Mythology is not history. Hindu mythology and the apologetic or propagandistic literature of established sects, religious orders, temples, pilgrimage sites, and interest groups are of limited use to the scholar who would attempt to piece together a history of South Asian polytheism. Far more reliable guides for historical development are to be found in Indian art, secular literature, epigraphy, and numismatics, as well as in colonial and post-colonial ethnographic literature. In this seminar, we will explore the history of the deities of Indian religions, who are often shared by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Muslims alike. As will become apparent, the modern cults of many of the great gods of Hinduism bear little or no resemblance to their ancient or medieval cults, in which they more closely resembled local or regional deities of mountains, forests, and rivers (or the deified or demonized dead) that the people of village India (i.e. some three quarters of the population) continue to worship today. Moreover, the cults of these deities have specific (albeit multiple) regional origins, which must be factored into any accurate account of their histories. Emerging out of local and regional cults, their names, images, stories, and rituals were spread across South Asia through strategies specific to patronage, trade, feudal relations, conquest, caste identity, and the itinerant religious orders.

We will begin the course by reverse engineering the cult of Kša (and, to a lesser extent, that of Rama), and devote the remainder of the quarter excavating the cults of the major and minor deities of Indian polytheism, in which devotion, bhakti—the watchword of scriptural reinventions of Hinduism—is conspicuously absent from worship practice.

In the course of the quarter, we will also have the occasion to observe and reflect upon the specific methods and theories proper to the disciplines of hermeneutics, history, art history, archeology, ethnography, anthropology, epigraphy, ritual studies and folklore studies as they impact the study of South Asian religions.

Organization of the Seminar and Course Requirements:

Students must attend all class meetings. Meetings will be divided into two parts: 1) discussions of the readings (1.5 hours); and 2) a one-hour lecture by Professor White. Beginning April 14, seminar discussions will be led by students, who will pre-circulate, via email, questions and points for discussion based on the readings.

The writing assignment for the seminar will be a term paper of 25 pages in length that will trace the history of the cult of an Indian deity (e.g. Ga‘eYā) or group of deities (e.g. kuldevs) from their origins to the present day, without recourse to Puranic or Mahatmya literature. Papers are due on March 22.
Term papers should include material from at least four of the following data sources:

1. ethnographies, colonial and post-colonial (state gazetteers; Tribes and Castes)
2. art historical journals, volumes (Artibus Asiae; Brill Studies in South Asian Culture)
3. non-scriptural mythological anthologies (Kathasaritsagara, Tales of the Punjab)
4. Sanskrit encyclopedias and compendia (Amarakośa, Manasollása, Ārāgadhara Paddhati)
5. Hindu mythology from non-Puranic sources
6. Buddhist, Jain, Sikh or Islamic myth and legend
7. sources on epigraphy, numismatics
8. ethnographic writing on non-Hindu or "shared" cults of deities

Sources should include journal articles and books by both Indian and Western authors, in both Indic and Western languages.

Books for Purchase at UCSB Bookstore:

Isabelle Nabokov, Religion Against the Self (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Book for Purchase available through Amazon.com:

Günther-Dietz Sontheimer, Pastoral Deities in Western India (Delhi: Oxford India, 1989).

Books on Reserve in Davidson Library


Chapters and Articles Available on Line through eRes: http://eres.library.ucsb.edu (password: delta)

C. A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).


Dominique-Sila Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities: Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997).


**Articles Accessible On-line through UCSB Library electronic journals:**


**Chapter Accessible On-line through eScholarship.org** (http://www.escholarship.org.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/editions/view?docId=ft8g5008h7&brand=ucpress):


**Excerpts, Articles and Chapters available through e-mail from Professor White:**


### Schedule of Class Meetings

**January 12**  
Introduction  

**January 18*  
Tools for Mapping South Asian Polytheism  
Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 125-39; 335-38  
Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 62-74  
DeCaroli, *Haunting* pp. 1-30  
Kulke, *Kings and Cults*, pp. 1-16  
Mines, *Fierce Gods*, pp. 188-208  
Pinch, *Peasants and Monks*, pp. 30-47; 151-160  
White, “Digging Wells While Houses Burn?” pp. 104-31

**January 26**  
K,’a and Rama
February 2  Yakás

Agrawal, Ancient, pp. 165-99
Cohen, “Naga, Yaksini, Buddha,” pp. 360-400
DeCaroli, Haunting, pp. 31-86
Kapferer, Celebration, pp. 68-73; 158-72
Sanford, “Shifting the Center,” pp. 89-110
Thapan, Understanding Ganapati, pp. 71-75; 97-106

February 9  Birs. Virs, Pirs, Ganas

Coccari, "Bir Babas," in Hitebeitel, Criminal Gods, pp. 251-69
Cort, “Tantra in Jainism,” pp. 115-33
Khan, Conversions, pp. 60-96
Oberoi, Construction, pp. 139-65
Sontheimer, Pastoral Deities, pp. 198-206
Thapan, Understanding Ganapati, pp. 12-41; 54-70; 84-97; 111-175

February 16  The Demonized and Heroic Dead

Blackburn, “Death and Deification,” pp. 253-73
DeCaroli, Haunting, pp. 87-103; 173-87
Gold, Fruitful Journeys, pp. 59-79
Gottschalk, “Dead Healers,” pp. 177-200
Nabokov, Religion, pp. 70-163
Weinberger-Thomas, Ashes of Immortality, pp. 134-74
February 23  Goddess Families/Family Goddesses

Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, pp. 165-71; 196-201
Nabokov, *Religion*, pp. 3-69
Orr, "Identity and Divinity," pp. 9-43
Pocock, *Mind, Body, and Wealth*, pp. 41-80
Vaudeville, *Myths, Saints and Legends*, pp. 140-57
Wujastyk, "Miscarriages of Justice," pp. 1-20

March 1  Mountain Gods and Goddesses

Coburn, *Devi-Mahatmya*, pp. 275-89
Erndl, *Victory*, pp. 37-60, 170-75
Gutschow, "A˚m˚k˚ and Navadurg˚," pp. 191-215
Humes, "Vindhyavasini," in Hawley and Wulff, *Devi*, pp. 49-76
Narain, "Ga˚e˚Ya, A Protohistory," pp. 19-48
Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, pp. 91-95; 185-90
Vaudeville, *Myths*, pp. 72-92; 158-96
White, "Yogic and Political Power"

March 8  Tree and Forest Deities

Babb, *Divine Hierarchy*, pp. 128-40
Biardeau, *Stories About Posts*, pp. 74-87; 258-306
Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother*, pp. 104-14
Feldhaus, *Water and Womanhood*, pp. 96-117
Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas*, pp. 1-20
Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, pp. 34-68; 190-95
Stewart, "Encountering," pp. 389-97
White, "The Goddess in the Tree," pp. 575-86

March 15  Bhairava

Geaves, "Sikh Controversies," pp. 48-77
Sax, *God of Justice*, pp. 25-50; 77-83
Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities*, pp. 19-33; 99; 151-64; 179-85; 195-98; 207-210
Stietencron, "The śaiva Component," in *Cult of Jagannath*, pp. 119-23
White, "Bhairava," pp. 485-90
White, "Filthy Amulets," pp. 135-62
White, "At the Mandala’s Dark Fringe," pp. 1-15