

Hindu Goddesses

RELI 840: 394:02

FALL 2012

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 9:30-10:30 am, or by appointment
Dept of Religion, Loree Building, Room 116

Class Location: Douglass Campus, Ruth Adams Building (RAB), Room 209B
Class Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4th Period, 2:15-3:35 pm

Do you know who these goddesses are? Which one is the 'Cool One'? Which one lives in Shiva's hair? Which one originated as a human woman? Which is considered a 'living goddess'? Which one regularly possesses devotees? Which one is a fierce virgin warrior *and* mother to her devotees?



The Hindu religious tradition is populated by some 330 million divine beings. Central among these is the Great Goddess, who manifests herself through a myriad of goddesses. This course introduces the most well known of these Hindu goddesses (and also some lesser known ones too), ranging from popular pan-Hindu female divinities to local or regional goddesses, and explores their mythical narratives, associated powers, iconography, and rituals of worship. It also aims to present some of the methodological approaches scholars employ in the interpretation of goddess worship in South Asia and abroad. Materials are drawn from textual, historical sources as well as contemporary

ethnographic research, and seek to include representative figures from different regions throughout India and the Himalayan region. Readings and class discussions are supplemented by films to further bring to life the vividness of these Hindu goddess traditions.

The following **REQUIRED** books are available at the Cook/Douglass Bookstore. They are also on reserve at the Douglass Library.

Thomas B. Coburn. *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. ISBN 81-7030-299-4

Dempsey, Corinne G. *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. ISBN: 9780195187304

David Kinsley. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. ISBN 81-208-0379-5

John Stratton Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, eds. *Devi: Goddesses of India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. ISBN 0-520-20058-6

June McDaniel. *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. ISBN 978-019-516791-7

Additional REQUIRED readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be posted to Sakai.

Course Topics and Readings

Note: This syllabus is subject to change! A successful class depends on the symbiotic relationship between the professor, students, and their individual interests and abilities. I may therefore alter the change of pace of the course or the readings accordingly. I will alert you to these changes with ample notice in advance –at least one class – when the readings have changed.

Please do all reading in advance of the class for which it is assigned, and please bring all readings (including those posted in electronic form on Sakai) in print form to class. Failure to bring the necessary materials to class will negatively affect your participation grade.

Tuesday, Sept 4	Introduction to the course
Thursday, Sept 6	Vedic Goddesses and the Great Goddess
Readings:	1. David Kinsley, <i>Hindu Goddesses</i> , Chs 1 (pp. 6-18) and 9 (pp. 132-150).
Suggested:	*1. Fuller, <i>The Camphor Flame</i> , Chs 2 (“Gods and Goddesses,” pp. 29-56) AND 3 (“Worship,” pp. 57-82)
Tuesday, Sept 11	Consort Goddesses I: Parvatī, Laksmī, Sarasvatī
Readings:	1. David Kinsley, <i>Hindu Goddesses</i> , Chs 2-4 (pp. 19-64);

*2. Dimmitt & van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, pp. 157-187.

Thursday, Sept 13

Readings:

Consort Goddesses II: Sita & Radha

1. David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, Chs 5 and 6 (pp. 65-94);
- *2. Cornelia Dimmitt, "Sita: Fertility Goddess and Sakti" in *The Divine Consort*, ed. Hawley and Wulff, pp. 210-223;
3. Donna Wulff, "Radha: Consort and Conqueror of Krishna" in *Devi*, ed. Hawley and Wulff, pp. 109-134;
- *4. Dimmitt & van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, pp. 118-130.

Tuesday, Sept 18

Readings:

Warrior Goddesses I: Durga and the Devi-Mahatmya

1. David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, Ch. 7 (pp. 95-115);
2. Thomas Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, pp. 1-84;
- *3. *Tales of Durga*, Amar Chitra Katha comic series, pp. 193-223.

Thursday, Sept 20

Readings:

Warrior Goddesses II: Kali

1. David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, Ch 8 (pp. 116-131)
 - *2. Patricia Dold, "Kali the Terrific and Her Tests: The Sakta Devotionalism of the *Mahabhagavata Purana*," in *Encountering Kali*, ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffery J. Kripal, pp. 39-59;
 - *3. Usha Menon and Richard Shweder, "Dominating Kali: Hindu Family Values and Tantric Power," in *Encountering Kali*, ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffery J. Kripal, pp. 80-99.
- In-class Film: "Devi" (89 min) (media call no. 2-1963)

Tuesday, Sept 25

Reading:

In-class Film:

Warrior Goddesses: Kali and Durga, continued

Start reading Tantric Goddesses material.
"Devi" (89 min)

Thursday, Sept 27

Readings:

Tantric Goddesses: The Ten Mahavidyas

- *1. David Kinsley, "Part 1: The Mahavidyas as a Group" in *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, pp. 9-63;
- *2. Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott, *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices*, Ch 4, pp. 98-130.

Tuesday, Oct 2

Readings:

Healing, Afflicting, Possessing Goddesses

- *1. Susan Wadley, "Sitala: The Cool One," *Asian Folklore Studies* (vol 39, no 1, 1980), pp. 33-62;

- *2. Brigitte Merz, "Wild Goddess and Mother of Us All: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Cult of the Goddess Harati in Nepal" in *Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal*, ed. A. Michaels, C. Vogelsanger, and A. Wilke, pp. 343-354;
- 3. Kathleen Erndl, "Seranvali" in *Devi*, ed. Hawley and Wulff, pp. 173-194.
- *4. Elaine Craddock, "Reconstructing the Split Goddess as Sakti in a Tamil Village," in *Seeking Mahadevi*, ed. Tracy Pintchman, pp. 145-169.

Thursday, Oct 4

Reading:

Healing, Afflicting, Possessing Goddesses

- 1. Sarah Caldwell, "Bhagavati: Ball of Fire" in *Devi*, ed. Hawley and Wulff, pp. 195-226;
 - *2. Kathleen Erndl, "The Play of the Mother: Possession and Power in Hindu Women's Goddess Rituals," in *Women's Lives, Women's Rituals in the Hindu Tradition*, ed. Tracy Pintchman, pp. 149-158.
- In-class Film: "Ball of Fire: the Angry Goddess" (59 min; call no 10-2674)

Tuesday, Oct 9

Readings:

Goddesses of Place: Rivers and Villages

- 1. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, Chs. 12 and 13 (pp. 178-211);
- 2. Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, "Ganga" by Eck (pp. 137-153);
- 3. TBA

Thursday, Oct 11

Assignment:

Film Viewing – Professor away at conference.

Give some preliminary thought to your research paper topic and begin gathering resources.

In-class Film: "The Lady of Gingee"

Tuesday, Oct 16

Readings:

Goddesses of Place: Bharat Mata and Tamilttay

- *1. Sumathi Ramaswamy, "The Goddess and the Nation: Subterfuges of Antiquity, the Cunning of Modernity," in the *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, pp. 551-568;
- *2. Sumathi Ramaswamy, Ch 2 ("Formal Concerns"), *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*, pp.13-71.

Thursday, Oct 18

Readings:

Blurring the Lines: Local, Regional, Supraregional Goddesses

- 1. Cynthia Ann Humes, "Vindhyavasini," in *Devi* (pp. 49-76);
- *2. Jessica V Birkenholtz, "Seeking Svasthani," pp. 1-33.

Tuesday, Oct 23

In-Class Midterm

Thursday, Oct 25 A Living Goddess: Nepal's Kumari

Readings: 1. Michael Allen, *The Cult of Kumari*, pp. 1-39

Tuesday, Oct 30 A Living Goddess: Nepal's Kumari

Readings: 1. Michael Allen, *The Cult of Kumari*, pp. 40-99.

In-class Film: "Living Goddess" (87 min; call no. 10-2183)

Thursday, Nov 1 A Living Goddess: Nepal's Kumari

Readings: 1. Michael Allen, *The Cult of Kumari*

2. Newspaper article handouts.

In-class Film: "Living Goddess" (87 min)

Tuesday, Nov 6 Observing Goddesses at Play & at Work

Readings: 1. June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*, pp. 1-66+.

Thursday, Nov 8 Observing Goddesses at Play & at Work

Readings: 1. June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*, pp. 67-208+.

Tuesday, Nov 13 Observing Goddesses at Play & at Work

Readings: 1. June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*, pp. 209-303.

Thursday, Nov 15 A "New" Goddess: Santoshi Ma

Readings: *1. Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, Ch 6, pp. 135-152;

*2. Stanley Kurtz, Chs. 1 and 2 in *All the Mothers Are One*, pp. 1- 28;

In-class Film: "Jai Santoshi Maa" (121 min; 10-2840)

Tuesday, Nov 20 A "New" Goddess: Santoshi Ma

Readings: *1. Philip Lutgendorf. "Who Wants to be a Goddess? Jai Santoshi Maa Revisited." Pp. 1-31.

In-class Film: "Jai Santoshi Maa" (121 min)

Assignment: Please bring to class a brief description (1-2 paragraphs) of your final paper topic, as well as a working bibliography.

Thursday, Nov 22	THANKSGIVING -NO CLASS Begin reading Corrine Dempsey, <i>The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York!</i>	
Tuesday, Nov 27	Hindu Goddesses Abroad: NY Readings: Corrine Dempsey, <i>The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York</i> , ALL Assignment: Please email me a working outline and updated bibliography for your final paper.	
Thursday, Nov 29	The Goddess in the West Readings: *1. Rachel Fell McDermott, "Kali's New Fontiers: A Hindu Goddess on the Internet," in <i>Encountering Kali</i> , pp. 273-297; *2. Jeffrey Kripal, "A Garland of Talking Heads for the Goddess: Some Autobiographical and Psychoanalytical Reflections on the Western Kali," in <i>Is the Goddess A Feminist?</i> , pp. 239-268. *3. Rachel Fell McDermott, "Devi in the Diaspora," in <i>Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal</i> , pp. 224-240.	
Tuesday, Dec 4	Is the Goddess a Feminist and/or Source of Empowerment? Readings: *1. Stephanie Tawa Lama, "The Hindu Goddess and Women's Political Representation in South Asia: Symbolic Resource or Feminine Mystique?," pp. 5-20; *2. Rita Gross, "Is the Goddess a Feminist?," pp. 104-111; *3. Cynthia Ann Humes, "Is the Devi-Mahatmya a Feminist Scripture?," pp. 123-150.	
Thursday, Dec 6	Student Presentations (Group 1)	
Tuesday, Dec 11	Student Presentations (Group 2)	
Monday, Dec 10	9am	Group 1 Final Paper Due
Friday, Dec 14	9am	Group 2 Final Paper Due
Monday, Dec 17	12-3pm	FINAL EXAM

Course Requirements

1. **Participation and punctuality.** The success of this seminar course is dependent upon the active and engaged participation of all class members. Regular attendance in class, careful preparation (i.e., reading *and* bringing to class) of course materials, and participation in class discussions will be reflected in your participation grade. Punctuality is expected of all students and recurrent lateness will negatively affect your participation grade.
2. **Film response papers.** These short response papers should be approximately 500 words and should be emailed to the professor within 24 hours of viewing the given film in class. No late papers will be accepted except in cases of emergency, religious observances, or with a doctor's note. These papers should address the key issues raised in the film and critically reflect on the questions, complexities, contestations, or other concerns surrounding the identity of the headlining goddess and/or the practices and rituals surrounding her. Please do not summarize the film plot.

I will use two criteria for grading: completion of the assignment, and clear writing that demonstrates engagement with the material. I will grade response papers with a check, a check-plus, or a check-minus. These will be converted to numerical grades for the final average. A check-plus will become a 100, a check, an 85, and a check-minus, a 70. A paper that is *not* turned in (a missing paper) will receive a zero and reduce the overall average for response papers accordingly.
3. **Midterm.** The midterm will be an in-class assessment of the material covered in the first half of the semester.
4. **Presentation.** Each student will give a 10-15 minute presentation based on his or her final paper. Each student will also be assigned to be the primary respondent to one presentation, and will be responsible for providing the initial feedback and getting the conversation started among the class. More details about the content and format of the presentation will be given later in the semester.
5. **Final paper.** Each student is required to write a 10-12 page research paper that is due at the end of the semester. The topic of the paper is for each student to decide, but must be approved by the professor. In addition, at designated dates over the course of the semester, the student will submit, first, a brief description of his or her paper topic and a working bibliography and, later, a more detailed synopsis, outline, and update bibliography.
6. **Final exam.** The final exam will be an assessment of the material covered in the second half of the semester.

Grading

Participation:	10%
Midterm:	20%
Presentation:	20%
Final paper:	30%
<u>Final exam:</u>	<u>20%</u>
Grading total:	100%

Writing Guidelines

All written assignments should conform to the following guidelines:

1. Double-spaced, Times New Roman (or equivalent) 12-point font, 1-inch margins.
2. Include the following information in the upper left hand side of the first page: Name, course number and title (e.g., Reli 394: Hindu Goddesses), professor's name, and date.
3. Be clear about whose ideas you refer to, be it yours or those of an author.
4. Citations should include author's last name and text page number in parentheses, e.g., (Kinsley 132). When discussing two works by the same author, indicate the text with its abbreviated title, e.g., (Erndl, "Seranvali," 132) and (Erndl, "Play of the Mother," 76).
5. All written work should be proofread for spelling and grammatical errors.
6. I expect you to think and analyze critically and deeply, make connections within and between texts and authors, and write clearly.

A Preliminary List of Additional Resources

- Babb, Lawrence. *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.
- Bapat, Jayant Bhalchandra and Ian Mabbett, eds. *The Iconic Female: Goddesses of India, Nepal, and Tibet*. Clayton, Australia: Monash University Press, 2008.
- Bose, Mandakranta, ed. *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Bose, Mandakranta. *Women in the Hindu Tradition: Rules, Roles, and Exceptions*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Brown, C. Mackenzie. *The Triumph of the Goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of the Devi-Bhagavata Purana*. Albany: State University of New York, 1990.
- Coburn, Thomas B. *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*. New York: State University of New York, 1991.
- Coburn, Thomas B. *Devi-Mahatmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt., Ltd., 1988.
- Dimmitt, Cornelia and J. A. B. van Buitenen, ed. *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978.
- Eck, Diana. *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Erndl, Kathleen M. *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Feldhaus, Anne. *Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Foulston, Lynn. *At the Feet of the Goddess: The Divine Feminine in Local Hindu Religion*. Brighton, England; Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 2002.
- Foulston, Lynn and Stuart Abbott. *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices*. Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009.
- Fuller, C. J. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Hawley, John Stratton and Donna Marie Wulff, ed. *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of*

- India. Boston: Beacon Press, 1982.
- Hieltebitel, Alf and Kathleen Erndl, ed. *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Kinsley, David R. *The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krsna, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
- Kinsley, David R. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Kinsley, David R. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Leslie, Julia, ed. *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992.
- McDermott, Rachel Fell. *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- McDermott, Rachel Fell and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds. *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- McDaniel, June. *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Michaels, Axel, Cornelia Vogelsanger, and Annette Wilke, ed. *Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal: Proceedings of an International Symposium, Berne and Surich, November 1994*. Bern, Germany: Peter Lang, 1996.
- Michaels, Axel. *Hinduism: Past and Present*. Translated by Barbara Harshav. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger. *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit*. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, trans and ed. *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Pintchman, Tracy. *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Pintchman, Tracy, ed. *Seeking Mahadevi: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess*. Albany: State University of New York, 2001.
- Raj, Selva J., and William P. Harman. *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Rodriguez. *Studying Hinduism in Practice*. London and New York: Routledge Press, 2011.
- Sax, William S. *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.