

RELIGION 42 x WGST 43.4

GODDESSES OF INDIA

Spring 2014
MWF 1:45-2:50
(X-hour: Th 1:00-1:50)
206 Dartmouth

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Office Hours: MW 8:30-10:00

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goddesses of ancient and modern India are complex and ambiguous deities. India's Hindu goddesses play roles as divergent as those of loving mother, adoring wife, and haggish Death, as well as Creator and Supreme Force enlivening all creation. This course will use both elite and popular Hindu religious texts in conjunction with contemporary sociological and anthropological accounts, scholarly analyses, visual art, and film to explore the diverse identities and roles of India's many goddesses, their mythologies, their cults, and their associated ritual practices. As we examine various goddesses and their cults, we will also look at the lives of Indian women, paying close attention to how the belief in a divine feminine functions both to empower women and to limit women's power within Indian society. To understand the relationship between goddesses and women, we will explore such topics as *sati* (widow burning), spirit possession, and women's rituals and songs.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All required books are available for purchase at both Dartmouth Bookstore and Wheelock Books, and on four-hour reserve at Baker-Berry. The *Religion 42 Course Reader*, which is also required, is available for purchase only at Wheelock Books.

A. L. Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, *Devi: Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

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).

Religion 42 Course Reader

GRADING CRITERIA

(1) ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. Class attendance, preparation, and participation are extremely important elements of this course. I will take attendance every day, and more than two absences throughout the term will begin to lower this portion of your grade. In addition, you are expected to do the readings carefully and be ready to discuss them in class, participate in classroom discussion on a regular and consistent basis, do occasional individual presentations on selected readings or submit occasional Blackboard responses, etc. Class attendance, preparation, and participation are worth 15% of the final grade.

(2) UNIT ASSIGNMENTS. The course is divided into six different units. Each unit has its own unique assignment, and each assignment is worth a certain portion of your final grade. These assignments (which do involve a substantial amount of writing) are as follows:

Unit I: IN-CLASS EXAM on Thursday, April 3 (X-hour)—worth 10% of the final grade.

Unit II: THREE-PAGE TEXT ANALYSIS, assigned on Monday, April 7, and due on Monday, April 14—worth 10% of final grade.

Unit III: FIVE-PAGE PAPER, assigned on Friday, April 11, and due on Friday, April 25—worth 20% of final grade.

Unit IV: THREE-PAGE PAPER, assigned on Friday, April 25, and due on Monday, May 5—worth 10% of final grade.

Unit V: OPEN-BOOK TAKE-HOME EXAM (APPROX. 5 PAGES), assigned on Friday, May 16, and due on Wednesday, May 28—worth 20% of final grade.

Unit VI: FOUR-PAGE WEB SITE ANALYSIS, assigned on Wednesday, May 21, and due on Friday, May 30—worth 15% of final grade.

(3) MAKE-UP POLICY. Late assignments will be accepted only with a documented excuse, or at my discretion. If you think you are going to have trouble turning an assignment in on time, *please come and talk to me beforehand*. I will often grant extensions for good reasons, but I appreciate the courtesy of being requested for such an extension *before* the assignment is actually due. I reserve the right to refuse an assignment that is excessively late or has been turned in late without my prior approval.

(4) SUMMARY OF GRADING CRITERIA: Attendance and Participation (15%); In-Class Exam for Unit I (10%); Three-Page Text Analysis for Unit II (10%); Five-Page Paper for Unit III (20%); Three-Page Paper for Unit IV (10%); Take-Home Exam for Unit V (20%); Four-Page Web-Site Analysis for Unit VI (15%).

(5) SPECIAL NEEDS. If you have a learning disability or any other condition that would require accommodation on my part, or if you will need to miss any classes in order to observe a religious holiday, *please come see me as soon as possible*.

SYLLABUS

(Note: Reading No. 1, Reading No. 2, etc., refer to numbered readings in the course reader.)

Unit I: An Overview of the Hindu Tradition

In this unit, we will have a “crash course” on the Hindu tradition in order to familiarize ourselves with the broad outlines of Hinduism, and especially, with fundamental Hindu concepts that will be raised again and again throughout the term, such as *dharma*, *moksha*, *bhakti*, etc. We will conclude the unit with a brief overview of prominent Hindu goddesses and the history and nature of goddess-worship in India.

Monday, March 24: Introduction to the course. What is Hinduism?

Wednesday, March 26: Overview of Hinduism.

Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism, 1-35.

Friday, March 28: Overview of Hinduism (continued).

Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism, 36-67.

Monday, March 31: Overview of Hinduism (continued).

Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism, 68-97.

Wednesday, April 2: Overview of Hinduism (continued).

Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism, 98-115.

(On Reserve through Streaming Video) FILM—“Hinduism: 330 Million Gods”

Thursday, April 3 (X-hour): IN-CLASS EXAM FOR UNIT I (COVERING ALL MATERIAL UP TO THIS POINT).

Friday, April 4: Overview of Hindu Goddesses.

Reading No. 1

Reading No. 2

Reading No. 3

Unit II: The Great Goddess, the Independent Goddess: Devi and the *Devi Mahatmya*

The *Devi Mahatmya* is a foundational text for Indian goddess-worship and the earliest elite Sanskrit text to put forth a vision of the Goddess (here called Devi) as creator and sustainer of the entire universe, supreme over all male gods. In this unit, we will read the *Devi Mahatmya* and discuss the nature of Devi as an independent goddess and the philosophical concepts and ideas that underlie a goddess-centered worldview (e.g., concepts such as *shakti*, *prakriti*, and *maya*).

Monday, April 7: Devi and the *Devi-Mahatmya*. THREE-PAGE TEXT ANALYSIS FOR UNIT II ASSIGNED.

Encountering the Goddess, 13-27 (“Historical Context”) and 32-52 (stop at the end of Section 4).

Wednesday, April 9: Devi and the *Devi-Mahatmya* (continued). Is Devi a Feminist?

Encountering the Goddess, 52-84.

[BLACKBOARD] Cynthia Ann Humes, “Is the *Devi Mahatmya* a Feminist Scripture?,” in *Is The Goddess a Feminist?: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 123-150.

Unit III: The Goddess as Consort: Three Types of Consort Relationship

In contrast to Devi (a supreme goddess who is independent of all male gods and superior to all male gods), many other Indian goddesses are envisioned in terms of the relationships they have with various male deities of the Hindu pantheon. In an influential article, Frederique Apffel Marglin has formulated a typology of three different types of such “consort” relationships: (1) a relationship in which the male is dominant and the female is subordinate; (2) a relationship in which the male and female are roughly equal in status; and (3) a relationship in which the female constitutes the dominant partner. Each type of relationship involves different philosophical notions and conveys a different religious world-view. In this unit, we will discuss these three different types of consort relationship (as well as the question of how *marriage* fits into the picture), and then turn our attention to four different case-studies illustrating these different types.

Friday, April 11: Three Types of Consort Relationship. FIVE-PAGE PAPER FOR UNIT III ASSIGNED.

Reading No. 4

Reading No. 5

Monday, April 14: The Goddess as Subordinate Wife: Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu. THREE-PAGE TEXT ANALYSIS FOR UNIT II DUE.

“Sri-Lakshmi,” Chapter 2 of *Hindu Goddesses*, 19-34.

Vasudha Narayanan, “Sri: Giver of Fortune, Bestower of Grace,” in *Devi*, 87-105.

Wednesday, April 16: The Goddess as Subordinate—But Feisty—Wife: Parvati, Wife of Shiva.

“Parvati,” Chapter 3 of *Hindu Goddesses*, 35-54.

Reading No. 6

Friday, April 18: The Goddess as Equal in Love: Radha, Consort of Krishna, in Jayadeva’s *Gitagovinda*.

Reading No. 7

Reading No. 8

Monday, April 21: The Goddess as Equal in Love: Radha, Consort of Krishna, among the Bengali Vaishnavas.

Reading No. 9

Wednesday, April 23: The Goddess as Dominant Partner: Durga, Destructress of Demons, and Kali, Dominator of Shiva. Is Kali a Feminist?

“Durga,” Chapter 7 of *Hindu Goddesses*, 95-115.

“Kali,” Chapter 8 of *Hindu Goddesses*, 116-131.

[BLACKBOARD] Usha Menon and Richard A. Schweder, “Power In Its Place: Is the Great Goddess of Hinduism a Feminist?,” in *Is The Goddess a Feminist?: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 151-165.

Unit IV: The Independent Goddess Once Again: Village Goddesses

In this unit, we will turn away from the elite Sanskrit tradition to examine another type of Hindu goddess—the rural village goddess who presides over the world of the village and the life and death of its villagers, and who constitutes perhaps the primary focus of devotion for millions of rural Indians.

Friday, April 25: The Nature of Village Goddesses. FIVE-PAGE PAPER FOR UNIT III DUE. THREE-PAGE PAPER FOR UNIT IV ASSIGNED.

“Village Goddesses,” Chapter 13 of *Hindu Goddesses*, 197-211.

Reading No. 10

Monday, April 28: Shitala, the Goddess of Smallpox—A Regional “Village” Goddess. FILM — “Shitala in Spring: Festival of the Bengali Goddess of Health and Ills.”

Reading No. 11

Reading No. 12

Unit V: Goddesses and Women

In this unit, we will examine the complex relationship between goddesses and actual women. We will do this by looking at a number of different questions: What is the role and status of women in traditional Hinduism? What are the basic characteristics of Hindu women’s religiosity? How does the belief in a divine feminine serve both to empower and to restrict women in Indian society? How do Hindu women use goddesses and goddess-worship both to conform to patriarchal Indian values and to resist them? And what is the dividing line between goddesses and women? Can goddesses become women? Can women become goddesses?

Wednesday, April 30: Women in Traditional Hinduism: The Normative Dharma Shastric View.

Reading No. 13

Reading No. 14

“The Ideal Wife,” 70-78 only of “Sita,” Chapter 5 of *Hindu Goddesses*.

Friday, May 2: NO CLASS. PROFESSOR WILL BE OUT OF TOWN.

Monday, May 5: FILM—“Dadi and Her Family.” THREE-PAGE PAPER FOR UNIT IV DUE.

Wednesday, May 7: Women in Traditional Hinduism: Women’s Stories About Goddesses.

Reading No. 15

Reading No. 16

Friday, May 9: Goddess Becoming Woman—The Phenomenon of Spirit Possession.

Kathleen M. Erndl, “Seranvali: The Mother Who Possesses,” in *Devi*, 173-192.

Reading No. 17

Monday, May 12: FILM—“Bearing the Heat: Mother Goddess Worship in South India.”

Wednesday, May 14: Goddess Becoming Woman—Kumari, the Living Goddess of Nepal. FILM— “Kumari: Living Goddess of Nepal.”

[BLACKBOARD] M. R. Allen, “Kumari or ‘Virgin’ Worship in Kathmandu Valley,” *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* 32 (1997) 207-221.

Friday, May 16: Woman Becoming Goddess—The Phenomenon of Sati (Widow-Burning).
OPEN-BOOK TAKE-HOME EXAM FOR UNIT V ASSIGNED.

Reading No. 18

Reading No. 19

Unit VI: The Goddess and Modernity

While the rest of the course has focused upon goddesses and goddess-worship within the context of traditional Hinduism, this final unit will turn to the tremendous pressures of *modernity* upon traditional India, and some of the fascinating phenomena that have arisen from the interaction between *goddesses* and *modernity*.

Monday, May 19: Modern Feminist Responses to the Practice of Sati.

Reading No. 20

Reading No. 21

Wednesday, May 21: Two Modern Goddesses—The Cinematic Goddess Santoshi Ma and the Political Goddess Bharat Mata. FOUR-PAGE WEB SITE ANALYSIS FOR UNIT VI ASSIGNED.

Reading No. 22

Lise McKean, “Bharat Mata: Mother India and Her Militant Matriots,” in *Devi*, 250-279.

Friday, May 23: Globalism and the Goddess: The Western Appropriation of Hindu Goddesses.

Reading No. 23

Reading No. 24

Rachel Fell McDermott, “The Western Kali,” in *Devi*, 281-305.

Monday, May 26: MEMORIAL DAY. NO CLASS.

Wednesday, May 28: Globalism and the Goddess: Is the Goddess a Feminist? OPEN-BOOK TAKE-HOME EXAM FOR UNIT V DUE.

[BLACKBOARD] Five articles from *Is The Goddess a Feminist?: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: New York University Press, 2000): (1) Kathleen M. Erndl, “Is *Shakti* Empowering for Women? Reflections on Feminism and the Hindu Goddess” (91-103); (2) Stanley N. Kurtz, “In Our Image: The Feminist Vision of the Hindu Goddess” (181-186); (3) Tracy Pintchman, “Is the Hindu Goddess Tradition a Good Resource for Western Feminism?” (187-202); (4) Jeffrey J. Kripal, “A Garland of Talking Heads for the Goddess: Some Autobiographical and Psychoanalytic Reflections on the Western Kali” (239-268); (5) Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, “Real and Imagined Goddesses: A Debate” (269-284).

Friday, May 30: FOUR-PAGE WEB SITE ANALYSIS FOR UNIT VI DUE AT 5:00 P.M.