the early colonial bureaucratic apparatus in the context of the British governance of immolations of Hindu widows. It will trace how and why the notion of the widow’s consent to the ritual became a central concern to the state, the orthodoxy and to the reformers in different ways and how it eventually forced upon all these categories of male actors, a recognition of the woman as a self determining subject with a legal personhood. This opens up a paradox : an acknowledgement of the woman’s supposed consent to her death by burning leads to an acknowledgement of the will of the living woman and also makes it the foundation of the continued life or death of a holy ritual. This lecture will build up an account of the ways in which early colonial administration tried to cope with the ritual which was granted legal immunity for a long time. It will also refer to the discussions of widowhood, female lifeworlds and religion in the emergent public sphere. It will, finally, try to show what kinds of arguments ensured its long delayed abolition in the early 19th century.

In the process, it will interrogate notions of female agency, especially as deployed by feminist scholars in South Asia.

**Tanika Sarkar** is Professor, Modern History, at the Jawaharlal Nehru university, Delhi. She has recently been a Visiting Fellow at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. Among her publications are: *Bengal 1928-1934: The Politics of Protest*, Oxford University press, Delhi, 1987; *Words to Win: A Modern Autobiography: Kali for Women*, Delhi 1995; *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Religion, Family, Community*, Permanent Black, Delhi and Indiana, 2001; *Rebels, Wives and Saints: Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Bengal*, Permanent Black, Delhi and Seagull, New York, 2009. She has also co edited with Urvashi Butalia, *Women of the Hindu Right*, Delhi and Zed Press, London; also, with Sumit Sarkar: *Women and Social Reform*, Permanent Black, Delhi and Indiana, 2008.

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