

RLG3611H1: Gender in Asian Traditions – The Goddess in South Asia
Department of Religion, University of Toronto

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-12 & by appointment

Undergraduate Seminar in South Asian Religions

Location: Sid Smith 1084

Class Hours: Fridays 10-12

Course Description:

“Thereupon Ambikā became terribly angry with those foes, and in her anger her countenance then became dark as ink. Out from the surface of her forehead, fierce with frown, issued suddenly Kālī of terrible countenance.”

Dēvīmāhātmya, Chapter 7

The prevalence of Goddess worship in South Asia has not only been parodied in Indiana Jones movies and in crime novels centering around obscure and fearsome Indian cults but, on a more serious vein, it has been the source of inspiration for Western feminist religious scholarship trying to retrieve its own Goddess traditions. It has also been the focus of psychoanalytical theories regarding Indian mothers, their male off-spring, masculinity and sexuality. In this course we are going to examine what exactly the South Asian religious tradition says about the Goddess. We are going to pose questions about the antiquity of the tradition, and its endless capacity for re-invention and renewal in contemporary religious practice and how it thrives in South Asian culture, with living women saints, goddesses and spirit possession among poor, low-caste women. We are going to look at its philosophical underpinnings in Śākta philosophy and in devotional traditions. We are going to ask if the Goddess is a feminist. We might also want to ponder the paradox of South Asian Goddess veneration co-existing with the scriptural and very real social subordination of women. Through exploring these various questions we are going to follow the story of the Goddess in the South Asian religious traditions.

Requirements:

Reading: A careful and critical reading of the assignments before class is crucial. You will not be able to participate in class discussions without a thorough understanding of the assigned readings. I recommend that you underline important arguments, mark passages that confuse you, and think about where (and why) you agree or disagree with the author. Please always bring your **Assigned Readings** to class so you can refer to the texts in our discussions.

Discussion: Participation is essential in this course. You will be expected to raise questions, to share your knowledge with the other members of the class, and to actively participate in the class discussion.

Participation and Attendance: Students who miss class without my permission should expect to have their grade lowered. Absences may be excused for medical, religious, or other compelling reasons. If you must miss class e-mail me in advance, and, in case of illness, bring a doctor's note to our next meeting. Also repeated lateness will affect your grade. The **Participation and Attendance marks are split as follows: 5% for physical attendance, 10% for sending in questions for registered session, 5% for involving yourself in active discussion in class (your participation will be noted carefully for each session).**

Submission of Two Questions on any five sessions that you have chosen by noon of Thursday

Send me: s.raman@utoronto.ca two questions **on more than one of the Assigned Readings for the week concerned**. Aim **NOT** at factual questions (e.g.: What is the date of the *Devīmāhātmya*?) but at analytical questions (e.g.: What is the relationship between spirit possession and gender?). Send the questions with the following SUBJECT HEADER ON YOUR E-MAIL: **RLG311H1 – Goddess -Questions**. Please include your **NAME AND STUDENT ID IN THE E-MAIL**.

Evaluation:

<i>Participation and Attendance</i>	20%
1 Critical Reading Response (maximum 2 pages)	10% (due on February 7th)
1 Essay Proposal (3-5 pages one-and-a-half line spacing, excluding Bibliography)	20% (due on March 7th)
1 Final Essay (10-15 pages one-and-a-half line spacing, excluding Bibliography)	50% (due on April 4th)

General Rules for the Writing Assignments

Your grading for all the written assignments will depend on the extent to which you:

- creatively use your knowledge to represent, explain and reformulate Hindu doctrines, practices and historical developments,
- refer to (e.g. paraphrase, quote) analyze (e.g. structure, explain), contextualize (e.g. historically, socially, doctrinally) and question (e.g. point out what you do not understand and why, critique the views and intentions represented) the primary and secondary sources you are dealing with,
- abstract from your primary data and come to more general conclusions about Hindu doctrine, social structures and historical change,

- draw from, process and refer to information received in class or from assigned readings,
- carry out the assignment comprehensively and accurately (e.g. if 3 items are required produce three, not two or four, delineate the items clearly and allow no overlap),
- structure your text (introductory remarks, main arguments, concluding remarks) and its parts (paragraphs),
- identify your work (add your name, enrolment details and email address, the course title and code, instructor's name, name of the assignment, session to which the assignment refers, date),
- get the facts right, including spelling of words in South Asian languages such as Sanskrit (the use of diacritics is encouraged but not required, e.g. you may write "a" instead of "ā" or "m" instead of "ṃ"),
- quote from written material (books, articles, online sources) correctly and comprehensively (using footnotes or endnotes),
- manage to do all this within the recommended number of words.

Critical Reading Response:

Write a short summary of one or more of the topics raised in the **Assigned Readings**, discuss why they interested you, what you have understood from the course thus far, what you are additionally interested in finding out and questions you might have.

Essay Proposal:

The *Essay Proposal* should anticipate, in a shortened form, the topic you intend to focus on for your term paper. Therefore it should engage with **one, if not more** of the **Assigned Readings**. In addition it should have the following features:

- The question/questions which interest you in the readings and which, therefore, becomes the focus of your topic
- What are the sources you are going to be looking at to answer the question/questions and why (here you would need to include a bibliography)
- What you hope to find out which will also address larger issues raised within the course and the discussions.

Final Essay

The final paper should be seen as a research paper. This option gives you the opportunity to investigate in more depth a topic that interests you, and it allows you to demonstrate your research skills. If you have trouble coming up with a topic or developing your argument, please come and see me!

Additional guidelines for the final paper will be handed out later in the semester. Penalty for late papers: 1% for each day the paper is late. Please note: If you hand in your paper after class on the day it is due, it will count as being one day late. **Papers more than one week late will not be accepted.**

A note on plagiarism: Plagiarism (i.e., the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another) will not be tolerated. Please bear in mind that the following is plagiarism and will be

treated as such: material taken without citation from the web; material taken from any book or other publication without citation; any ideas that I can trace to another source that you are not citing. These are all forms of cheating and will subject you to serious consequences. Trust your own ability to think and write, and take this course as an opportunity to refine your research and writing skills. If you need help, come see me or visit www.utoronto.ca/writing. If you have any questions or doubts concerning citations and references, please talk to me before handing in your paper.

Course Readings

January 10th

Discussion of Syllabus, Course Work and Assigned Readings. General survey of the parameters of the lectures.

January 17th: Conceptions of the Feminine in Classical Indian Philosophy and the Emergence of the Goddess

Assigned Readings:

Pintchman, Tracy. 1994. *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*. Albany: SUNY Press. 61-90.

Stietencron, Heinrich von. 2005. The Goddess Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardini: Myth, Representation and Historical Role in the Hinduisation of India. In *Hindu myth, Hindu history, religion, art, and politics*. New Delhi: Permanent Black. 115-172.

Coburn, Thomas B. 1996. Devī/ The Great Goddess. In Hawley, John S. and Donna M. Wulff. (ed.) 1996. *Devī: goddesses of India*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 31-48.

January 24th: Buddhist and Jain Goddesses.

Assigned Readings:

Cort, John. 1987. Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions. In *Numen*. 34. 235-255.

English, Elizabeth. 2002. *Vajrayoginī: her visualizations, rituals and forms: a study of the cult of Vajrayoginī in India*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. 1-32.

Shaw, Miranda. 2006. *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. Princeton University Press. 143-152, 357-386.

January 31st: The Goddess as Devoted Spouse.

Assigned Readings:

Narayanan, Vasudha. 1996. Śrī. Giver of Fortune, Bestower of Grace. In In Hawley, John S. and Donna M. Wulff. (ed.) 1996. *Devī: goddesses of India*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 87-108.

Wulff, Donna M. 1996. Rādhā. Consort and Conqueror of Kṛṣṇa. In In Hawley, John S. and Donna M. Wulff. (ed.) 1996. *Devī: goddesses of India*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 109-134.

Kinsley, David. 1986. *Hindu goddesses: visions of the divine feminine in the Hindu religious tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 34-54.

February 7th: The Goddess in the Theology of the Tantras.

Assigned Readings:

Biernacki, Loriliai. 2007. *Renowned Goddess of Desire: women, sex, and speech in Tantra*. Oxford University Press. Introduction. (Available as E-Book on Robarts Website)

Brooks, Douglas Renfrew. 1990. *The secret of the three cities: An introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 46-76.

Kinsley, David. 1997. *The Ten Mahavidyas. Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*. Motilal Banarsidass. 1-63.

February 14th: Elite Religious Practices of the Goddess: Durgā Pūjā.

Assigned Readings:

Rodrigues, Hillary Peter. 2003. *Ritual Worship of the Great Goddess. The Liturgy of the Durgā Pūjā with Interpretations*. Albany: SUNY Press. 15-68.

Sanderson, Alexis. 1995. Vajrayāna: Origin and Function. In *Buddhism in the Year 2000*. International Conference Proceedings. Bangkok and Los Angeles: Dhammakāya Foundation. 89-102.

Waghorne, Joanne Punzo. 2001. The Gentrification of the Goddess. In *International Journal of Hindu Studies*.5.3.227-267. (Available on JSTOR)

February 28th: Non-Elite Religious Practices of the Goddess.

Assigned Readings:

Gentes. M.J. 1992. Scandalizing the Goddess at Kodungallur. In *Asian Folklore Studies*.51.2.295-322. (Available on JSTOR)

Ram, Kalpana. 2013. *Fertile Disorder. Spirit Possession and the Provocation of the Modern*. University of Hawai'i Press. 138-142, 157-170.

March 7th: Living and Dead Goddesses.

Assigned Readings:

Allen, Michael. 1975. *The Cult of the Kumari. Virgin Worship in Nepal*. Nepal: Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies.1-51.

Weinberger-Thomas, Catherine. 1999. *Ashes of immortality: widow burning in India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.1-51, 134-159.

March 14th: The Female Guru as Goddess

Assigned Readings:

Hallstrom, Lisa Lasell. 1999. *Mother of Bliss. Ānandamayī Mā*. New York/Oxford: 19-53.

Cornell, Judith. 2001. *Amma. A Living Saint*. UK: Piatkus Publishers Ltd. 53-58.

Amritaswarupananda Puri, Swami. 1998. *Amma. Mata amritanandamayi devi*. A biography.

Kollam, Kerala: Amrita Books. 105-118.

Warrier, Maya. 2003. Processes of Secularization in Contemporary India: Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission. *Modern Asian Studies*.37.1.213-253.

March 21st: The Goddess East-West

McDermott, Rachel Fell and Jeffrey Kripal (eds.). 2003. *Encountering Kālī in the margins, at the center, in the west*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 223-248, 273-295.

March 28th: Is the Goddess a Feminist?

Assigned Readings:

Hiltebeitel, Alf and Kathleen M. Erndl (eds.) 2000. *Is the goddess a feminist? The politics of South Asian goddesses*. New York: New York University Press. 123-150, 187-202, 269-284.