

Religion 384 / South Asian Studies 384 / Women's and Gender Studies 384
Goddesses, Women and Power in Hinduism
TuTh 11-12:20 HL 215 spring 2013

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This course focuses on power as female and female power, on goddesses and on women, in Hindu cosmology, mythology, and society. We look at gender hierarchies in various rural and urban, past and present, domestic and political, textual and cultural contexts. Most especially, we try to observe and understand complex, multifaceted interrelationships among mythic, economic, and social constructions of female beings in India; a "critical reflections" course.

Readings

The following books are required readings and should be available for purchase at the University Bookstore. They have also been placed on 2-hour reserve in Bird library:

- Hiltebeitel, Alf, and Kathleen M. Erndl. Editors. 2000. *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*. New York: New York University Press
- McDermott, Rachel Fell. 2001. *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Murthy, Laxmi and Rajashri Dasgupta 2011. *Our Pictures, Our Words: A Visual Journey Through the Women's Movement*. Zubaan Books and University of Chicago Press
- Sharma, Bulbul. 2003. *The Book of Devi*. Penguin

The following required readings -- here listed alphabetically by author / translator-- will be available to download as PDFs from our merged Blackboard course web site, in folders under "content."

[REL/SAS/WGS.384.Merged.SPRING13.Goddesses,Women,Power / Hindu](#)

- Agarwal, Bina. 2008. "Two Poems on Sita," in *Ramayana Stories*.
- Ambai 1992 "My Mother, Her Crime," from *A Purple Sea*, 11-21. New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press.
- Bhattacharya, Himika. 2009. Performing Silence: Gender, Violence, and Resistance in Women's Narratives From Lahaul, India. *Qualitative Inquiry* 15 (2): 359-371.
- Deshpande, Shashi. 1993. "The Stone Women," from *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, 141-146. New Delhi: Penguin Books, India.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2000. "From Demon Aunt to Gorgeous Bride: Women Portray Female Power in a North Indian Festival Cycle." In *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and*

- Politics in India*, edited by Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, 203-230. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2008 "Gender." In *Studying Hinduism: Key Concepts and Methods*, edited by Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, 178-193. London: Routledge.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2008. Deep Beauty: Rajasthani Goddesses above and below the Surface. *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 12(2):153-179.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2010. "New Light in the House: Schooling Girls in Rural North India." In *Everyday Life in South Asia*, 2nd edition, edited by Diane Mines and Sarah Lamb, 80-93. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hallstrom, Lisa Lassell. 2004. Anandamayi Ma, the Bliss-Filled Divine Mother, in *The Graceful Guru: Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States* edited by Karen Pechilis, 84-118. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Hariharan, Githa, 1997 "The Remains of the Feast." In *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, edited by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, 422-429. Vintage.
- Hess, Linda. 1999. Rejecting Sita: Indian Responses to the Ideal Man's Cruel Treatment of His Ideal Wife. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67:1-32.
- Kali, Devadatta, translator. 2003. "Ch. 11 "Hymn to Narayani" and Ch. 12 "The Promise of Blessings," from *In Praise of the Goddess: The Devimahatmya and Its Meaning*. Nicolas-Hays.
- Kishwar, Madhu. 1999. "Yes to Sita, No to Ram!" from *Off the Beaten Track: Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women*, 234-249. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 1999. "The Third and Final Continent," from *Interpreter of Maladies*, 173-198
- Mankekar, Purnima. 1993. Television Tales and a Woman's Rage: A Nationalist Recasting of Draupadi's "Disrobing". *Public Culture* 5:469-492.
- Narayanan, Vasudha 2004. "Gurus and Goddesses, Deities and Devotees," in *The Graceful Guru*, ed. Karen Pechilis, 149-178. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Narayanan, Vasudha. 1996. "The Hindu Tradition," in *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby, 12-133. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pande, Mrinal. 1991. "Girls." In Lakshmi Holmstrom, ed., *The Inner Courtyard: Stories by Indian Women*, 57-64. New Delhi: Rupa.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sundar. 1999. "The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing: Meanings for Our Times," in *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India*. Edited by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, pp. 331-358. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Rao, Velcheru Narayana 2004 "When Does Sita Cease to Be Sita?" in *The Ramayana Revisited*, edited by Mandakranta Bose, 219-241. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Richman, Paula, ed. 2008 Selections from *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India*: "Foundations" (1-13); "Talking Back" (58-63); "Forest of Possibilities" (91-98)
- Selected sources on the "Delhi Braveheart" rape case and related matters
- Shulman, Angela Rudert. "Shakti's New Voice: Anandmurti Gurumaa" unpublished ms. forthcoming in *Women in Asian Religions*, ed. Zayn Kassam. Praeger/ABC-Clio.
- Thakur [Tagore], Rabindranath. 1990 [1926] "Letter from a Wife" in *Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels*, edited by Kalpana Bardhan, 96-109.

Requirements

Read, reflect, attend, pay attention, stay awake, talk, listen, think, learn, understand, question, compose

Your grade will be based on several different tasks designed to allow your instructor and T.A.s to assess how well you are meeting these requirements. The tasks break down as follows:

5 out of 6 response papers @ 5 points each	25%
participation	30%
independent project	25%
take-home 2/3-term essay (5-6 pages)	20%

*Extra credit potential 5 % max
See p. 6 for additional details on requirements

Week/Date Topic/Readings

Hinduism's gendered cosmology and society: preliminary explorations (4 weeks)

- 1 Tu 1/15 Introductory and organizational session; a story we can't ignore: "Delhi Braveheart"
- Th 1/17 Sketching contexts - 1: overview of Hindu texts, concepts, mythology
Read: Narayanan, "Hindu Tradition," 13-42, *BB*
- 2 Tu 1/22 Sketching contexts - 2: overview of Hindu ritual and gender roles
Read: Look over Narayanan's "Hindu Tradition," 42-116; read carefully about deities (42-49) and women's rituals & women's roles, 103-116, *BB*
[hand-out on response paper 1](#)
Self-enroll for point-person turns, weeks 3 - 8
- Th 1/24 Delhi Braveheart: what's shakti got to do with it?
Read: Hildebeitel and Erndl, *Is the Goddess a Feminist?* (hereafter H & E), Introduction, 11-23; Erndl in H & E, 91-103; Selected sources on "Braveheart," *BB*
Student self-introductions & discussion
• RP 1 due •
- 3 Tu 1/29 *The Greatness of the Goddess (Devi Mahatmya): Shakti, Prakriti and Maya*
Read: Sharma, pp. 1-29
Devi Mahatmya story in slides
[hand-out on response papers 2-6](#)
- Th 1/31 Battles and blessings of the Devi
Read: Humes in H & E, 123-150; Sharma 158-161; Kali, *In Praise*, *BB*;
[note Kali translates the original Sanskrit text, from which Sharma draws her retelling of Durga's story; I am asking you here to look at just 2 chapters in translation]
- 4 Tu 2/5 Goddesses and women in Hindu texts and contexts
Read: Gross in H & E, 104-112; Gold, *Gender*, *BB*
- Th 2/7 Goddesses, women and families
Read: Harlan in H & E, 69-90; Menon in H & E, 151-165
RP 2 due

Devi and the arts of devotion: songs, stories, rituals, lives (4 weeks)

- 5 Tu 2/12 Devi in rural settings 1: women's celebrations
Read: Gold, Purdah is as Purdah's Kept, BB; Gold, Demon Aunt, BB
[hand-out describing independent project distributed](#)
- Th 2/14 Devi in rural settings 2: shrines and stories
Read: Gold, Deep Beauty, BB; Sharma, 145-157
- 6 Tu 2/19 Kali, Uma, and the poetics of devotion in Bengal
Read: McDermott (hereafter McD), 1-37
- Th 2/21 Kali, transformation, adoration
Read: McD, 38-91
RP 3 due
- 7 Tu 2/26 Mithila women 'write' their stories through art
Guest: Susan S. Wadley, Professor of Anthropology, Syracuse
Read: TBA
- Th 2/28 Paths to Kali; Uma as daughter
Read: McD, 92-151; Sherma, H & E, 24-51
Independent project statement of intention due
- 8 Tu 3/5 Goddesses bridging worlds: critical reflections
Read: Gross 104-112, Pintchman 187-202, Dobia, 203-238 all in H & E
Self-enroll for point-person turns, weeks 9 - 14
- Th 3/7 *Class will not meet*

SPRING BREAK

heroines, saints and gurus (2 weeks)

- 9 Tu 3/19 Sita 1
Read: Sharma, 77-106; Richman, ed., Selections from Ramayana Stories, BB
Watch: Sita's "Trial by Fire"
- Th 3/21 Sita 2
By prearrangement you will read either Hess, "Rejecting Sita" or Rao, "When Does Sita Cease to be Sita?" or Kishwar, "Yes to Sita No to Ram" or Sen, "The Immortality Trap" (all on BB)
RP 4 due
- 10 Tu 3/26 Female saints and gurus
Read: Shulman, "Shakti's New Voice," BB; Hallstrom, "Anandamayi Ma" (BB); Narayanan, "Gurus and Goddesses" (BB)

Guest: Dr. Angela Rudert Shulman, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Ithaca College will join our class to discuss her research on Anandmurti Gurumaa
• hand-out of 2/3 term take home essay questions •

Th 3/28 Draupadi and Radha
Read: Sharma, 109-127; Mankekar, "Television Tales," *BB*; Rajan, "The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing," *BB*
Watch: Draupadi's "Disrobing"

activism: organizing women's power (3 weeks)

11 Tu 4/2 Feminism and activism in modern India: beginnings
Read: Murthy and Dasgupta (hereafter M & D), pp. 9-29
2/3-term take-home essays due in class

Th 4/4 "Body Politics"
Read: M & D, pp. 32-117

12 Tu 4/9 Community and Society
Read: M & D, pp. 118-185

Th 4/11 a feminist scholar-activist's reflections
Guest: Himika Bhattacharya, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Syracuse
Read: Bhattacharya, TBA, *BB*

13 Tu 4/16 "Politics of Access"
Read: M & D, 188-221

Th 4/18 Daughters and literacy
Read: Gold, "New Light in the House," *BB*
RP 5 due

relationships in fiction

14 Tu 4/23 Mothers and grandmothers
Read: Ambai, "My Mother . . . "; Pande, "Girls"; Hariharan, "Remains of the Feast," all on *BB*
independent project due in class
independent project presentations

Th 4/25 Husbands
Read: Thakur, "Letter from a Wife"; Deshpande, "Stone Women"; Lahiri, "Third and Final Continent," all on *BB*
independent project presentations

15 Tu 4/30 Concluding discussion
independent project presentations
• *RP 6 due* •

more about requirements

Response papers are 2-3 pages long. In them you reflect on specific syllabus content most often covering a two-week period. Response papers serve two main purposes: a) they reveal whether or not you are keeping up with the readings, and eliminate the need for exams; b) they help you to prepare for in-class discussions.

Participation means:

1) **All students** are expected to come to **every** class prepared to talk about that day's reading assignment.

2) Beginning the third week of class, 3-4 students will take **pre-arranged**, rotating turns at being "point-persons" (discussion leaders). A point-person gives a **brief** (under 3 minutes) opening presentation of the assigned readings. This is **not** a summary, but more of an oral response. Its main purpose is to **get a general discussion going among all class members**. Mostly, you should prepare a list of questions addressed to fellow students (not your professor) and designed to get them talking. *Any and all creative strategies are encouraged!* Please consult one another and cooperate to prepare; we will facilitate this with self-enrollment groups on blackboard. Everyone must take at least two turns in the course of the semester!

Participation will push you to articulate your thoughts about what may be for some completely unfamiliar materials, and for others new ways of thinking about familiar materials. REL/SAS/WGS 384 is a designated "**critical reflections**" course, and it is appropriate to use syllabus readings to reflect back onto broader social issues, both in South Asia and at home. Remember that our primary aim is always to understand, not to judge.

Your participation is assessed largely on presence and preparation; discussion leadership is a major component. Everyone starts with a B (22 points). You will maintain it through fulfilling the conditions detailed above. Consistently well-prepared discussion and near-perfect attendance can of course raise this grade; evident negligence and / or no-shows on your discussion leader turn day can lower it.

attendance counts, but I don't want unwilling prisoners. Therefore, missing three or fewer classes will not affect your grade. However, each cut over three will take 3 points off your participation score. We will do our best to keep an accurate written record of student attendance, but it is your responsibility to sign the sheet!

Independent projects are your single opportunity to go beyond the syllabus and explore a particular topic in greater depth. Details TBA in hand-out distributed on 2/12.

2/3 term essay question (take-home, open book, approximately 5-6 pages) will challenge you to display your comprehensive understandings of the syllabus.

Please note: Late work is bad for you and bad for us. On the other hand, we acknowledge the complexities and balancing acts of college life. Any written work that is one class late will lose a full letter grade (one point off on the 5-point response papers; 3 points off on the essay). **Absolutely no** response papers will be accepted beyond one class late.

**extra credit potential*

Opportunities arise during the semester to write responses to outside events -- lectures, films, performances -- that enhance your knowledge and understanding of gender in Indian culture. I list a few possibilities below; I may announce others as I learn of them. I offer **maximum 2** extra credit points for a one-page response paper describing any event and explaining how it relates to our syllabus. Extra Credit is capped at 5 points, but learning potential is limitless.

Wednesday, February 20, 4:00 pm in Global Collaboratory, 060 Eggers
Stir, Fry, Simmer (film) by **Vani Subramanian**
Fulbright Scholar, Cornell University

Tuesday, March 26, 12:30 pm in 341 Eggers
Forging Faith: Ambivalent Globalization, Neo-ness and Innovative Religion in the Temple Publics of Bangalore City by **Tulasi Srinivas**
Liberal Arts & Interdisciplinary Studies, Emerson College

Tuesday, April 9, 12:30 pm in 100 Eggers
Gender and Sexuality in Mughal India: Historical Narratives, Medicine and Jurisprudence by **Poonam Deol**
Department of History, Jawaharlal University, New Delhi, India

Learning Outcomes

In keeping with University-wide concerns to assess learning outcomes in undergraduate courses, the religion department advises all students of the following goals. You will learn:

- to understand better what we mean by "religion" and to think more critically about the subject;
- to become more aware of a diversity of perspectives within the study of religion;
- to know and understand better diverse manifestations of religion within human cultures and societies, and be able to describe and interpret them.

Your grades in this course, based on written and classroom performance, will reflect your achievement of these goals, at the broadest level.

**IMPORTANT NOTICES REGARDING
FAITH TRADITION OBSERVANCES, DISABILITY, INTEGRITY AND COURTESY:
PLEASE READ CAREFULLY**

faith tradition observances SU's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. An online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class. If you need to miss any class session during the spring semester due to a faith tradition observance, **please make sure to take care of filing your notification(s) immediately.**
http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm

disability Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see
<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>

academic integrity The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. Students in REL/SAS/WGS 384 found violating academic integrity in any aspect of their class work will receive the grade F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal. Please see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>

academic courtesy All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. Please come to class on time to avoid disrupting the class; for the same reason, please do not leave and return while class is in session. Once class begins, you must refrain from personal conversations. You must put away all non-course reading materials (e.g. newspapers). Normal practice is to turn off and put away all electronic devices unless they are specifically required to access course materials; if that is the case, inform instructor. Please avoid premature preparations to leave class; your instructor will let you know when class is over. Eating is not allowed during class. You may be asked to leave the class for the day if you do not follow these rules.