

Religion 333: Women and Goddesses in India

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Office Hours: W 1-4 and by appt., CCC 417

DESCRIPTION

This course examines the complex relationships between the power and importance of goddesses in Hindu religious traditions and the lives of women today both inside and outside India. This is a complicated, challenging, and deeply rewarding undertaking. We will encounter examples in which reality is at its deepest level a form of the goddess, examples that clearly repress female power, and everything in between. As we proceed on this journey, a broader question will come into play: what implications does the importance of goddess worship in Hindu religious traditions have for how we live our lives in Wisconsin?

OUTCOMES

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- 1) Identify and explain stories and personalities connected to important goddesses and goddess types in Hindu religious traditions.
- 2) Describe and explain common categories of ritual practice relating to goddesses and women in India.
- 3) Offer an argument about how Hindu goddess-oriented ritual practices, ideas, and narratives connect to the lives of women that is sensitive to both the historical and current complexity of this topic inside and outside India.

These outcomes are designed to connect to the university outcomes for Humanities and Global Awareness.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Pop quizzes (lowest grade dropped): 10%

Attendance: 5%

Class Participation: 10%

Unit 1 Take-Home Test: 15%

Unit 2 Essay: 20% (approx. 1000 words)

Book Report: 20% (approx. 800-1000 words)

Final Paper: 20% (approx. 1500 words)

COURSE TEXTS

Text Rental

Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition (Kinsley)
Is the Goddess a Feminist: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses (Hiltebeitel and Erndl)

Text Purchase

Tracy Pintchman. *Women's Lives, Women's Rituals in The Hindu Tradition*. (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Bulbul Sharma. *The Book of Devi* [Paperback]. Penguin Global (2010).

Policies

Written Assignments

If you are not able to turn in on time due to particularly extenuating circumstances, some flexibility may be possible. If this is the case, you must have asked and received permission from me no later than the day before the assignment is due. Without permission, a grade penalty will be assigned at my discretion or I may not allow you to submit.

Required Articles

If I do not provide photocopies of an assigned reading not in one of our books, you must print out the reading (you will find PDF versions on our D2L site) and bring to class at a magnification you can actually read. You may NOT view the readings on a smart phone in class.

Smart Phones

Please do not use a smart phone in class without permission. Tablets or laptops for the purposes of note-taking are fine, with permission.

Assignments

Assignments will change. Be sure to check D2L before each assignment.

Absences

Everyone is automatically entitled to two unexcused absences. Anything beyond this should be discussed with me and will impact your final grade. Your presence and participation matter.

Learning Accommodations

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>

<http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>

Mutual Respect

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/rightsCommBillRights.pdf>

Academic Misconduct

<http://library.uwsp.edu/guides/vrd/plagiarism.htm>

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

Percentage to Letter Grade Conversion:

A: 94-100, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82, C+:77-79, C: 73-76. C-: 70-72, D+: 67-69, D: 65-66, F: 64 or lower

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SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1

Wednesday, Sept. 7: Beginnings (materials from class discussion available on D2L.)

Week 2

Wednesday, Sept. 14: **Durga**

Assignment:

- The Legend of Durga on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/38117574>
- Introduction and "Durga" in The Book of Devi (3-7, 11-29, handout, PDF on D2L)
- The sections "Who is Devi" and "Manifestations" (two consecutive web pages and each of their internal hyperlinks, e.g. "puja", "Hinduism") and "Durga" under "dayini" section of "Aspects of Devi" in the Smithsonian web exhibition entitled Devi: The Great Goddess (<http://www.asia.si.edu/devi/>).
- Kinsley: "Durga" and beginning of "Kali" (95-115, 116-121)
- **Study questions:** How would you summarize the personality and important characteristics of the goddess Durga in approximately three sentences? What questions arose as you did this reading?

Week 3

Wednesday, Sept. 21: Lakshmi, Saraswati, overview of Hindu traditions

Assignment:

- The Book of Devi: 47-59 ("Lakshmi") and 63-76 (Saraswati)
- Excerpts from *Hinduism* by Vasudha Narayanan (6-19, 23-33, 97-103, handout and PDF). FYI: the pages in this book are TINY. :)
- KINSLEY): 6-7, 19-34. Focus in this reading on understanding the main focus of each SECTION of the chapter and how the sections relate to one another rather than all of the details. We will unpack in class.
- Devi: The Great Goddess (website: <http://www.asia.si.edu/devi/>): focus on Lakshmi.
- **Study questions:** How does Lakshmi differ from Durga? What terms from the reading felt *most important* for our overview of Hindu traditions? What questions arose as you did this reading?

Week 4

Wednesday, Sept. 28: Sita and Radha

- Book of Devi: Sita and Radha (77-128). Read carefully.
- Kinsley: Sita: 70-78, Radha: 81-85.
- View scenes (just scenes, unless from one of the short examples) from at least two of the following:
 - <https://vimeo.com/142013803> (Ramayana_Story of Diwali - Mocomi Kids) - short and worth watching in its entirety.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNvS8APBvSM> (Sita's Trial by Fire in old tv version of Ramayana). About 40 minutes.
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx4pS_N7X74 (The eternal love of Krishna and Radha). A short clip.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjAcSLf12ik> (Sri Krishna Leela -- particularly beginning at the 2 hour mark). A full movie.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mUaogeB6r0> (Gopaal Krishna). A full movie.
- **Study Questions:** How does Sita differ from Radha? What terms from the reading felt most important for our overview of Hindu traditions? What questions arose as you did this reading?

Week 5

Wednesday, Oct. 5: Parvati, Sati, Ganga, gram-devi, yogini

- Book of Devi: Sati (31-44), Ganga (129-142), Village Goddesses and Minor Deities (143-157). Paper copy handed out in class. PDF available on D2L.
- Complete your perusal of the content in the "Aspects of Devi" section of the Smithsonian website. Use of this website is important for thinking through how different goddesses relate to each other and to women.
- Read excerpt from Hindu Art (Blurton) about Shiva, Parvati, Ganga, Ganesha, and Skanda (76-79, 94-105 - PDF on D2L, print handout).
- View at least one of the following:
 - The immolation of desire:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF6buOdokcw&index=29&list=PLGSMcizEZuIrO87PHwt6v84w7jwnkLrKY>
 - The sacrifice of Sati:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0ueHUtkxIY>
 - The descent of Ganga:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nU1ZkMUcl8>
- Devi's Anger:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2KWk6gp5PI>
- Optional (but useful): read the "Devi" chapter from Blurton (PDF on D2L)
- **Study questions:**
 - How does Parvati relate to Shiva?
 - How does Ganga relate to Shiva?
 - How does Sati relate to Shiva
 - How does Sati relate to Parvati?

Week 6

Wednesday, Oct. 12: **Unit 1 Take-Home due.** In-class discussion of unit, film viewing, and preview of second unit. Something worth extra credit will happen in this class.

Unit 2

Week 7

Wednesday, Oct. 19*: Women, Goddesses and Ritual Practice 1

Week 8

Wednesday, Oct. 26: Women, Goddesses and Ritual Practice 2, Gender and Sexuality

Week 9

Wednesday, Nov. 2: Women, Goddesses and Ritual Practice 3, Building an Accurate Picture 1

Week 10

Wednesday, Nov. 9: Women, Goddesses, and Ritual Practice 4, Feminism and Post-Colonialism, Building and Accurate Picture 2

Week 11

Wednesday, Nov. 16: Conversation with Dr. Devaleena Das, **Unit 2 Essay due.**

Unit 3

Week 12: Wednesday, Nov. 23: No class – alternate seminar.

Week 13: Wednesday, Nov. 30: Book Reports due.

Week 14: Wednesday, Dec 7: TBD, discussion of segments from *Is the Goddess a Feminist?*, class choice (possible topics include modern short stories or plays by South Asian writers).

Week 15: Wednesday, Dec 14: closing conversations, presentations of in-progress final projects.

Final Essay due during Finals.