GUESTS AT GOD’S WEDDING
Celebrating Kartik among the Women of Benares
Tracy Pintchman

A fascinating look at women’s rituals honoring the god Krishna.

This fascinating look at the sacred Hindu month of Kartik (October–November) as it is celebrated in the city of Benares in North India highlights Kartik-related practices, stories, songs, and experiences particular to women. During Kartik, Hindu women living in and around Benares meet daily to enact a form of ritual worship, or puja, in which they raise the playful Hindu deity Krishna from childhood to adulthood throughout the month, ultimately marrying him to the plant-goddess Tulsi (Basil). Tracy Pintchman explores how women who perform Kartik puja understand and celebrate both Kartik and Krishna in ways that are linked to the desires, hopes, fears, and social realities characteristic of many Hindu women living in the rather conservative social milieu of this region.

“There is a lamentable dearth of material on urban religious experiences in South Asia, which makes this book particularly welcome. The author is a gifted translator; her renditions of the stories and songs of women’s Kartik rituals are a pleasure to read and are among the book’s most attractive and important contributions. She is also well versed in Sanskrit literatures, which allows her to consider popular traditions and their mythological elements thoroughly and precisely as they may emerge and diverge from Puranic sources. Eminently accessible, the book would be useful at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.” — Ann Grodzins Gold, coauthor of In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan

“An excellent resource for South Asian specialists in religion and folklore, Guests at God’s Wedding presents a vivid picture of all that is entailed in the sacred month of Kartik.” — Kirin Narayan, author of Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching

Tracy Pintchman is Professor of Hindu Studies at Loyola University Chicago. She is the author of The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition and the editor of Seeking Mahadevi: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess, both also published by SUNY Press.

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THE BIRTH OF THE KHALSA
A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity
Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

A feminist reconsideration of Sikh identity, discussing its original egalitarianism and current hypermasculine quality, which is harmful to both men and women.

Sikhs trace the genesis of their religious rites, prayers, dress codes, and names to Guru Gobind Singh’s creation of the Khalsa in 1699. The Birth of the Khalsa is the first work to explore this pivotal event in Sikh history from a feminist perspective, questioning the ways in which Sikh memories have constructed a hypermasculine Sikh identity. The book argues that Sikh memory needs to acknowledge the vital female dimension grounded in the universal human condition and present at the birth of the Khalsa.

Inspired by her own father, the eminent Sikh scholar Harbans Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh rediscovers the feminine side of the words and actions of the founders of Sikhism. She looks at the basic texts and tenets of Sikh religion and demonstrates the female aspect in the sacred text, daily prayers, dress code, and rituals of the Sikhs. Singh reminds us that Guru Gobind Singh’s original vision was an egalitarian one and urges present-day Sikhs to live up to the liberating implications set in motion when he gave birth to the Khalsa.

“The author’s feminist critique of ‘malestream Sikh scholarship’ is so bold that it deconstructs and displaces conventional interpretations of the institution of the Khalsa and is a major departure from traditional Sikh understanding ... It is likely to generate a lively debate within the Sikh community.” — Pashaura Singh, author of The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh Self-Definition and the Bhagat Bani

“This is a unique work: the author’s conclusions are fresh, and clearly challenge former interpretations of these events.” — Robert N. Minor, author of The Religious, the Spiritual, and the Secular: Auroville and Secular India

In the Department of Religious Studies at Colby College, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh is Chair and Crawford Family Professor of Religious Studies. She is the author of several books, including The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent.

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Harold Coward, editor

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**THE PRISTINE DAO**

*Metaphysics in Early Daoist Discourse*

Thomas Michael

*A new reading of Daoism, arguing that it originated in a particular textual tradition distinct from Confucianism and other philosophical traditions of early China.*

The *Laozi* (*Daodejing*) and the *Zhuangzi* have long been familiar to Western readers and have served as basic sources of knowledge about early Chinese Daoism. Modern translations and studies of these works have encouraged a perception of Daoism as a mystical philosophy heavy with political implications that advises kings to become one with the Dao. Breaking with this standard approach, *The Pristine Dao* argues that the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* participated in a much wider tradition of metaphysical discourse that included a larger corpus of early Chinese writings.

This book demonstrates that early Daoist discourse possessed a distinct, textually constituted coherence and a religious sensibility that starkly differed from the intellectual background of all other traditions of early China, including Confucianism. The author argues that this discourse is best analyzed through its emergence from the mythological imagination of early China, and that it was unified by a set of notions about the Dao that was shared by all of its participants. The author introduces certain categories from the Western religious and philosophical traditions in order to bring out the distinctive qualities constituting this discourse and to encourage its comparison with other religious and philosophical traditions.

“The overall argument is a direct challenge to the prevailing tendency to read much early Daoism politically. The author confronts this issue directly and makes a very strong case for an essentially religious reading. As a result of this work, we can now proceed to make more intelligent and interesting comparisons of Chinese Daoism with other religious traditions.”

— Stephen W. Durrant, coeditor of *Early China/Ancient Greece: Thinking through Comparisons*

Thomas Michael is Assistant Professor of Religion at The George Washington University.

A volume in the SUNY series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture

Roger T. Ames, editor

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**CONFESSION AND BOOKKEEPING**

*The Religious, Moral, and Rhetorical Roots of Modern Accounting*

James Aho

*A fascinating exploration of the connection between profit making and morality, this book illustrates how modern accounting had its roots in the sacrament of confession.*

Double-entry bookkeeping (DEB), modern capitalism’s first and foremost calculative technology, was “invented” during the Middle Ages when profit making was morally stigmatized. James Aho examines the problematic of moneymaking and offers an explanatory understanding of the paradoxical coupling of profit seeking and morality by situating DEB in the religious circumstances from which it emerged, specifically the newly instituted sacrament of penance, that is, confession.

Confession impacted the consciences of medieval businessmen both through its sacramental form and through its moral teachings. The form of confession produced widespread habits of moral scrupulosity (leading to compulsive record keeping); the content of confession taught that commerce itself was morally suspect. Scrupulous businessmen were thus driven to justify their affairs to church, commune, and themselves. With the aid of DEB, moneymaking was “Christianized” and Christianity was made more amenable to the pursuit of wealth. Although DEB is typically viewed exclusively as a scientifically neutral account of the flow of money through a firm, it remains as it was originally devised, a rhetorical argument.

“As always, Aho writes extremely well. Who would have thought that a book on confession and bookkeeping would be so engaging and at times downright fun to read? Aho’s command of the subject makes this performance possible.”

— Peter Kivisto, author of *Key Ideas in Sociology*

James Aho is Professor of Sociology at Idaho State University and is the author of many books, including *The Things of the World: A Social Phenomenology* and *The Orifice as Sacrificial Site: Culture, Organization, and the Body.*

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GOD OF DESIRE
Tales of Kamadeva in Sanskrit Story Literature
Catherine Benton

Presents Kamadeva, the Hindu god of desire, in tales, art, and ritual. Also covers Kamadeva’s appearance in Buddhist lore.

God of Desire presents Sanskrit tales of the Indian deity Kamadeva as he battles the ascetic god Siva, assists the powerful goddess Devi, and incarnates as the charming son of Krsna. Exploring the imagery and symbolism of the god of desire in art and ritual, Catherine Benton reflects on the connection of Kamadeva to parrots, makaras (gharials), and apsaras (celestial nymphs), and to playful devotional rituals designed to win his favor. In addition to examining the Hindu literature, Benton also highlights two Buddhist forms of Kamadeva, the demonic Mara, who tries to persuade the Buddha to trade enlightenment for the delights of a woman, and the ever-youthful Manjusri, who cuts through ignorance with the bodhisattva sword of wisdom. Tales of Kamadeva from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions present desire as a powerful force continually redefining the boundaries of chaos and order and gently pulling beyond the ephemeral lure of passionate longings.

“The author is fully versed in the relevant texts and salient debates, and she advances a startling thesis: the modern world is not only devoid of myth, it’s better off without it. The critical issues she raises are long overdue and her thought-provoking arguments have the potential to prompt a radical revisioning of what the study of myth is all about.” — Kelly Bulkeley, author of Visions of the Night: Dreams, Religion, and Psychology

Sophia Heller is an independent scholar with a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She lives in Massachusetts.

THE ABSENCE OF MYTH
Sophia Heller

Despite contemporary attempts to revive myth, this book argues that we are living in a world without myth and looks at what this means for humankind.

In this provocative work, Sophia Heller challenges the assumption that we cannot be without myth, that myth is necessary to vital, soulful living. Indeed, Heller argues, we have been living in a world without myth for a long time. The Absence of Myth examines the loss of a religious mode of being-in-the-world and demonstrates how theorists who insist on the presence of myth deny its historical end.

Absence of myth may seem obvious: evidenced by our lack of cult and ritual, and by our de-animated natural world, as well as in the emergence of conceptual thought and psychological awareness, which could only arise with the dissolution of a prereflective (mythic) mode of being-in-the-world. But what appears to be straightforward becomes complicated when myth is intentionally conflated with thought and reflection, usually in the attempt to cultivate a “mythic consciousness” that aims to restore meaning to life and assuage the spiritual malaise of contemporary culture.

Myth cannot rest in peace. It must be continually unearthed, redefined, and recontextualized such that modern and postmodern notions of myth are made to substitute for something that has never been experienced, only imagined.

“The author is fully versed in the relevant texts and salient debates, and she advances a startling thesis: the modern world is not only devoid of myth, it’s better off without it. The critical issues she raises are long overdue and her thought-provoking arguments have the potential to prompt a radical revisioning of what the study of myth is all about.” — Kelly Bulkeley, author of Visions of the Night: Dreams, Religion, and Psychology

Conclusions here are sharply different than the status quo within much of contemporary mythography. At last someone has been brave enough to point out that the emperor has no clothes.” — William G. Doty, author of Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals, Second Edition

Sophia Heller is an independent scholar with a Ph.D. in Mythological Studies from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She lives in Massachusetts.
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

THE BROKEN WHOLE
Philosophical Steps Toward a Theology of Global Solidarity
Thomas E. Reynolds

Considers the problem of pluralism and offers a vision of human solidarity for the postmodern era.

In an increasingly precarious global situation, and in light of the postmodern emphasis on difference, efforts to grasp the “whole” as something universally shared by all human beings have fallen short, according to Thomas E. Reynolds. In this book, he explores the philosophical and theological significance of the problem of pluralism and asserts that the shared resources of the world’s religious traditions can be used to cultivate peace and solidarity across diverse boundaries. He engages a range of philosophical thinkers—such as Gadamer, Marcel, Rorty, Foucault, Levinas, Derrida, and Habermas—and brings them into conversation with contemporary theologians and writers in religious studies. Presenting a vision of solidarity that is both religiously charged and philosophically astute, The Broken Whole outlines an inventive approach toward retrieving the relevance of God-talk, an approach rooted in a philosophy of dialogue and cross-cultural hospitality.

“The writing is subtle and nuanced, the arguments are well conceived and worked through, and the conclusions are reasonable and balanced. This book is a remarkable achievement which helps to redirect inquiry and reopen more realistic theological questions that have been largely excluded from the discussion.” — John B. Cobb, author of Postmodernism and Public Policy: Reframing Religion, Culture, Education, Sexuality, Class, Race, Politics, and the Economy

Thomas E. Reynolds is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at St. Norbert College.

SAMA
The Numinous and Cessative in Indo-Tibetan Yoga
Stuart Ray Sarbacker

Explores yoga and meditation in Eastern religions, incorporating psychological and social aspects of these practices.

A historical and comparative study grounded in close readings of important works, this book explores the dynamics of the theory and practice of yoga in Hindu and Buddhist contexts. Author Stuart Ray Sarbacker explores the fascinating, contrasting perceptions that meditation leads to the attainment of divine, or numinous, power, and to complete escape from worldly existence, or cessation. Sarbacker demonstrates that these two dimensions of spiritual experience have affected the doctrine and cultural significance of yoga from its origins to its contemporary practice. He also integrates sociological and psychological perspectives on religious experience into a larger phenomenological model to address the multifaceted nature of religious experience. Speaking to a broad range of methodological and contextual issues, Samadhi provides numerous insights into the theory and practice of yoga that are relevant to both scholars of religious studies and practitioners of contemporary yoga and meditation traditions.

“Sarbacker tackles an immense swath of material and accompanying secondary literature and manages to do something genuinely creative with it all, that is, develop his own phenomenology of meditative experience via his central categories of the numinous and cessative.” — Jeffrey J. Kripal, author of Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism

Stuart Ray Sarbacker is Lecturer in Religion at Northwestern University.

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