

Seminar in History and Religion

THE POWER OF THE VOICE: SEMINAR ON DEVOTIONALISM IN INDIA

(SARS 433, RELS 465)

Fall Semester 2004

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30-12

Location: Williams 826

Professor Christian Lee Novetzke

Office: Williams Hall 811

Office Tel: (215) 898-8431 (Direct) and 898-7475 (SASt)

Email: cln@sas.upenn.edu

Website: www.sas.upenn.edu/~cln

Office Hours: Tuesday 3-5, or by appointment

Course Synopsis: Within the plural religious history of India is cut a deep path of practice and literary production called “bhakti” or “personal devotion to God.” In songs and rituals participants affirm a direct relationship to their deity, often in the language of eroticism, subservience, complaint, and skepticism. Though the adherents of bhakti in India come from all walks of life, the literary trace of this kind of devotionism is often marked by the motifs of social suffering due to caste, gender, and class difference. These sentiments have been expressed for a millennium or more primarily through song and oral performance, highlighting the power of the voice to convey deep religious and social sentiment. This course selectively surveys forms of expressing bhakti in India.

Requirements: You’re required to attend all classes, read all materials carefully and thoughtfully, and engage with the subject matter in class and in your writing. This means that during class you’re expected to participate enthusiastically and outside of class to complete your readings conscientiously. Each week you’ll be asked to compose a **short reaction** paper; you can send this to me electronically. In addition, for at least one class in the semester, you’ll give an **informal presentation** on the readings and assist in leading discussion for the remainder of the class. At the end of the term, **undergraduate** students will write a **twelve to fifteen (12-15) page research paper**, which should be printed and submitted; **no electronic submissions**. **Graduate** students will write an essay relevant to their dissertation projects.

Grading: Fifteen percent (15%) of your grade will depend on your attendance and the quality of your classroom participation; twenty percent (20%) will be based on the quality of your weekly reaction papers; twenty-five percent (25%) will depend on your day(s) of presentation and leading discussion; and forty percent (40%) will hinge on your final paper. An outline and good draft will be due as per the syllabus in order to allow for group discussion about one another’s work.

Materials: The books listed below are available at House of Our Own for purchase. A bulkpack will be available at the Wharton Copy Shop, and a version will be online through the course's blackboard site. You are required to bring copies of all readings to class, whether or not you purchase the materials.

Books available at House of Our Own:

Hawley, J. S. and M. Juergensmeyer. 1988. *Songs of the Saints of India*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McDermott, Rachel. 2001. *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Miller, B. S. 1977. *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gitagovinda*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Sax, W., ed. 1995. *The Gods at Play*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Syllabus

Week One: Introduction

- 9/9 Introduction to the class, syllabus, and aims of the course.

Week Two: Survey of Religion and History in India

- 9/14 Lecture: History of Religion in India Crash Course, Part I

Reading for 9/16: “Bhakti” by J.S. Hawley and C. L. Novetzke from *Encyclopedia Britannica*; readings from *Gita Govinda* (B. S. Miller, translator).

- 9/16 Lecture: History of Religion in India Crash Course, Part II

Reading for 9/21: “Part I: Images of Bhakti” in *The Embodiment of Bhakti* by K. Prentiss; “Introduction” by Hawley and Jeurgensmeyer; readings from *Songs of the Saints of India* by J. S. Hawley and M. Jeurgensmeyer—Nanak and Tulsidas.

Week Three: What is Bhakti?

- 9/21 Lecture: Bhakti, Performance, and the Big Picture

Reading for 9/23: “Introduction” to *Speaking of Shiva* by A. K. Ramanujan; and poems from Basavana.

- 9/23 Presentation and Discussion.

Reading for 9/28: “On Practical Hinduism: The Puja as Human Contact,” by Anoop Chandola (353-371).

Week Four: Performing Bhakti

- 9/28 Discussion

Reading for 9/30: William S. Sax. 1995. Introduction (Sax) and Lila (Norvin Hein) in *The Gods at Play: Lila in South Asia*; Donna M. Wulff. 1995. The Play of Emotion: *Lilakirtan* in Bengal, pages 99-114; “Words Made Flesh: The Text Enacted,” by Philip Lutgendorf in *The Life of a Text* (248-339).

- 9/30 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 10/5: “Author and Authority in the Bhakti Poetry of North India” by J. S. Hawley; selections from Sur Das and Kabir in Hawley and Jeurgensmeyer.

Week Five: Authorship

- 10/5 Screening of “Tukaram” (1936 Damle, dir.; 130mins)

Reading for 10/7: “Divining an Author: The Idea of Authorship in an Indian Religious Tradition” by C. L. Novetzke; “The Last Kirtan of Gadge Baba,” by G. N. Dandekar.

- 10/7 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 10/12: “Says Tuka...Songs of a Radical Bhakta,” by Gail Omvedt and Bharat Patankar; “Introduction” and “The Demon Prahlad” by David Lorenzen in *Praises to a Formless God*; “Cokhamela and Eknath: Two *Bhakti* Modes of Legitimacy for Modern Change,” by Eleanor Zelliot in Lele, ed.; Nita Kumar. In Sax 1995. Class and Gender Politics in the *Ramlila*, pages 156-174.

Week Six: Bhakti as Social Protest

- 10/12 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 10/14: None

- 10/14 **No Class—Professor at Conference**

Reading for 10/19: “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India” by Sheldon Pollock (261-298).

Week Seven: For God and Country—Desh Bhakti

- 10/19 Screening: *Hey Ram* (Kamal Haasan, 2000, 199mins)

Reading for 10/21: “Interpreting Ramraj: Reflections on the “Ramayan,” Bhakti, and Hindu Nationalism,” by Philip Lutgendorf (253-287).

- 10/21 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 10/26: None over Break.

Week Eight: Dalit Bhakti

- 10/26—**Fall Break**

Reading for 10/28: “The Dalit in India,” by Sagarika Ghose (83-109); “Chokhamela: Piety and Protest,” by Eleanor Zelliot (212-220); and selections of Dalit Literature: “Ravidas” in Hawley and Jeurgensmeyer (9-34); “Introduction to Dalit Poetry” by Eleanor Zelliot (96); Three Dalit Moods: Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Tryambak Sapkale” (97-101).

- 10/28 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 11/2: “Bahina Bai: Wife and Saint” by Anne Feldhaus; “Janabai: A Woman Saint of India” by Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande.

Week Nine: Gender and Bhakti

- 11/2 Screening of “Devi” (1960, Satyajit Ray, dir., Bengali)

Reading for 11/4: “From *Nayika* to *Bhakta*: A Genealogy of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval India,” by Daud Ali in Leslie and McGee; “Mirabai” in Hawley and Jeurgensmeyer.

- 11/4 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 11/9: Kinsley, “Kali” from McDermott and Kripal (23-38); “Introduction” by Rachel McDermott and read half of *Singing to the Goddess*.

Week Ten: Kali I—The Terrible Mother

- 11/9 In-class screening of “Ball of Fire: The Angry Goddess” by Sarah Caldwell, 1999 (58 minutes) and discussion.

Reading for 11/11: “Loving Paradox: A Feminist Reclamation of the Goddess Kali” by Vrinda Dalmia (125-150); finish McDermott.

- 11/11 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 11/16: “Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times,” by Sumit Sarkar (282-357).

Week Eleven: Kali II—Kali’s Child and Society

- 11/16 Discussion

Reading for 11/18: “The Nationalist Elite” by Partha Chatterjee (35-75).

- 11/18 Presentation and Discussion

Reading for 11/23: None—Write first draft of final paper

Week Twelve: Write First Draft of Final Paper

- **11/23 No Class—Professor at Conference**

Reading for 11/25: None—Continue work on first draft of final paper

- **11/25 No Class—Thanksgiving Break**

Reading for 11/30: Drafts of Student Papers (to be distributed by email before 11/29)

Week Thirteen: Workshop for Final Papers

- 11/30 Workshop

Reading for 12/2: Drafts of Student Papers

- 12/2 Workshop

Reading for 12/7: “Zorba The Buddha: Capitalism, Charisma and the Cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh,” by Hugh Urban (161-182).

Week Fourteen: Bhakti, Late Capitalism, and the Media

- 12/7 In-class Screening: Osho and Satya Sai Baba videos

Reading for 12/9: “Avatar for Our Age: Sathya Sai Baba and the Cultural Contradictions of Late Capitalism,” by Hugh Urban (73-93).

- 12/9 Presentation and Discussion