

## **Religion 333: Women and Goddesses in India**

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Office (CCC 417) Hours: Tues 3:20-4, Wed. 4-5, Thurs 3:20-4.

### **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

Graded Discussion Posts: 10%

Class Participation, Preparation, and Attendance: 15% (5% participation + 5% preparation + 5% Attendance)

Unit 1 Take-Home Test: 20%

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

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

Final Essay: 15% (approx. 800-1000 words)

## COURSE TEXTS

### Text Rental

*Is the Goddess a Feminist: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (Hiltebeitel and Erndl)

*Hindu Art* by Richard Blurton

### Text Purchase

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

Sanjay Patel. *Little Book of Hindu Deities*. (Plume: 2006)

## Notes

**In-Class Journal Entries** (graded as part of the "preparation" grade):

*Before* each **in-class** meeting you must upload a brief journal entry to D2L that contains the following: a 2 sentence general summary of each assigned reading and a 1-2 sentence discussion of at least one specific point that you either found notable or about which you had a question for each assigned reading. As long as it is clear that you have thoughtfully prepared the material your entry will be scored 100%. You are allowed to miss two entries.

## 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

## Learning Accommodations

UWSP is committed to providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities and temporary impairments. If you have a disability or acquire a condition during the semester where you need assistance, please contact the Disability and Assistive Technology Center on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of Albertson Hall (library) as soon as possible. DATC can be reached at 715-346-3365 or DATC@uwsp.edu. <https://www.uwsp.edu/disability/Pages/default.aspx>

## 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 Readings

If I do not provide photocopies of an assigned reading not in one of our books or the reader, you must print out the reading (you will find PDF versions on our D2L site) and bring to class.

## Electronics

Tablets or laptops for the purposes of note-taking are fine, with permission. If your smart phone use is causing our collective energy to decrease I will let you know. If it continues to be an issue it will impact your grade.

## Assignments

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

## Attendance

Regular attendance is expected for all physical classes and timely participation is expected for non-physical class weeks.

- 1 or fewer unexcused absences (Excellent) = 90-100%
- 2-3 unexcused absences (Good) = 80-90%
- 4-5 unexcused absences (Poor) = 66-79%
- More than 6 unexcused absences = failing grade for attendance.

Absences will be excused only when the excuse is provided (via email or in person) in advance of the class that will be missed. You should also be sure to upload a note/relevant information (including a copy of emails to me) into the "Absence-Related Info" folder on D2L. Acceptable reasons for an excused absence are illness, family emergency, or school sponsored trip or athletic competition.

If you miss class (excused or unexcused) you should complete the assignments, request and review notes from a colleague, and then come to discuss with me any questions you have about the material. and study any class notes posted on D2L.

***Note: If you miss more than 2-3 physical classes I strongly suggest that we meet in person to discuss how things are going. I have found that repeated absence usually means you are struggling with something.***

## Mutual Respect (avoid bad *karmas*)

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>

## Academic Misconduct (avoid bad *karmas*)

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

<https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf#page=11>

## Emergency Response Guidance:

- In the event of a medical emergency call 9-1-1 or use the closest Red Emergency Phone. Offer assistance if trained and willing to do so. Guide emergency responders to victim.
- In the event of a tornado warning, proceed to the lowest level interior room without window exposure.
- In the event of a fire alarm, evacuate the building in a calm manner.
- Active Shooter/Code React – Run/Escape, Hide, Fight. If trapped hide, lock doors, turn off lights, spread out and remain quiet. Call 9-1-1 when it is safe to do so. Follow instructions of emergency responders. See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Procedures at [www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures](http://www.uwsp.edu/rmgt/Pages/em/procedures) for details on all emergency response at UW-Stevens Point.”

## Netiquette Guidelines

Netiquette is a set of rules for behaving properly online. We all want to foster a safe online learning environment. All opinions and experiences, no matter how different or controversial they may be perceived, must be respected in the tolerant spirit of academic discourse. You are encouraged to comment, question, or critique an idea but you are not to attack an individual. Working as a community of learners, we can build a polite and respectful course community. *Because this is a course about religion, we can assume that there will be a number of different views and reactions and that is fine. Everyone will be surprised or challenged by something but it may well be different for everyone. We will, therefore, discuss with this awareness in mind.*

The following netiquette tips will enhance the learning experience for everyone in the course:

- Do not dominate any discussion.
- Give other students the opportunity to join in the discussion.
- Do not use offensive language. Present ideas appropriately.
- Be cautious in using Internet language. For example, do not capitalize all letters since this suggests shouting.
- Popular emoticons such as ☺ or / can be helpful to convey your tone but do not overdo or overuse them.

- Avoid using vernacular and/or slang language. This could possibly lead to misinterpretation.
- Never make fun of someone's ability to read or write.
- Share tips with other students.
- Keep an "open-mind" and be willing to express even your minority opinion. Minority opinions have to be respected.
- Think and edit before you push the "Send" button.
- Do not hesitate to ask for feedback.
- Using humor is acceptable

Adapted from:

Mintu-Wimsatt, A., Kernek, C., & Lozada, H. R. (2010). *Netiquette: Make it part of your syllabus*. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6(1). Retrieved from [http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/mintu-wimsatt\\_0310.htm](http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/mintu-wimsatt_0310.htm)

Shea, V. (1994). *Netiquette*. Albion.com. Retrieved from: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/book/>.

# Schedule of Assignments

## Foundational

Week 1: Wednesday, September 5, 2018: **Physical Class**  
Setting the Stage

Week 2: Wednesday, September 12, 2018: **Physical Class**

- Pluralism Project:
  - The Textures of Tradition (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - What does 'Hindu' Mean? ((PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - A Context for Diversity (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - Many Gods and One ((PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
- Please fill out the "About Me" document located under Important Course Documents on D2L and upload to the About Me dropbox on D2L as a .docx document
- In The Little Book of Hindu Deities (Henceforth PATEL):
  - Introduction
  - Ganesha
  - Trimurti\*
  - Brahma
  - Vishnu
  - Shiva
  - Manifestations of Shiva
  - Uma Maheshvara
  - Rudra
  - Bhairava
  - Nataraja
  - Lingam
  - Mother Goddess
  - Sarasvati
  - Lakshmi
  - Parvati
- Blurton
  - 9-19, 32-39, 76-77 (Shiva), 94-102 (Parvati)
- Begin exploring the Smithsonian virtual exhibit about Devi:  
<https://archive.asia.si.edu/devi/whoisdevi.htm>

Week 3: Wednesday, September 19, 2018: **Virtual Class: Graded Online Discussion**

- PATEL:
  - Sita
  - Durga
  - Rama
  - Hanuman
  - Krishna
  - Ganga
  - Mahabharata
  - Ramayana
  - Bhagavad Gita
- "Sita and Radha" from *Book of Devi* (PDF on D2L)
- View:
  - Sita Sings the Blues*
    - <http://www.sitasingstheblues.com/watch.html>
  - Agni Pariksha episode from Sagar Ramayan
    - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNvS8APBvSM>
- **Finish exploring (i.e. read ALL text)** in the Smithsonian virtual exhibit about Devi:
  - <https://archive.asia.si.edu/devi/whoisdevi.htm>

**Graded Online Discussion Post 1:**

Compare and contrast how Sita is presented and how her relationship with Rama is portrayed in Patel (Sita/Rama/Hanuman/Ramayana), *Book of Devi*, *Even Sita Sings the Blues*, and the *Agni Pariksha* (Trial By Fire) episode from Ramanand Sagar's tv version of the *Ramayana*. Be sure to mention at least 4 specific details (i.e. approximately one or two details from each source) and cite the source for each detail. Feel free to also share reactions and questions that arose about Sita as you consider this question. Initial Post should be submitted to the Discussion Forum by Tuesday, September 18 at midnight. Revised posts should be submitted by Friday, September 21 at midnight.



Week 4: Wednesday, September 26, 2018: **Physical Class**

- Pluralism Project
  - Hinduism in the World Timeline (PDF on D2L); print out and bring to class)
  - Agni (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - Brahman and Atman (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - Vedanta: The Way of Wisdom (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - Bhakti: The Way of Devotion (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - Karma: The Way of Action (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
  - Dharma: The Social Order (PDF on D2L; print out and bring to class)
- Blurton:
  - 154-185 (Devi)
- "Tales of Durga" graphic novel excerpt (color PDF on D2L; no need to print)
- Durga from *Book of Devi* / Lakshmi and Saraswati from *Book of Devi* (PDF on D2L)
- OPTIONAL (very good but very dense) "History of Religion in India" by Richard Davis (PDF)
- Take home test handed out.

Week 5: Wednesday, October 3, 2018: **Virtual Class: Graded Online Discussion**

- Sati, Ganga, and Village Goddesses *The Book of Devi* (PDF on D2L)
- Selections of modern writing about Sita (PDF on D2L)
- Priya's Shakti and Priya's Mirror (links on D2L) - NOTE THAT THIS CONTENT MAY BE UPSETTING -- IT INVOLVES VISUAL DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT.
- View *Devi* by Satyajit Ray
  - <https://wm1-download.uwsp.edu/secure/LRC-EReserve/REL333-Whitmore/G-Devi-082018.html>
- Graded Online Discussion question 2:
  - In this week's reading you encountered several new goddesses and their stories (Sati, Ganga) and also a range of modern perspectives about Sita and Durga. How can you use this material to interpret the film *Devi*? Answer the following questions based on the reading and the film:
    - What connections do you see between the story of Sati and the film *Devi*?
    - What connections do you see between the story of Ganga and the film *Devi*?

- Which of the modern perspectives on Sita that we read this week resonate with the film Devi?
- Both the film Devi and Priya's Shakti / Priya's Mirror directly invoke Durga? Where are there similarities and where are there differences in how Durga is invoked?

Initial posts should be submitted to D2L by Tuesday, October 2 at midnight. Revised posts should be submitted by Friday, October 12 by midnight.

Week 6: Wednesday, October 10, 2018: Physical Class

- Take-Home Test due.
- Discussion of Unit 1 in-class.

## Ritual and Social and Theoretical Issues, Part 1

Week 7: Wednesday, October 17, 2018: **Physical Class**

- "Marriage: Women in India" by Doranne Jacobson (written in 1977) - PDF on D2L - print out and bring to class
- "Gender Scripts and Age at Marriage in India" by Sonalde Desai and Lester Andrist (written in 2010) - PDF on D2L - print out and bring to class
- PINTCHMAN 3-7; 35-54 (Flueckiger)

Week 8: Wednesday, October 24, 2018: **Virtual Class**

- PINTCHMAN 55-64 (Pintchman); Nagarajan (85-108)
- Graded Online Discussion

Answer the following questions. Be sure to mention and cite at least two specific details with page numbers for each chapter.

What is a kolam?

What does the presence of the kolam indicate about the auspicious power of a married Hindu woman?

Do you read this as a practice that asserts female power, an example in which female power is being controlled through heterosexual marriage, or something else?

What is a sakhi friendship?

How do sakhi friendships provide an alternative to patriarchal structures of control for Benarsi women?

Where does Krishna fit in?

Initial Post due by Tuesday at midnight on Tuesday, October 23

Revised post due by Friday, October 26 at midnight. Be sure to comment on FOUR other posts and to post in the requested format.

Week 9: Wednesday, October 31, 2018: **Physical Class**

- "Sexuality" by Ruth Vanita (PDF on D2L -- PRINT OUT AND BRING TO CLASS)
- "Gender" by Karen Pechilis (PDF on D2L -- PRINT OUT AND BRING TO CLASS)

Week 10: Wednesday, November 7, 2018: **Virtual Class**

- PINTCHMAN 131-147 (Craddock), 149-158 (Erndl)
- Graded Online Discussion: Answer the following questions. Initial post is due by Tuesday, November 6 at midnight. Revised post is due by Friday, November 9 at midnight.

**Two notes:**

- Please be sure to place your revised post in the same thread as your initial post.
  - When you write you should aim to use about 99% your words and very little quotation. Paraphrase (with citation) is totally fine.
- 1) What role does the cremation ground play for Karaikkal Ammaiyar - why is it significant for her and who does she become there?
  - 2) Craddock writes that "Karaikkal Ammaiyar's poetry dismantles the paradigm of human order and duty rooted in the household not by focusing on gender roles, but by extolling devotion to Shiva in a community of devotees in which gender is irrelevant." In your view, can Karaikkal Ammaiyar function as a resource/symbol for female empowerment? Why or why not?
  - 3) Erndl views "women's goddess possession rituals as traditional cultural resources which create an arena for women's empowerment in the varied and rapidly changing context of contemporary India." Broadly speaking she points to two related aspects of women's goddess possession rituals to support her interpretation. What are those two related aspects?
  - 4) Do you think that Erndl proved her interpretation? Why or why not?

Week 11: Wednesday, November 14, 2018: **Physical Class**

- Unit 2 Essay due. Discussion.

## Broader Social and Theoretical Issues, Part 2:

Week 12: Wednesday, November 21, 2018: **Virtual Class: Graded Online**  
Discussion. (Thanksgiving begins next day)

- View: "The Story of India: Freedom":
  - <https://login.ezproxy.uwsp.edu/login?url=https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=102962&xtid=41065>
- Read "British Rule" by Gottschalk (PDF on D2L)
- Read the first half of "Under Western Eyes" by Mohanty (PDF on D2L)
- Work on your Book Review
  - Turn in a brief note to the Book Review Progress dropbox that states your current progress with your book review. I strongly suggest that people aim to have their books in their hands before the break, at the very least.
- **Graded Discussion Post**. This discussion post should be turned in by no later than 5PM on Wednesday, November 21. For this discussion post, there is NO REVISED POST. Answer the following questions
  - What (based on the first half of your Mohanty reading) do you understand to be Mohanty's main argument(s)?
  - What connections do you see between the "British Rule" article, the "Under Western Eyes" article, and the "Story of India: Freedom" video? How are these sources related?
  - What questions/confusions do you have about these sources and how they relate to class?

Week 13: Wednesday, November 28, 2018: Physical Class

- Finish "Under Western Eyes"
- Read "The Poojari's Daughter" (PDF on D2L)
- Read "India's Women" "The Mixed Truth" by Amartya Sen
- Continue to work on your Book Review

Cont'd on next page:

## Week 14: Wednesday, December 5, 2018: Physical Class

I have uploaded (as separate PDFs, found in the Week 14 module on D2L) multiple chapters from a book called *Separate Journeys: Short Stories by Contemporary Indian Women*. Everyone should **read the introduction** plus the chapter I have assigned to you specifically. Come to class ready to tell others about your chapter.

**Bayen:** Haley A.

**A Day with Charulata:** Brooke, Delaney

**The Decision:** Stefani, Tierney

**Private Tuition with Mr. Bose:** Jasmine, Shane

**The Empty Chest:** Alyssa C., Griffin

**Izzat:** Sarah, Amanda

**Justice:** Ivy, Victoria

**A Kind of Love Story:** Haley F., Kayla

**The Hijra:** Brianna, McKenna

**The Widows of Tithoor:** Lauren, Lexi

**The Sermons of Haji Gul Baba Bektashi:** Claire, Marina

**Jeelani Bano:** Choua, Allie T.

**Thayyaal:** Danielle, Jacob

**Just a Simple Bridge:** Madison, MaiLa

**I am Complete:** Alyssa M., Xiao

## Also:

### **View, Explore, Read:**

About the Abused Goddesses campaign:

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/06/abused-goddesses-campaign-domestic-violence-india\\_n\\_3880515.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/06/abused-goddesses-campaign-domestic-violence-india_n_3880515.html)

<http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/arts-letters/no-more-goddesses-please-bring-in-the-sluts>

About the Sabarimala controversy:

[https://www.ndtv.com/kerala-news/sabarimala-temple-body-to-meet-soon-as-protests-grow-over-womens-entry-1932707?fbclid=IwAR1Ye-QqC6TBYTUwx0F8TLEoZOPHfdvgA3TDV\\_Pc8HEPXyM3zBAkt7k2MqI](https://www.ndtv.com/kerala-news/sabarimala-temple-body-to-meet-soon-as-protests-grow-over-womens-entry-1932707?fbclid=IwAR1Ye-QqC6TBYTUwx0F8TLEoZOPHfdvgA3TDV_Pc8HEPXyM3zBAkt7k2MqI)

<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/the-pilgrimages-progress/article25282141.ece?fbclid=IwAR1gaH2kl0ITKitouEp7PEvq5Yo9VI42EOpW5pRQDxQkFrGwC3wrJ-d36jI>

"Feminism in India" <https://feminisminindia.com/>

Superhero Amrita Simla: <https://amritasimla.com/home.htm>

Week 15: Wednesday, December 12, 2018: Physical Class

- Book Reviews Due
- Oral Presentations based on Book Review