

ENCOUNTERING THE GODDESS IN INDIA

Religion 220
Spring, 2012

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.

Learning Goals:

- (1) Learn about the meaning of the major Hindu Goddesses of India: their history, scriptures, myths, rituals, iconography, and symbolism.
- (2) Place the Goddesses and devotion to them in the context of other kinds of Hindu religious movements.
- (3) Learn about the culture of India through the study of Hindu Goddesses.
- (4) Develop critical concepts and methodologies for the study of religions in India and elsewhere.
- (5) Practice subtle reading, writing, and analytical skills, including critical evaluation, by discussing readings in class and by writing essays about them.
- (6) Consider feminist aspects of the Goddesses and their relevance for non-Hindu Westerners, especially women.

Office Hours: I would be delighted to talk with you outside of class. Make an appointment or stop by during my office hours:

Monday & Wednesday: 4:30- 5:30 p.m.
Tuesday & Thursday: 5:00- 6:00 p.m.
Friday: 11:00-12:00 a.m.
(other times by appointment)

Office: Ladd 217

Email: jsmith@skidmore.edu

Office Phone: (518) 580-5407 (Please don't call me at home.)

Required Texts:

1. -----, The Bhagavad Gita, tr. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Books, 1986).

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

Schedule of Assignments:

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

- 24: Introduction to the course.
- 26: Harvey, Hidden Journey, all.
- 31: Harvey, Interviews (handout);
Cornille, Mother Meera, Avatar (handout).
- 2: 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).
- 7: Kinsley H, Introduction (Ch. 1) & Historical Outline (pp.11-25)
Kinsley H, Central Hindu Beliefs, Ch. 5 (pp. 84-96 only);
Kinsley H, Symbols and Structures: A Concluding Analysis, Ch 9
- 9: Kinsley H, Hindu Social Structure, Ch. 8.
- 14: Kinsley H, Mahabharata, pp. 32-39;
The Bhagavad Gita, Ch 1-6, pp. 21-69.
- 16: The Bhagavad Gita, Ch 7-18, pp. 71-154.

The Indus Valley Civilization -- Vedic Goddesses

- 21: Kinsley HG, Appendix: Indus Valley Civilization (pp.212-220);
Vedic Goddesses HG: Kinsley, Ch. 1;
"Hymn of Creation" & "Devi Sukta"(Rg Veda) (handouts in class).

Sita -- Lakshmi -- Parvati -- Sarasvati

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

Durga -- Kali -- The Devi-Mahatmya

- 6: **Durga:** Kinsley HG, Ch. 7.
- 8: **Kali:** Kinsley HG, Ch. 8;
Kinsley H, Dissent, Ch. 3;
Mookerjee, Kali: The Feminine Force(browse in text & pictures)
Ram Dass, Lineage (handout); Alexandra&Sara
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.
- 13 Spring
15 break
- 20: Coburn, Encountering the Goddess (Devi-Mahatmya), pp.13-84.
22: Coburn, Encountering the Goddess, pp. 1-6, 87-93, 149-174.

24 (Saturday): Optional visit to Hindu Temple in Albany.

The Mahadevi

- 27: **The Mahadevi:** Kinsley HG, Ch. 9.

Radha -- The Gita Govinda

- 29: Koller, Devotional Hinduism: God as Joy, Love, Beauty (handout)
film: "Krishna in Spring".
- 3: Essay #1 due at the beginning of class; discuss topic in class.
- 5: **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).

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

Goddesses and Sacred Geography: Yamuna and Ganga

- 17: Haberman, River of Love in an Age of Pollution (handout);
Alley, Separate Domains: Hinduism, Politics, and Environmental Pollution (handout).
19: 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)

The Devi Gita

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

Goddesses and Women's Religious Experience

- 26: Kinsley H, Sacred Female Imagery and Women's Religious Experience in Hinduism, Ch. 7;
Ghosh, Household Ritual and Women's Domains (handout).
1: Gross, "Hindu Female Deities as a Resource in the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess" (handout);
Gross, "Is the Goddess a Feminist?" (handout).
7 (Monday; first day of exams): Essay #2 due at 12:00 noon sharp in my office, Ladd 217.

Course requirements:

1. **Participation** (20%): The combination of (a)+(b)+(c)+(d) will count 20% of your final course grade.

(a) **Participate actively** in our class discussions.

(b) **Attendance is required at every class.** Even one absence will seriously damage your grade. Illness or a family emergency or a religious holiday are the only exceptions. 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) **Discussion Focus.** Twice during the semester I will ask you and another person in the course to focus our class discussion. Do this by discussing the reading with your partner outside of class and deciding what passage you want to focus our discussion on. Identify the passage in class and raise an issue about it for the class--question it or criticize it or defend it or elaborate on it or apply it. (See Schedule of Assignments above for your two assigned classes.)

(d) **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.

2. **Exam** (20%): An exam will be given in class on February 23. Detailed instructions will be provided in advance. It will consist of identification of terms primarily. (Please let me know right away if you are approved for extra time in taking an exam.)

3. **Essays** (60%): Two essays will be due, one on April 3 and one on May 7 (the first day of exam week). 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.

There is no final exam for this course.

