



Hindu Myth, Image, and Pilgrimage

Literature and Arts C-18
Harvard University, Fall Term 1999

Diana L. Eck

[This course fulfills either the Literature and Arts C Core Requirement or the Foreign Cultures Core Requirement, but may not fulfill both. This course is also listed as Divinity 3450]

This course is an exploration of the gods and myths of Hindu India, the images through which the gods are envisioned and embodied, and the temples and pilgrimage places where they are worshipped. We will read a range of India's mythic and epic literature, stories of the gods and heroes which have penetrated virtually every level of Hindu civilization. We will become familiar with the images and iconography of the major Hindu gods. And we will track the relationship of these gods to the pilgrimage landscape of India where myth "takes place." Anyone attempting to understand the Hindu religious tradition or the multi-religious civilization of India will encounter the web of meaning and reference that this myth-image-pilgrimage complex continues to create. Being able to 'read' the meanings of myth, image, and pilgrimage is critical to understanding classical and contemporary Indian culture.

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The course website is <http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~lac18>. The syllabus, section listings, weekly section assignments, announcements, lecture handouts, music selections and an image carousel will be accessible on the website.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

Week of Sept. 20 Myth, Image, and Pilgrimage in the Indian Context

Why is the language of myth, image, and pilgrimage important for understanding the religious and cultural life of Hindu India? What does this particular cultural complex, constructed in the language of myth, image, and pilgrimage, contribute to our understanding of the contested definitions of modern India?

Sept. 21 (Tu) Myth: Hindu Myths, Learning the Tradition

Sept. 23 (Th) Image: The Multitude of Many-Armed Gods

Reading:

Diana L. Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India
and Gavin Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism, Ch. 1-2.

Times will be posted for an open section this week to discuss the image of Nataraja, the Dancing Shiva, found on the class website.

Week of Sept. 27 Crossings and Consecrations: Tirthas, Temples, Murtis

What does it mean to speak of pilgrimage sites as tirthas or "crossings?" What does it mean to speak of temples and images as divine "embodiments?" We look at the Hindu temple and its cosmic ground plan as a link between the human and divine realm, and we investigate the meaning of divine images through their crafting and consecration.

Sept. 28 (Tu) Pilgrimage: Myth on Earth, The Sacred Geography of India

Sept. 30 (Th) Temple and Image: Sacred Crossings & Divine Embodiments

Reading:

Diana L. Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India

George Michell, The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to its Meaning and Forms. Ch. 4.

* Diana L. Eck, "India's Tirthas: Crossings in Sacred Geography"

+ Gavin Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism, Ch. 9

Week of Oct. 4 Contexts: Myths of Creation, Cosmology, Worldview

Hymns of creation from the Rig Veda, interpreted and repeated in the classical mythology of India and in the contextual motifs of Indian art. How the world developed --from the divine body, the cosmic egg, the seed. How the world is imaginatively ordered --the seven ring islands, the lotus-cosmology of the four-petaled world, with Mount Meru at the center and the heavenly Ganges falling on top to spread in the four directions. How matter, time, and purpose are seen. The ideas of maya and lila, illusion and play.

Oct. 5 (Tu) Myths of Creation and the Map of the Universe

Oct. 7 (Th) Time, Space, and Purpose; "Vastumarabu" Film on the creation & consecration of images

Reading:

Rig Veda X.90, X.121; X. 129; Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4 and Chandogya Upanishad 3.19 (Xerox)

Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization Chs. I. Eternity and Time, II. The Mythology of Vishnu, and III. The Guardians of Life.

Selections from the Kurma Purana, the Vamana Purana, the Bhagavata Purana and the Markandeya Purana as collected in Dimmit and VanBuitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology, chapter 1, "Origins."

Week of Oct. 11 Vishnu and the Avatars of Vishnu

A survey of the mythology of Vishnu from the Rig Veda to the Puranas. A look at the ways in which the mythology of Vishnu appropriates themes of creation mythology. An exploration of the avatars or divine "descents" of Vishnu. A consideration of some of the major images and pilgrimage sites of Vishnu.

Oct. 12 (Tu) The Wide-Striding Vishnu and the Avatars

Oct. 14 (Th) The Shrines of Vishnu

Reading:

Rig Veda I. 154-156 -- Early Hymns to Vishnu (Xerox)

Selections from the Markandeya, Matsya, Bhagavata and Vishnu Puranas as collected in Dimmitt and Van Buitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology, Chapter 2, "Vishnu" + Gavin Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism, Ch. 5-6

Week of Oct. 18 World of the Epics

A brief examination of the structure of the frame-stories of India's two Epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, with special attention to the contexts they create for the elaboration of mythology and the construction of the pilgrim's landscape. An examination of the Ramayana. Rama as hero and God. The Epics as source for Hindu dharma.

Oct. 19 (Tu) The Epics, Mythology and Landscape

Oct. 21 (Th) The Ramayana: Dharma in the Epic

Reading:

William Buck, The Ramayana [an abridged rendering]

Gavin Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism, Ch. 3-4

Oct. 23 (Sat) Visit to Sri Lakshmi Temple in Ashland for Abshishekha of Lord Vishnu

Week of Oct. 25 The Ramayana

The exile of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana and the uses of this exile-journey in Hindu pilgrimage. The significance of Hanuman. The major sites associated with the Ramayana --Ayodhya, Chitrakut, Nasik, Kishkindha, and Rameshvaram. The continuing Ramayana tradition, the many Ramayanas, the Ramlilas and the televised

Ramayana, and the politicization of Ayodhya.

Oct. 26 (Tu) Rama and Sita, Hanuman and Ravana

Oct. 28 (Th) The Ramayana: Pilgrimage and Contestation

Reading:

William Buck, The Ramayana [an abridged rendering]

* Diana L. Eck. "Following Rama, Worshipping Shiva"

* Peter Van der Veer, "Ayodhya: Time and Place"

Week of Nov. 1 Reviewing, Looking Ahead

This week we will have a midterm, followed by an introduction to the popular myth cycle of Lord Krishna as elaborated in the Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas.

Nov. 2 (Tu) **Midterm Exam in Class, followed by orientation to Image Paper**

Nov. 4 (Th) Krishna: Child, Hero, Friend, Lover

Reading:

Selections from the Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas, as collected in Dimmitt and Van Buitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology, chapter 3, "Krishna"

* Thomas Hopkins, "The Social Teachings of the Bhagavata Purana"

Week of Nov. 8 Krishna's Lilas and Pilgrimages

The relation of the myths of Krishna to the pilgrimage landscape of Braj in central north India and to other major shrines associated with Krishna.

Nov. 9 (Tu) The Land and Shrines of Krishna

Nov.11 (Th) Veteran's Day (Holiday)

Reading:

Selections from the Vishnu and Bhagavata Puranas, as collected in Dimmitt and Van Buitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology, chapter 3, "Krishna"

* John S. Hawley, "Pilgrimage to Brindavan"

* McKim Marriott, "The Feast of Love"

Week of Nov. 15 Krishna in Painting and Poetry

An examination of the five rasas or aesthetic 'tastes' of the love of Krishna, as expressed in the poetry of some of the finest medieval bhakti poets, especially Jayadeva, author of the Gita Govinda, and as expressed in the late-medieval painting traditions of the Rajput and Pahari traditions.

Nov. 16 (Tu) The Moods and Tastes of Krishna

Nov. 18 (Th) The Love Song of the Dark Lord

Reading:

Jayadeva, Gita Govinda. Translated by Barbara Stoller Miller, Love Song of the Dark Lord.

David Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses, see Ch. 6 on Radha.

Week of Nov. 22 The Myths of Shiva in the Shiva Purana

Major elements of the mythology of Rudra-Shiva in the Vedas and the continuities into the classical period of the Puranas. Consideration of Wendy Doniger's view of the tensions of eroticism and asceticism. Shiva the androgyne; the Dancing Shiva and the elaboration of Shiva's many faces in myth; the courtship and marriage of Shiva and Parvati.

Nov. 23 (Tu) Shiva: Outsider, Ascetic, Married Man

Nov. 25 (Th) Thanksgiving Holiday

Readings:

Hymns to Rudra from the Rig Veda

The "Shatarudriya" from the Shatapatha Brahmana

Selections from the Shiva Purana and Linga Purana, as collected in Dimmitt and VanBuitenen, Classical Hindu Mythology.

Ch.IV, "The Cosmic Delight of Shiva" in Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization.

David Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses, Ch. 3 on Parvati.

Gavin Flood, Introduction to Hinduism, Ch. 7

Week of Nov. 29 Manifestations of Shiva: Linga and City

The aniconic linga as the primary "form" or symbol of Shiva. The linga of light, jyotirlinga, and the places of pilgrimage where this light is said to have pierced the earth. Kashi, the City of Light, and the twelve jyotirlingas of today's Hindu pilgrimages. The Shaiva gods Ganesha and Skanda, sons of Shiva.

Nov. 30 (Tu) Linga and the Linga of Light, **Image Paper Due**

Dec. 2 (Th) Banaras, City of Light

Reading:

Diana L. Eck, Banaras, City of Light.

Pamphlet on the Jyotirlingas (in-class)

Classical Hindu Mythology sections on Ganesa, Karttikeya

Week of Dec. 6 Manifestations of the Goddess

A look at the earliest Goddess literature in the hymns of the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. The most ancient images of female divinities among the indigenous peoples of India. Continuities of the iconic and textual themes associated with goddesses. The female language of shakti (energy) and prakriti (nature). The great praise poem to the Goddess, the Devi Mahatmya, officially part of the Markandeya Purana, has traveled on its own for nearly 1500 years. It is one of the most well known and beloved devotional works, recited all over India as the Durga Saptashati, the "Seven Hundred Verses of the Goddess Durga". A look at the major mythic episodes of the hymn and the apotheosis of the "Great Goddess" amidst hundreds of localized goddesses in this literature.

Dec. 7 (Tu) Goddesses, Ancient and Local

Dec. 9 (Th) "The Devi Mahatmya"

Reading:

* Prithivi Sukta, "Hymn to the Earth" of the Atharva Veda

David Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses, Ch. 1-4, 7-9, 10-13.

Classical Hindu Mythology, Ch. 5, "The Goddess." Contains major extracts of the Devi Mahatmya.

Week of Dec. 13 Pilgrimage to the Goddess

Continuing our investigation of the Goddesses of India through two of her major images --the Slayer of the Bull Demon and Kali.

Dec. 14 (Tu) Mahishasuramardini: Slayer of the Bull Demon

Dec. 16 (Th) Kali and her Multiforms

Reading:

Classical Hindu Mythology, Ch. 5, "The Goddess." Contains major extracts of the Devi Mahatmya.

Week of Dec. 20

Dec. 21 (Tu) Conclusions

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Sections.** Attendance at sections is required. The weekly discussion sections will focus primarily on the understanding and interpretation of myths and images, looking at the primary texts and other readings assigned for each week and at particular examples of art. The first sections will meet on September 23 and 24, at the end of the first week of classes.
- **Writing.** Writing is an integral part of our thinking and reflection. Almost every week there will be a very short writing exercise for the purpose of launching our section discussion.
- **Nov. 2: Mid-Term Exam .** This will focus on some of the basic language of the Hindu tradition and the materials covered to this point in the course. There will be an image identification component.
- **Nov. 30: Image Paper Due in class.** The short image-paper (4-5 pages) will be on one of the images at the Fogg Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, or an image to which you have access through books or slides. As far as possible you should place the image in its historical and mythological context.
- **Jan 6 and 7: Section will meet to discuss Pilgrimage books**

- **Jan. 18: Pilgrimage Paper Due.** The pilgrimage paper (7-10 pages) will enable you to read an extensive account and analysis of a single pilgrimage and ask you to reflect on the interrelation of myth, image, and landscape in the context of that pilgrimage. For this you have a choice of three books which treat different pilgrimage places:

1. Kathleen Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

2. David Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

3. Mokashi, Palkhi: *An Indian Pilgrimage*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

These books are available for purchase at the Coop and at the Harvard Divinity Bookstore

- **Final Exam.** This will include a one-hour section of slide-based identifications as part of a regular three hour exam. See Courses of Instruction for date and time.

Required Reading

Buck, William. *The Ramayana*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Dimmit, Cornelia and J.A.B. Van Buitenen. *Hindu Mythology*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.

Eck, Diana L. *Darsan, Seeing the Divine Image in India*. Third Edition, New York: Columbia

University Press, 1998.

Eck, Diana L. *Banaras City of Light*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Flood, Gavin, *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Kinsley, David. *Hindu Goddesses, Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Miller, Barbara Stoler, trans. *The Love Song of the Dark Lord*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

*Sourcebook: There is also a sourcebook of articles which are part of the required reading.

*One of the three books listed for the Pilgrimage paper is also part of your required reading.

These books are available for purchase at the Harvard Coop and at the Harvard Divinity School Bookstore, located in the basement of Andover Hall, 45 Francis Avenue. They are also on reserve at Hilles, Lamont, and Andover Libraries.

