

*DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, WBSU
invites you to three stimulating afternoons
in January-February, 2011*



Gendered Divinity: Goddesses in the Hindu Tradition

Mandakranta Bose,
University of British Columbia

2.00 p.m. Friday, 21st January, 2011

The goddess figure is viewed in the Hindu metaphysical tradition as the active principle of creation and source of all power. Yet, she is at the same time defined in familial terms that constrain her within the gender roles prescribed by social norms. This lecture examines the implications of this duality of divinity humanized along gender lines.

Mandakranta Bose is Professor Emerita at the University of British Columbia, Canada where she taught in the Departments of Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies, and Women Studies. She studied Sanskrit in Calcutta University and Oxford University, as well as comparative literature in the University of British Columbia. She has authored many articles and books, including studies in Sanskrit literature, Hinduism, classical Indian performing arts, and Tagore's works. A large and important part of her research is devoted to the performing arts of India, classical dance in particular, in which she received training from eminent gurus and which formed her initial research venture in Oxford. It was by probing the wider cultural implications of dance that Dr. Bose arrived at gender studies as well as performance studies in general, including the performance and representation of the Ramayana. Her first book was a comprehensive account of the entire range of Sanskrit texts on dance, now in its second edition. In 1991 she published a history of Indian classical dance, *Movement and Mimesis* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), and a critical edition of the 16th century Sanskrit dance text, *The Nartananirnaya of Pundarika Vitthala* (Calcutta: General, 1991). A major work on gender studies is *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). A work on the Ramayana is *The Ramayana Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Her latest major publications are: *Sangitanarayana: A Critical Edition* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, 2009), and *Women in the Hindu Tradition: Roles, Rules and Exceptions* (London: Routledge, 2010). She was the director of the Centre for India and South Asia Research at UBC for five years until her retirement. Dr. Bose has lectured on a wide range of subjects at universities around the world and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain.



The Nation Undone: Constructing the Past in Bengali Historical Drama

Tirthankar Bose

Simon Fraser University

2.00 p.m., Friday, 11th February, 2011

From its advent in mid-19th c., historical drama ruled the Bengali stage for almost a century. At once spectacle and political text, this newcomer on the Bengali stage offered a coherent if simplistic explanation of how India had fallen into subjection to foreigners, asserting that their triumph had been brought about less by their prowess than by their systematic treachery and by infighting among Indians themselves. This tragic perception was offset in these plays by their implicit promise of India's regeneration through the emulation of a legendary past. But that reassurance was compromised by two self-defeating assumptions: the first was the idea of internecine conflict, which was a British thesis that projected India as a land eternally divided and therefore deservedly dominated; the second was the fear of treacherous foreigners, which imported an "other" into nationalist politics that quickly became a diversionary tactic and reinforced the very infighting that the plays lamented in the first place. Keeping in mind that in these plays history is a distorting mirror, I argue here that the construction, rhetoric and ideology of the plays serve as crucial factors in the political self-construction of colonial India.

Tirthankar Bose owes his education in literature to his teachers at Presidency College, Calcutta and to his father, the late Amalendu Bose. With degrees from Calcutta, Oxford and the University of British Columbia, Dr. Bose has taught in several universities in India and Canada, retiring some years ago from Simon Fraser University, Canada. His teaching was focused mainly on British renaissance drama and poetry, especially Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, with a subsidiary but strong interest in imperialist fiction of British colonial times. His publications cover Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Victorian poetry, Kipling, and in recent years, Rabindranath Tagore. His current research interests are in Milton, Tagore, cultural history in general and Bengali culture in particular. Dr. Bose lives in Vancouver, with regular visits to Kolkata and Oxford, and spends his time mostly in idle but pleasurable reading.



Heidegger's Critique of Modernity and the Task of Imagining Possible Futures

Dr Sonia Sikka

University of Ottawa

2.00 p.m., 18th February, 2011

In his later works, Martin Heidegger offers a critique of Western modernity that connects in significant ways with some critical Indian discourses on the subject. For instance, he calls into question the predominant modern conception of the relation between human beings and nature, the assumption that the real is what can be mathematically measured, the exclusion of the experience of the sacred as illusory, and the idea that tradition is exclusively a limiting force from which one must break free. By challenging, at a deep level, the premises on which these positions are based, Heidegger's critique helps to deconstruct the apparent obviousness of modern Western (but increasingly global) assumptions about the self and reality. It thereby helps to clear the way for envisioning alternative possibilities, and ones that will not be merely reactionary.

Sonia Sikka is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ottawa, Canada. Her primary research interests are in modern European philosophy, particularly Heidegger and Nietzsche, and philosophy of culture. Over the last decade, she has also been working on the thought of Johann Gottfried Herder, examining his ideas about humanity and cultural difference in light of contemporary debates regarding race, identity, relativism and multiculturalism. She has published a series of articles on issues related to cultural identity and pluralism within Herder's thought, and her book, *Herder on Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism*, is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. More recently, Professor Sikka has been working on the construction of socio-cultural identities in contexts involving inequalities of power, drawing cross-cultural comparisons between Canada, the U.S. and India. Her research in this area especially focuses on the intersection between religion and culture, including the question of secularism. She was awarded a Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute fellowship, for a research stay in Delhi, India in 2009, in affiliation with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.