

ENCOUNTERING THE GODDESS IN INDIA

Religion 220
Fall, 2007

Dr. Joel R. Smith
Skidmore College

An introduction to the Hindu religious culture of India through a study of major Hindu goddesses. The vision (**darsan**) of and devotion (**bhakti**) to the feminine divine image will be explored in terms of both the Goddess worshipped in her own right independently of any male god, and goddesses worshipped as the spouse or consort of a male god. An interdisciplinary approach will explore the religious meaning of the Hindu goddess in literature, painting, poetry, ritual, and sculpture.

Required Texts:

1. Andrew Harvey, Hidden Journey: A Spiritual Awakening (New York: Arkana, 1992). (Out of print; available from the instructor.)
2. David Kinsley, Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition, Second Edition (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997). =Kinsley HG
3. David Kinsley, Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective, Second Edition, (Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993). =Kinsley H
4. Diana Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India, Third Edition (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Anima Books, 1998).
5. The Bhagavad Gita, tr. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Books, 1986).
6. Jayadeva, The Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gita-govinda, tr. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).
7. Ajit Mookerjee, Kali: The Feminine Force (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1988).
8. Thomas B. Coburn, Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of its Interpretation (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).
9. The Song of the Goddess: The Devi Gita: Spiritual Counsel of the Great Goddess, tr. C. Mackenzie Brown (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002).

Schedule of Assignments:

Hindu Devotion (**bhakti**): Seeing the Divine Image (**darsan**)

- 6: Introduction to the course;
film: "The Goddess and her Worship".

- 11: Harvey, Hidden Journey, all.
- 13: Harvey, Interviews (handout);
Cornille, Mother Meera, Avatar (handout).
- 18: Eck, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India, Forward
& pp. 1-75;
Kinsley H, Two Hindu Temples, pp. 71-78;
Kinsley H, Common Worship of the Goddess, pp. 123-128;
film: "Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion" (in class).
- 20: Kinsley H, Introduction & Historical Outline, Ch. 1 & pp.11-25
Kinsley H, Central Hindu Beliefs, Ch. 5 (pp. 84-96 only);
Kinsley H, Symbols and Structures: A Concluding Analysis, Ch 9
- 25: Kinsley H, Hindu Social Structure, Ch. 8.
- 27: Kinsley H, Mahabharata, pp. 32-39;
The Bhagavad Gita, Ch 1-9, pp. 21-87.
- 2: The Bhagavad Gita, Ch 10-18, pp. 89-154.

The Indus Valley Civilization -- Vedic Goddesses

- 4: Kinsley HG, Appendix: Indus Valley Civilization (pp.212-220);
Vedic Goddesses HG: Kinsley, Ch. 1.

Sita -- Lakshmi -- Parvati -- Sarasvati

- 9: Exam (in class).
- 11: **Sri-Lakshmi**: Kinsley HG, Ch. 2;
Parvati: Kinsley HG, Ch. 3;
Sarasvati: Kinsley HG, Ch. 4.
- 16: **Sita**: Kinsley H, Historical Scenes: Ramayana, pp. 25-32;
Kinsley HG, Ch. 5;
Dimmitt, Sita: Fertility Goddess & Sakti (handout).

Durga -- Kali -- The Devi-Mahatmya

- 18: **Durga**: Kinsley HG, Ch. 7.
- 23: **Kali**: Kinsley HG, Ch. 8;
Kinsley H, Dissent, Ch. 3;
Mookerjee, Kali: The Feminine Force (browse in text, pictures
Ram Dass, Lineage (handout);
Sen, from Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair (handout);
optional: **Tara, Chinnamasta, Mahavidyas**, Kinsley HG, Ch 11
optional: **The Matrikas**, Kinsley HG, Ch. 10.
- 25: Coburn, Encountering the Goddess (Devi-Mahatmya), pp.13-84.

30: Coburn, Encountering the Goddess, pp. 1-6, 87-93, 149-174.

The Mahadevi

1: **The Mahadevi**: Kinsley HG, Ch. 9.
Ganga -- Goddesses and Sacred Geography

6: Haberman, A River of Delights & Troubles--The Source(handout)
8: Kinsley HG, Goddesses and Sacred Geography, Ch. 12;
Eck, The Goddess Ganges in Hindu Sacred Geography (handout);
"Ganga Dasahara: Liquid Shakti at the Source of the
Ganges." (slides).

Radha -- The Gita Govinda

13: Essay #1 due at the beginning of class; discuss topic in class.
15: Koller, Devotional Hinduism: God as Joy, Love, Beauty (handout)
film: "Krishna in Spring".

20: **Radha**: Kinsley HG, Ch. 6;
Kinsley H, Historical Figures: Chaitanya, pp. 39-47;
Dimock and Levertov, from In Praise of Krishna (handout);
Kinsley H, Art as Revelation, pp. 67-71;
Kinsley H, Kangra Paintings of Radha and Krishna, pp. 79-82;
Stoler Miller, Divine Duality of Radha & Krishna (handout).
22: Thanksgiving break.

27: Jayadeva, Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gita-
govinda (read First Part through Sixth Part).
29: Jayadeva, Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gita-
govinda (read Seventh through Twelveth Part);
optional: Introduction.

The Devi Gita

4: The Song of the Goddess, pp. 1-126 (Introduction & Devi Gita).

Goddesses and Women's Religious Experience

6: Kinsley H, Sacred Female Imagery and Women's Religious
Experience in Hinduism, Ch. 7;
Ghosh, Household Ritual and Women's Domains (handout);
Gross, Hindu Female Deities as a Resource in the
Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess (handout).

11: Conclusion to the course.

17 (Monday): Essay #2 due at 12:00 noon sharp in Ladd 217.

Office hours: Monday: 4:30- 5:30
Tuesday through Friday: 2:30- 3:30
(other times by appointment)

Office: Ladd 217 Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu
Office phone: 580-5407. (Please do not call me at home.)

Course requirements:

1. **Participation** (20%):

(a) **Participate actively** in our class discussions.
(b) **Attendance is required at every class.** Even one absence will seriously damage your grade. The following guidelines express my expectations:

A or A- = attend all classes and make useful contributions
to discussion in nearly every class.
B+ or B = attend all classes and make regular contributions.
B- = attend all classes but seldom speak.
C, D, F = one or more absences no matter how much you talk.

Please do not arrive in class late. Please do not leave during class unless you absolutely must. (Leaving during class can be rude, distracting, and often shows lack of concentration or lack of interest.) Please do not bring a cell phone or beeper to class.

Since learning during class depends directly on the reading and writing assignments, all assignments must be completed on time. Your understanding of class discussions, and the quality of class discussion itself, depend on how well you have prepared the reading assignments, so read the assignments carefully and critically. Take notes or outline the readings so you are well prepared.

The Skidmore College guideline is that students ought to study two hours outside of class for every hour of class time. Indeed, I expect you to spend about 2 1/2 hours preparing for each of our classes, and I have assigned work based on that expectation. I suggest that you work out a study schedule that sets aside a regular 2 1/2 hour period of time to prepare for each class.

(c) **Study Guides** (written assignments to guide your reading) will be due regularly about once each week. They will be graded pass/fail. They will be due at the beginning of class, and late study guides will not be accepted for credit.

The combination of the above three requirements will count 20% of your final course grade.

2. **Exam** (20%): An exam will be given in class on October 9. Detailed instructions will be provided in advance, but it will primarily consist of identification of terms.

3. **Essays** (60%): Two essays will be due, one on November 13 and one on December 17. Each essay must be typed (double-spaced) and about eight pages long. Each essay will count 30% of your final course grade. Detailed written instructions will be given well in advance.

