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LIT 391.01: Special Topics - Goddesses

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Fall 2021

Goddesses

LIT391, 3 credits

CRN 74452

Dr. Vanita, Professor of English

Tuesday, Thursday, 11.00-12.20

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This is an elective for the Art History major, English major, and the WGSS major and minor. Since it's an experimental course you will not see it in Degree Works, but I will obtain a substitution for you if you want it to count towards any of the degrees here listed.

Texts

Required readings (all on Moodle)

1. Background information on Hinduism: "Hinduism and Indian Civilization," "Major Hindu Goddesses and Gods"; "Rig Veda, Creation Hymn."
2. Extract from Diana Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*
3. "King Shantanu and Goddess Ganga."
4. Goddess Hymns from the Rig Veda (circa 1500 BC)
5. "Lakshmi Arati" (Hymn to Lakshmi).
6. "Devi Mahatmya extracts."
7. "Saundarya Lahari extracts" and "Lalitha Sahasranamam extracts."
8. "Bhagiratha's Two Mothers" and "Birth of Ganesha."
9. "Note on Women Devotional Poets," and "Mirabai."
10. "Three Women Mystics."
11. "Tantra."
12. "The Greek Gods and Goddesses."
13. Sappho's "Hymns to Aphrodite."
14. "Homeric hymn to Demeter" and "The Eleusinian Mysteries."
15. "Background note on the Odyssey" and Extracts from the Odyssey: Athena and Odysseus
16. Roman Gods and Goddesses www.realmofhistory.com/2018/03/20/15-roman-gods-goddesses-facts/
17. From the Bible: "Hymn to Sophia"; Luke Chapters 1-2 "St Paul's visit to Ephesus" (Book of Acts).
18. Extract, "The Marian Model," from Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary*, and "Medieval Hymns to Mary."
19. Note on John Knox

20. Introduction to Christine De Pizan
21. Extracts from Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*.
22. Suniti Namjoshi, *The Conversations of Cow*
23. Dialogue for the ending of film *Amar Prem*
24. Poems by lesbian poets, black women poets and modern male poets alluding to Goddesses

Further readings (in the Mansfield Library; some are e-books). These are not required but you can use them for writing your presentations or papers or read them for pleasure.

Joseph Campbell, *Goddesses: Mysteries of the Feminine Divine*

Diana Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*

Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*

Nancy Auer Falk, *Living Hinduisms*.

David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*

David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: the Ten Mahavidyas*

David Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*

Manushi journal, special issue on Women Bhaktas (medieval mystic poets)

Barbara Stanley Spaeth, *The Roman Goddess Ceres*

Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: the Christian Destruction of the Classical World*

Geoffrey Ashe, *The Virgin: Mary's Cult and the Re-Emergence of the Goddess*

Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*

Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination*

Marion Wheeler, *Images of the Virgin in Art*

Julian of Norwich, *Showings* translated Edmund Colledge

Elisabeth of Schonau, *The Complete Works*, translated Anne L. Clark

Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* sections: "The Saints in their Images"; "Devotions to the Virgin"; Chapter 16 "Mary."

Jack Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*.

Goals

To introduce you to changing concepts of the divine feminine in three major philosophical traditions, and to acquaint you with the literature and art produced in three religious traditions (Hindu; Greco-Roman; medieval European Christian) around figures that are either worshiped as Goddesses or depicted as Goddess-like.

Learning Outcomes

- (a) Acquire basic information about the history of Goddess worship in the ancient world in general, and in classical antiquity (Greece and Rome) in particular
- (b) Acquire information about the development and worship of Goddesses and Goddess-like figures (mystics; female Gurus) in Hindu tradition from antiquity to modernity
- (c) Acquire basic information about the development of Goddess-like figures (the Virgin and the female saints) in the Christian tradition from the medieval period onwards, and the participation of mystics, especially female mystics, in this development

- (d) Develop a basic understanding of how Goddesses and Goddess-like figures are represented in literature and art in these three traditions.

Requirements

- (a) attend classes regularly. More than four absences not explained to my satisfaction will result in halving your grade for attendance and class participation, and more than seven absences will result in a zero for attendance; leaving early or coming late without explanation will be treated as an absence. Explanations (preferably in advance of the absence) must be backed up with documentation, communicated to me in person and accepted by me.
- (b) keep up with the assigned readings, most of which are on Moodle, bring the text to class (either printed out or on a device), and participate in discussion
- (c) Make an 8-10 minute presentation in class on a topic you will select from a list provided by me. Discuss the presentation with me while working on it.
- (d) take the mid-term exam and two in-class tests
- (e) Starting on 2 November, submit a typed, thoughtful weekly response or set of questions in class (minimum half-page, maximum 1 page) about a text that is to be discussed in class on the day you submit it. Bring the response to class, use it in discussion, and put it in a place I will indicate, at the end of class. No response is required for the weeks of 5-7 Oct, 2-4 Nov, and 7-9 Dec.
- (f) take in-class quizzes
- (g) Check UM email regularly, especially the day before class. I send out notifications and changes by email. The best way to communicate with me is by email.

Grades

- a. Class attendance and participation will be worth 20%, class presentation 10%, quizzes 15%, short tests 15% each, weekly responses 10%, the mid-term exam 15%.
- b. Quizzes and short tests will be given at the start of class. Therefore, you need to be on time to take them. **In addition to the specified texts, quizzes will also contain questions on information supplied in class lectures.** Quizzes may contain both multiple-choice type questions and short answer questions and are designed to test (a) whether you have read the prescribed texts (b) whether you remember basic facts about the texts as well as information communicated in class lectures and movies. Quizzes can be made up within the week (not more than thrice in the semester), but not later.
- c. Plagiarism or academic dishonesty of any kind, in any assignment, will result in your failing the class and may also result in other penalties such as expulsion from the University (for further details, refer to the section on Academic Misconduct in the Student Conduct Code).
- d. If you take this course to fulfill requirements for your major or minor, you cannot take it Credit/No Credit, and you must earn a C minus to pass.
- e. If you have any condition, such as a physical or learning disability, that will make it difficult for you to complete the work as I have outlined it, please notify me in the first week of class.

Notes on Covid and other matters

1. This class will be taught as a mixture of illustrated lectures, video and film clips, discussions of readings, student presentations, and Q&A

2. Please turn off cell phones in class
3. Mask use is required in the classroom and in my office.
4. If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
5. UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
6. Please sit in the same seat in every class. This is required to support contact tracing efforts.
7. Please avoid drinking liquids and eating food in the classroom.
8. As a covid precaution, please maintain a 6-foot distance from me if you talk to me before or after class. If you wish to meet me outside of office hours, it's best to email me for an appointment.

Reading Schedule

This schedule is tentative. It is the student's responsibility to keep up with any changes.

Readings indicated for a certain class are to be read in advance of that class, for example, read Rig Veda Goddess Hymns before you come to class on 9 September.

| Date | Assignment (to be completed before class) | Class Plan | In-class assignment |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| 31 August | | Explanation of syllabus; Introduction & Background; Illustrated Lecture giving an overview of Goddesses in ancient civilizations: Egypt; Mesopotamia; Europe (Nordic, Germanic); pre-Islamic Arabia; ancient India (Indus Valley Civilization). | |
| 2 September | Read Background information on Hinduism: "Hindu Doctrines," "Major Hindu Goddesses and Gods"; "Hindu Scriptures". | Discuss readings. Illustrated lecture on Goddesses in the three main strands of Hinduism (worshippers of Vishnu, of Shiva and of the Goddess [Shakti]). | |
| 7 September | Read extract from Diana Eck, <i>India: A Sacred Geography</i> and "King Santanu and Goddess Ganga." | Discuss readings. Lecture: Hindu worship of earth, rivers, trees, and living beings as Goddesses; evolution of Goddesses from the Vedic period to the Puranic period (circa 1500 BC-first millennium AD) | Quiz on lectures and readings of 2-7 Sep |
| 9 September | Read "Rig Veda Goddess Hymns" and "Hymn to Saraswati" | Discuss readings. Illustrated lecture: The Great Goddesses 1: Saraswati, | |

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| | | Goddess of Wisdom, Education and the Arts | |
| 14 September | Read “Lakshmi Arati” (Hymn to Lakshmi). | Illustrated lecture: The Great Goddesses 2: Lakshmi, Goddess of Prosperity. | . |
| 16 September | Read “Extracts from The Greatness of the Goddess” and “Dialogue from film <i>Amar Prem</i> ” | Discuss reading. Illustrated lecture: the Great Goddesses 3: Durga-Parvati-Kali, the Triune Goddess and her forms. Film clip Student presentation on Diana Eck, <i>Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India</i> | |
| 21 September | | Illustrated lecture on Goddess-worship today in modern Hinduism in India and abroad. Life cycle rituals; festivals; the Goddess in Indian cinema; female Gurus as Goddesses; women politicians as Goddesses. Student presentation on Hindu Goddess-worship in America today | . |
| 23 September | Read “Extracts from Wave of Beauty” and “Extracts from The Thousand Names of the Goddess.” | Lecture and discussion: the philosophical idea of the Ultimate Principle as female/male/many-gendered and beyond gender. Student presentation on modern American women Gurus. | Quiz on lectures and readings 9-23 Sep |
| 28 September | Read “Bhagiratha’s Two Mothers” and “Birth of Ganesha.” | Discuss readings. Illustrated lecture: Gender and Sexuality in Hindu philosophy. Hindu temple architecture and the <i>garbha griha</i> (womb-house), <i>lingam</i> and <i>yoni</i> ; miraculous sex-change and Gods who encompass all genders | |
| 30 September | Read “Note on Women Devotional Poets”; “Mirabai” and “Three Women Mystics.” | Discuss readings. Illustrated lecture: Devotional mysticism, female mystics who become Goddesses and male poets who identify as female. | |
| 5 October | Read “Tantra.” | Discuss reading. Student presentation on David Kinsley, <i>The Ten Mahavidyas</i> . | |
| 7 October | No response required this week | Illustrated lecture on Yogini temples, Matrikas, and devadasis. Review for mid-term | Quiz on lectures and readings from 21 Sep-5 Oct |

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| 12 October | | | Mid-term Exam |
| 14 October | Read “The Greek Gods and Goddesses” | Discuss readings. Illustrated lecture on the Goddess Aphrodite | |
| 19 October | Read Sappho’s poems | Discuss Sappho’s poems. Illustrated lecture on Sappho’s Aphrodite. | |
| 21 October | Read modern lesbian poets’ poems on Goddesses; “The Eleusinian Mysteries.” | Illustrated lecture on the triune Goddess: Artemis-Persephone-Hecate. Student presentation on modern lesbian poets’ poems on Goddesses | |
| 26 October | Read “Homeric Hymn to Demeter” and modern male poets’ poems about Goddesses | Discuss reading. Student presentation on modern male poets’ poems about Goddesses | Quiz on lectures and readings 14-26 Oct. |
| 28 October | Read “Background note on the Odyssey” and extracts from the Odyssey about Odysseus and Goddess Athena. | Discuss the reading and compare Odysseus’ friendship with Athena to Sappho’s friendship with Aphrodite Student presentation on “Homeric hymn to Aphrodite” | |
| 2 November | | Illustrated lecture on Roman Goddesses. Student presentation on Barbara Spaeth’s book about Ceres as fertility Goddess in Rome Review for test | |
| 4 November | No response required this week | Student presentation on Hypatia | In-class test on Greco-Roman materials (14-28 October) |
| 9 November | Read <i>The Conversations of Cow</i> Read poems by black women poets | Discuss reading. Student presentation on black women poets’ poems on Goddesses | |
| 11 November | | Veterans’ Day. NO CLASS | |
| 16 November | Read Vanita, “The Marian Model.” | Discuss readings. Student presentation on Catherine Nixey, <i>The Darkening Age</i> . | |
| 18 November | Read from the Bible: | Student presentation on Geoffrey Ashe, <i>The Virgin</i> . | |

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| | “Hymn to Sophia”; “St Paul’s visit to Ephesus” (Book of Acts). | Illustrated lecture on the Virgin Mary in European art and literature. | |
| 23 November | Read Luke Chapter 1-2; “Medieval Hymns to Mary”; extracts from Christine de Pizan, <i>Book of the City of Ladies</i> (on the Greeks) | Discuss readings. Student presentation on Christian woman mystic Julian of Norwich | Quiz on lectures and materials 9-23 Nov |
| 25 November | | Thanksgiving. NO CLASS | |
| 30 November | Read extracts (saints’ lives) from Christine de Pizan. | Discuss the reading Illustrated lecture on Christian worship of the female saints Student presentation on Elizabeth of Schonau’s visions | |
| 2 December | Read background note on John Knox (Moodle) | Illustrated lecture on the Protestant Reformation attack on worship of the Virgin and the saints, and the counter-Reformation. Student presentation on John Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.” Student presentation on Eamon Duffy and/or Jack Scarisbrick | Quiz on Marian readings |
| 7 December | No response required this week | | Test on Christian materials and Suniti Namjoshi |
| 9 December | | Start watching a Bombay film with a Goddess theme | |
| 16 December 10.10-12.10 | THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM but we are required to meet during the time scheduled for the exam | Continue watching film | |