

Goddesses in India

The Powers of Divine and Human Women

39:160 / 32:160
Spring 2001
Tu./Th. 1:05 – 2:20, 25 Phillips Hall

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Note: Students with disabilities that may affect their participation in this course are encouraged to see the instructor privately to discuss their needs. He will make every effort to accommodate them.

This course aims to introduce some of the most important and characteristic feminine divine beings who inhabit the religious universe of South Asia, through their mythical narratives, rituals of worship, and visual representation. It also aims to introduce some of the approaches scholars apply to understanding such beings. Additionally, it seeks to situate goddess worship within the context of human gender roles and relations and to suggest ways in which South Asian women experience and negotiate their own feminine power. Roughly the first half of the course focuses on the history, typology, and forms of worship of Hindu goddesses, and the second half emphasizes the interpretation of goddess worship and some of its contemporary socio-cultural contexts.

Reading materials:

The syllabus below lists readings for each week of the semester. These are drawn from four required books (available for purchase) and from a photocopied packet (in two parts) on reserve in the Main Library (students are urged to make their own photocopies of the selections in the packet).

Texts for Purchase at IMU Bookstore, Textbook Dept.:

Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*

John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, *Devi: Goddesses of India*

David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*

Geetanjali Shree, *Mai* (a novel), translated by Nita Kumar

Text on reserve at Main Library Reserve, main floor:

“Goddesses in India”
(photocopied course anthology, in 2 parts, hereafter referred to as “Goddesses”)

In addition, the following books are being placed on reserve. These are books from which excerpts have been copied for the course anthology. However, students may wish to consult the entire work, especially as they pursue research for the final paper.

Diana L. Eck, *Darsan, Seeing the Divine Image in India*
 Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*
 Anne Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood*
 Lynn E. Gatwood, *Devi and the Spouse Goddess*
 Lisa L. Hallstrom, *Mother of Bliss*
 John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, *The Divine Consort*
 Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World*
 Stanley N. Kurtz, *All the Mothers Are One*
 Julia Leslie (ed.), *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*

Course Format, Requirements, and Grading

Although class activities will sometimes include lectures and films, the course is primarily intended as a participatory experience, emphasizing guided discussion of assigned materials. Timely completion of reading assignments is obviously crucial to this format, as is regular attendance. All students are expected to participate in class discussion, and in addition, each student will be expected to make a brief (roughly 10 minute) oral presentation sometime during the semester, based on one of the readings and aimed at initiating discussion by the group. Attendance, participation in discussion, and the oral presentation will collectively represent roughly 30% of the course grade.

However, **attendance is essential and cannot be given a strictly numerical value.** Apart from excused absence due to illness or documented emergencies, any pattern of recurring, unexcused absence will seriously reduce the final grade.

In addition, note that there is a special event at which attendance is required: an international Symposium at the UI Museum of Art on February 23 and 24 (Friday evening Feb. 23 and all day Saturday Feb. 24). See below under Week 6.

Students should also note that several assigned readings include sexually-explicit materials.

Reading assignments reflect the content to be discussed during each week of the course. Ideally, students should try to complete the week's readings by each Tuesday's class (except during first week!). However, readings may also be divided roughly in half and read sequentially for the two class sessions; they are listed in the syllabus below in the approximate order in which they will be discussed in class. **Films** (all in video format) shown in class represent additional important "texts" for the course. Students may wish to consult or review them for papers, hence the syllabus below includes cataloging numbers for each film (obtainable from the Media Services collection, on the main floor at UI Main Library).

Writing Assignments are of two kinds: a bi-weekly "reaction paper," and a final research paper. The **reaction paper** is to be handed in at the Tuesday session of every other week beginning with week 3, through week 13. It is to consist of roughly 2-3 typed pages of reactions to assigned readings. (A "typed page" means a page with one-inch margins and double-spaced lines in 12-point type; it comprises roughly 250 words.) These papers are meant primarily to show that you are keeping up with readings and to help you formulate thoughts about them to bring up in class. They may include comments on the style or content of the readings, questions about cultural concepts or

vocabulary, opinions, analyses, comparisons to other readings, mini "reviews," etc. They are not expected to be polished essays, but neither should they be fragmentary notes. Be careful to proofread them before handing them in, as spelling, grammar, and style will all be noted. References to readings should be given in parentheses in abbreviated form: e.g., (Coburn 1991:83). Reaction papers will be graded with letter grades. Students have considerable freedom in what approach to take, but should aim for a serious and thoughtful paper that shows engagement with assigned materials. You need not discuss all readings for the two-week period, but should select several on which to focus.

A **research paper** is due at the end of week 15. It should consist, for undergraduates, of 7-10 pages of original analysis; 15-20 pages for graduate students. Papers should be based on a topic of interest to you that is approved by the instructor. Please feel free to discuss paper topics with the instructor at any time during the semester; you must identify the topic on which you plan to work by **Week 9**. Written assignments will represent approximately 50% of the course grade (25% for reaction papers, 25% for the final research paper). Note that all writing assignments are essential and required, **and must be handed in on the dates indicated on the Syllabus**. Plan ahead to avoid last-minute problems that prevent timely submission ("My printer wouldn't work!" etc.).

There will be no midterm. A two-hour **final exam** will be given Monday, May 7th at 2:15 PM. The format and grading of the exam will be explained during the final week of classes. The exam will be worth approximately 20% of the final course grade.

Weekly Schedule

Part I: Ancient South Asia and the "Rise of the Goddess"

Week 1

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 1-5
- 2) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 1-28 (John S. Hawley, "Prologue")
- 3) Goddesses (Anthology): Diana Eck, *Darsan*, pp. 1-58

Jan. 16 – Introduction to course

Jan. 18 – Brief chronology of South Asian religious history, guide to Sanskrit pronunciation

Week 2

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 212-220; pp. 6-18
- 2) Goddesses (Anthology): Alf Hiltebeitel and Thomas J. Hopkins, "Indus Valley Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1986, vol. 7, pp. 215-223
- 3) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 31-48 (Thomas B. Coburn, "Devi")
- 4) Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, pp. 13-84 (translation of *Devi Mahatmya*)

Jan. 23 – Indus Valley and Vedic evidence of goddess worship

Jan. 25 – The *Devi Mahatmya* and its impact

Part II: Meeting the Mothers

Week 3

First reaction paper due on Tuesday

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 19-64
- 2) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 87-108 (Vasudha Narayanan, "Sri")
- 3) Goddesses (Anthology): Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, pp. 157-185 (Shiva and Parvati), pp. 227-242 ("The Goddess")

Jan. 30 – Auspicious consorts: Lakshmi, Parvati, Sarasvati

Feb. 1 – Tales of Shiva and Shakti

Week 4

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 65-94
- 2) Goddesses (Anthology): *The Divine Consort*, edited by Hawley and Wulff; Cornelia Dimmitt, "Sita: Fertility Goddess and Shakti," pp. 210-223
Dimmitt and van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology*, pp. 118-130 (Krishna and Radha)
- 3) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi* pp. 109-134 (Donna M. Wulff, "Radha")

Feb. 6 – Auspicious consort: Sita

Feb. 8 – Radha, mistress and consort

Week 5

Second reaction paper due on Tuesday

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 178-211
- 2) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 49-76 (Cynthia Ann Humes, "Vindhyavasini"); pp. 137-153 (Diana L. Eck, "Ganga")
- 3) Goddesses (Anthology): Anne Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood* (1995), pp. 40-64

Feb. 13 – Goddesses of place: rivers, towns, villages

Feb. 15 – Film, "Wedding of the Goddess," Part I (Mira Binford, Michael Camerini, 1987; 3188 VHS)

Week 6

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 95-131
- 2) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 77-86 (David R. Kinsley, "Kali")
- 3) Goddesses (Anthology): Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 251-261

Excerpts from *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair*, poems of Ramprasad Sen
(translated by Leonard Nathan and Clinton Seely, 1982)

Feb. 20 – Durga and protection (in UI Museum of Art, Stanley Gallery)

Feb. 22 – Kali and destruction (in UI Museum of Art, Stanley Gallery)

Special event:

Symposium, “Experiencing Devi: Hindu Goddesses in Indian Popular Art”

UI Museum of Art, Lasansky Room

Friday Feb. 23, 7:30-9:00 PM

Saturday Feb. 24, 9:00 AM-12:00, 1:00-5:00 PM

Week 7

Third reaction paper due on Tuesday

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 151-160
- 2) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 173-194 (Kathleen M. Erndl, “Seranvali”); pp. 195-226 (Sarah Caldwell, “Bhagavati”)
- 3) Goddesses (Anthology): *The Divine Consort*, edited by Hawley and Wulff; Edward C. Dimock, “A Theology of the Repulsive: The Myth of the Goddess Sitala,” pp. 184-203

Feb. 27 – Goddesses who afflict, heal, and possess

March 1 – Film, “Ball of Fire: the Angry Goddess” (Sarah Caldwell, 1999; 9306 VHS)

Week 8

Reading:

- 1) Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 132-150, 161-177
- 2) Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, pp. 119-148
- 3) Goddesses (Anthology): Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World*, “Mothers and Infants,” pp. 52-112 (to be discussed after spring break)

March 6 – discussion of Caldwell reading and film

March 8 – the Mahadevi and Tantric goddesses

s p r i n g b r e a k

Part III: Interpreting Goddesses, Encountering Women

Week 9

Fourth reaction paper due on Tuesday

Final paper topic must be identified by Thursday

Reading:

- 1) Goddesses (Anthology): Veena Das, "The Mythological Film and its Framework of Meaning: An Analysis of *Jai Santoshi Ma*" pp. 43-56
Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*(1993), pp. 135-152
Stanley N. Kurtz, *All the Mothers Are One* (1992), pp. 1-53

March 20 – A "new" goddess?: Santoshi Ma

March 22 – Film, "Jai Santoshi Ma" (Vijay Sharma, 1975; 5741 VHS)

Week 10

Reading:

- 1) Goddesses (Anthology): Kurtz, *All the Mothers Are One*, pp. 91-176

March 27 – Film, "Jai Santoshi Ma," (concluded)

March 29 – Discussion of Veena Das's article on "Jai Santoshi Ma" and of Sudhir Kakar's chapter assigned for Week 8

Week 11

Fifth reaction paper due on Tuesday

Reading:

- 1) Goddesses (Anthology): Lynne E. Gatwood, *Devi and the Spouse Goddess* (1985), pp. 1-12, 108-120, 137-187

April 3 – Mothers, sons, and psychoanalysts (discussion of Stanley Kurtz's theory)

April 5 – Discussion of Lynn Gatwood's theory

Week 12

Reading:

- 1) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 250-280 (Lise McKean, "Bharat Mata"), pp. 227-249 (Lindsey Harlan, "Sati, the Story of Godavari")
- 2) Goddesses (Anthology): Julia Leslie (ed.), *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women* (1991), "Suttee or *Sati*: Victim or Victor?," pp. 175-191

April 10 – Patriarchy, Sati, and "Matriotism"

April 12 – Film, "Father, Son, and Holy War" (Anand Patwardhan, 1994; 6137 VHS)

Week 13

Sixth reaction paper due on Tuesday

Reading:

- 1) Geetanjali Shree, *Mai*, pp. 1-93

April 17 – Discussion of Patwardhan film, Harlan and Leslie readings

April 19 – Film, “Dadi and Her Family” (Michael Camerini, 1979; 2907 VHS)

Week 14

Reading:

- 1) Geetanjali Shree, *Mai*, pp. 94-157
- 2) Goddesses (Anthology): Lisa Lassell Hallstrom, *Mother of Bliss* (1999), pp. vii-ix, 19-53, 199-222

April 24 – Discussion of *Mai*

April 26 – Discussion of *Mai* and *Mother of Bliss*

Week 15

Final paper due by 5:00 PM on Friday May 4 in 667 PH

Reading:

- 1) Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 281-313 (Rachel Fell McDermott, “Epilogue: The Western Kali”)

May 1 – A Transnational Goddess?

May 3 – Concluding thoughts, class evaluations

Final exam

Monday, May 7, 2:15-4:15 PM, 25 PH