

# *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*



Popular Goddess Worship  
in West Bengal

JUNE MCDANIEL

# Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls Popular Goddess Worship In West Bengal

**Zayn R. Kassam**



## **Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls Popular Goddess Worship In West Bengal:**

*Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls* June McDaniel, 2004-08-05 The Indian state of West Bengal is home to one of the world's most vibrant traditions of goddess worship. The year's biggest holidays are devoted to the goddesses Durga and Kali with lavish rituals, decorated statues, fireworks, and parades. In *Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls* June McDaniel provides a broad, accessibly written overview of Bengali goddess worship. McDaniel identifies three major forms of goddess worship and examines each through its myths, folklore, songs, rituals, sacred texts, and practitioners. In the folk/tribal strand, which is found in rural areas, local tribal goddesses are worshipped alongside Hindu goddesses with an emphasis on possession, healing, and animism. The tantric/yogic strand focuses on ritual, meditation, and visualization as ways of experiencing the power of the goddess directly. The devotional or bhakti strand, which is the most popular form, involves the intense love and worship of a particular form of the goddess. McDaniel traces these strands through Bengali culture and explores how they are interwoven with each other as well as with other forms of Hinduism. She also discusses how these practices have been reinterpreted in the West, where goddess worship has gained the values of sexual freedom and psychological healing but lost its emphases on devotion and asceticism. *Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls* takes the reader inside the lives of practicing Shaktas, including holy women, hymn singers, philosophers, visionaries, gurus, ascetics, healers, musicians, and businessmen, and offers vivid descriptions of their rituals, practices, and daily lives. Drawing on years of fieldwork and extensive research, McDaniel paints a rich, expansive portrait of this fascinating religious tradition.

**Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls** June McDaniel, 2004 In *Offering Flowers Feeding Skulls* June McDaniel provides an overview of Bengali goddess worship or Shakti. She identifies three major forms of goddess worship and examines each through its myths, folklore, songs, rituals, sacred texts, and practitioners, tracing these strands through Bengali culture.

**Hindu Goddesses** Lynn Foulston, 2009-07-03 Explores the diversity of Hindu goddesses and the variety of ways in which they are worshipped. Although they undoubtedly have ancient origins, Hindu goddesses and their worship is still very much a part of the fabric of religious engagement in India today. This book offers an introduction to a complex and often baffling field of study.

[The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion](#) John Corrigan, 2008-01-02 The academic study of religion recently has turned to the investigation of emotion as a crucial aspect of religious life. Researchers have set out in several directions to explore that new terrain and have brought with them an assortment of instruments useful in charting it. This volume collects essays under four categories: religious traditions, religious life, emotional states, and historical and theoretical perspectives. In this book, scholars engaged in cutting-edge research on religion and emotion describe the ways in which emotions have played a role in Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions. They analyze the manner in which key components of religious life—ritual, music, gender, sexuality, and material culture—represent and shape emotional performance. Some of the essays included here take a specific emotion, such as love or hatred, and observe the place of that emotion in an assortment of religious traditions and cultural settings.

Other essays analyze the thinking of figures such as St Augustine Soren Kierkegaard Jonathan Edwards Emile Durkheim and William James This collection offers a range of critical perspectives on the academic study of religion and emotion in the form of syntheses provocations and prospective observations that will inform the work of those already engaged in the field Taken together the writings included in this handbook serve as an ideal entry point for anyone wishing to familiarize themselves with the new academic study of religion and emotion

**Possessed by the Virgin** Kristin C. Bloomer, 2018 Possessed by the Virgin is an ethnographic account of three Roman Catholic women in Tamil Nadu south India who claim to be possessed by Mary the mother of Jesus The author follows the lives of these women over many years investigating questions about gender social power agency and authenticity

**The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Hinduism** Gavin Flood, 2022-05-13 An accessible and up to date survey of scholarly thinking about Hinduism perfect for courses on Hinduism or world religions The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Hinduism examines the historical trajectories that have led to the modern religion of Hinduism Covering main themes such as philosophy practice society and science this comprehensive volume brings together a variety of approaches and perspectives in Hindu Studies to help readers better appreciate the richness complexity and diversity of Hinduism Essays by acknowledged experts in the field present historical accounts of all major traditions analyze key texts engage with Hindu theology and philosophy address contemporary questions of colonialism and identity and more Throughout the text the authors highlight the links common threads and issues that reoccur in the history of Hinduism Fully revised and updated the second edition of the Companion incorporates the most recent scholarship and reflects the trend away from essentialist understandings of Hinduism New chapters examine the Goddess tradition Hindu diaspora Hinduism and inter religious comparison Hindu philosophy and Indian astronomy medicine language and mathematics This edition places further emphasis on the importance of region specific studies in analyzing Hinduism discusses important theoretical issues and offers fresh perspectives on current discourse in Hindu society and politics Provides a thorough overview of major texts their histories and the traditions that preserve them Describes the major textual traditions in Sanskrit with examples in different Indian vernacular languages Addresses major issues and contemporary debates about the nature and study of Hinduism Discusses the importance of systematic rational thinking in Indian sciences philosophy and theology Examines key socio political themes in Hinduism that are of particular relevance to the modern world The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Hinduism Second Edition is an excellent text for undergraduate courses on Hinduism in Religious Studies and Philosophy departments and an invaluable resource for scholars and researchers in Hindu Studies

**Contemplative Studies & Jainism** Purushottama Bilimoria, Cogen Bohanec, Rita D. Sherma, 2023-08-01 This volume is one of the first wide ranging academic surveys of the major types and categories of Jain praxis It covers a breadth of scholarly viewpoints that reflect both the variegation in terms of spiritual practices within the Jain traditions as well as the Jain hermeneutical perspectives which are employed in understanding its rich diversity The volume illustrates a complex and nuanced understanding of the

multifaceted category of Jain religious thought and practice. It offers a rare intrareligious dialogue within Jain traditions and at the same time significantly broadens and enriches the field of Contemplative Studies to include an ancient ascetic non-theistic tradition. Meditation, yoga, ritual, prayer are common to all Indic spiritual traditions. By investigating these diverse yet overlapping categories, one might obtain a sophisticated understanding of religious traditions that originally emerged in South Asia. Essays in this book demonstrate how these forms of praxis in Jainism and the philosophies that anchor those practices are interrelated and when brought into dialogue help to foster new tools for understanding a complex and variegated tradition such as Jain Dharma. This book will be useful to scholars and researchers of religious and theological studies, contemplative studies, Jain studies, Hindu studies, consciousness studies, Yoga studies, Indian philosophy and religion, sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, comparative religion, and South Asian studies, as well as general readers interested in the topic.

*Identity, Politics, and Narratives of Belonging* Nilakshi Goswami, Arunima Das, 2025-06-10. The collection of essays draws from a comprehensive exploration of Northeast India's diverse heritage, intently capturing richly textured social landscape, sacred environment, natural resources, literary terrain, and culinary traditions. Its regional literature, along with their translations into English, remain a crucial aspect highlighted in this anthology. Alongside this, issues of gender dynamics and body politics and the manner they engage with prevailing societal norms is further revealed. Additionally, these essays intently focus on identity, beliefs, and customs, providing an in-depth analysis of customary practices, regional folklore, and religious beliefs, and how they shape regional identities and cultural dynamics. Through its critical portrayal of these multifaceted aspects of the Northeastern region, this collection reveals the reciprocal interplay of regional customs and folklore and their reflections in the evolving cultural discourse of Northeast India. In the process, it actively contributes to the ongoing dialogues on the region's diverse literatures, customs, and community practices.

*Tantra, Magic, and Vernacular Religions in Monsoon Asia* Andrea Acri, Paolo E. Rosati, 2022-11-03. This book explores the cross and trans-cultural dialectic between Tantra and intersecting magical and shamanic practices associated with vernacular religions across Monsoon Asia. With a chronological frame going from the mediaeval Indic period up to the present, a wide geographical framework, and through the dialogue between various disciplines, it presents a coherent enquiry shedding light on practices and practitioners that have been frequently alienated in the elitist discourse of mainstream Indic religions and equally overlooked by modern scholarship. The book addresses three desiderata in the field of Tantric Studies: it fills a gap in the historical modelling of Tantra; it extends the geographical parameters of Tantra to the vast yet culturally interlinked socio-geographical construct of Monsoon Asia; it explores Tantra as an interface between the Sanskritic elite and the folk, the vernacular, the magical, and the shamanic, thereby revisiting the intellectual and historically fallacious divide between cosmopolitan Sanskritic and vernacular local. The book offers a highly innovative contribution to the field of Tantric Studies and more generally South and Southeast Asian religions by breaking traditional disciplinary boundaries. Its variety of disciplinary approaches makes it attractive to

both the textual diachronic and ethnographic synchronic dimensions It will be of interest to specialist and non specialist academic readers including scholars and students of South Asian religions mainly Hinduism and Buddhism Tantric traditions and Southeast Asian religions as well as Asian and global folk religion shamanism and magic *Personal Experience and Materiality in Greek Religion* K.A. Rask,2023-04-14 Employing frameworks of lived religion and materiality this book provides the first full length study of personal religious experience in the Greek Archaic and Classical periods Rask analyzes archeological epigraphic and textual evidence to highlight the role of individuals as vital actors and makers of Greek religion A range of perspectives such as those of Archaic mariners and Late Classical weaving women show that religion infused the daily lives of ancient Greeks Chapters visit the many spaces where people engaged in religious activities from household kitchens to international emporia as well as shrines both large and small The book also interrogates devotional activities such as making votives and engaging in lifelong relationships with divinities arguing for the emotionally rich character of Greek lived religion Not only do these considerations demonstrate underexplored ways for reconstructing aspects of Greek religion but also allow us to rethink familiar subjects such as votive portraits and epiphany from new angles *Personal Experience and Materiality in Greek Religion* is of interest to students and scholars working on ancient Greek religion and archeology as well as anyone interested in daily life and lived experience in the ancient world

**Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond** István Keul,2012-01-27 The essays in this volume written by specialists working in the field of tantric studies attempt to trace processes of transformation and transfer that occurred in the history of tantra from around the seventh century and up to the present The volume gathers contributions on South Asia Tibet China Mongolia Japan North America and Western Europe by scholars from various academic disciplines who present ongoing research and encourage discussion on significant themes in the growing field of tantric studies In addition to the extensive geographical and temporal range the chapters of the volume cover a wide thematic area which includes modern Bengali tantric practitioners tantric ritual in medieval China the South Asian cults of the mother goddesses the way of Buddhism into Mongolia and countercultural echoes of contemporary tantric studies *Re-imagining South Asian Religions* Pashaura Singh,Michael Hawley,2012-12-07 Re imagining South Asian Religions is a collection of essays offering new ways of understanding aspects of Hindu Tibetan Buddhist Sikh Jain Theosophical and Indian Christian experiences

**Situating religion and medicine in Asia** Michael Stanley-Baker,2023-12-05 This edited volume presents the latest research on the intersection of religion and medicine in Asia It features chapters by internationally known scholars who bring to bear a range of methodological and geographic expertise on this topic The book s central question is to what extent religion and medicine have overlapped or interrelated in various Asian societies Collectively the contributions explore a number of related issues such as which societies separated out religious from medical concerns at which times and in what ways Where have medicine and religion converged and how has such knowledge been defined by scholars and cultural actors Are religion and medicine the best

terms by which scholars can grapple with knowledge about the sacred and the self destiny and disease

**The Path of Desire** Hugh B. Urban, 2024-03-27 A provocative study of contemporary Tantra as a dynamic living tradition Tantra one of the most important religious currents in South Asia is often misrepresented as little more than ritualized sex Through a mixture of ethnography and history Hugh B Urban reveals a dynamic living tradition behind the sensationalist stories Urban shows that Tantric desire goes beyond the erotic encompassing such quotidian experiences as childbearing and healing He traces these holistic desires through a series of unique practices institutional Tantra centered on gurus and esoteric rituals public Tantra marked by performance and festival folk Tantra focused on magic and personal well being and popular Tantra imagined in fiction film and digital media The result is a provocative new description of Hindu Tantra that challenges us to approach religion as something always entwined with politics and culture thoroughly entangled with ordinary needs and desires

*A Taste for Purity* Julia Hauser, 2023-12-05 In nineteenth century Europe and North America an organized vegetarian movement began warning of the health risks and ethical problems of meat eating Presenting a vegetarian diet as a cure for the social ills brought on by industrialization and urbanization this movement idealized South Asia as a model In colonial India where diets were far more varied than Western admirers realized new motives for avoiding meat also took hold Hindu nationalists claimed that vegetarianism would cleanse the body for anticolonial resistance and an increasingly militant cow protection movement mobilized against meat eaters particularly Muslims Unearthing the connections among these developments and many others Julia Hauser explores the global history of vegetarianism from the mid nineteenth century to the early Cold War She traces personal networks and exchanges of knowledge spanning Europe the United States and South Asia highlighting mutual influence as well as the disconnects of cross cultural encounters Hauser argues that vegetarianism in this period was motivated by expansive visions of moral physical and even racial purification Adherents were convinced that society could be changed by transforming the body of the individual Hauser demonstrates that vegetarians in India and the West shared notions of purity which drew some toward not only internationalism and anticolonialism but also racism nationalism and violence Finding preoccupations with race and masculinity as well as links to colonialism and eugenics she reveals the implication of vegetarian movements in exclusionary hierarchical projects Deeply researched and compellingly argued *A Taste for Purity* rewrites the history of vegetarianism on a global scale

**The Forbidden Body** Douglas E. Cowan, 2022-05-17 Throughout history the religious imagination has attempted to control nothing so much as our bodies what they are and what they mean what we do with them with whom and under what circumstances how they may be displayed or more commonly how they must be hidden Religious belief and mandate affect how our bodies are used in ritual practice as well as how we use them to identify and marginalize threatening religious Others This book examines how horror culture treats religious bodies that have stepped or been pushed out of their proper place Unlike most books on religion and horror This book explores the dark spaces where sex sexual representation and the sexual body come together with religious

belief and scary stories Because these intersections of sex horror and the religious imagination force us to question the nature of consensus reality supernatural horror especially as it concerns the body often shows us the religious imagination at work in real time It is important to note that the discussion in this book is not limited either to horror cinema or to popular fiction but considers a wide range of material including literary horror weird fiction graphic storytelling visual arts participative culture and aspects of real world religious fear It is less concerned with horror as a genre which is mainly a function of marketing and more with the horror mode a way of storytelling that finds expression across a number of genres a variety of media and even blurs the boundary between fiction and non fiction This expanded focus not only deepens the pool of potential examples but invites a much broader readership in for a swim     [Is This Yoga?](#) Anya Foxen,Christa Kuberry,2021-05-31 This book provides a rigorously researched critically comparative introduction to yoga Is This Yoga Concepts Histories and the Complexities of Contemporary Practice recognizes the importance of contemporary understandings of yoga and at the same time provides historical context and complexity to modern and pre modern definitions of yogic ideas and practices Approaching yoga as a vast web of concepts traditions social interests and embodied practices it raises questions of knowledge identity and power across time and space including the dynamics of East and West The text is divided into three main sections thematic concepts histories and topics in modern practice This accessible guide is essential reading for undergraduate students approaching the topic for the first time as well as yoga teachers teacher training programs casual and devoted practitioners and interested non practitioners     **Women and Asian Religions** Zayn R. Kassam,2017-06-22 Covering eclectic topics ranging from South Asian religion to motherhood to world dance to ethnomusicology this book focuses on contemporary selected experiences of women and how their lives interface with religion Religion has often been perceived as the source of constriction for women s roles in society This volume explores how modern women across Asia are mobilizing their faith traditions to address existential issues encountered in both the public and private realms relating to economics public participation politics and culture As such it is revealed that religion can be a powerful force for social change and ameliorating women s lives despite use of religious doctrine in the past to limit women Editor Zayn R Kassam PhD and the contributors cover not only the commonly considered Asian traditions of Hinduism Islam and Buddhism but also Christianity Judaism Bahai and indigenous traditions The book reveals that the challenges and opportunities Asian women face arise both from within and outside whether in terms of developments within their countries or in relation to international political and economic regimes The chapters explore how the issues Asian women face have as much to do with cultural and religious codes as they do with politics economics education and the law consider the varying ways in which family and motherhood are affected by the state s construction of the gendered citizen by social constructs of motherhood and by policies regarding women and children s access to health care and identify the roles played by religion and spirituality in these circumstances     *Thomas Merton in California* David M. Odorisio,2024-02-03



Previously unpublished material from world renowned Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton featuring the final conference talks given in the United States before his untimely death In May and October of 1968 Thomas Merton offered two extended conferences at Our Lady of the Redwoods Abbey a Cistercian women s community in Northern California Comprising over twenty six hours of previously unpublished material Thomas Merton in California covers a variety of topics including ecology and consciousness yoga and Hinduism Native American ritual and rites of passage Sufi spirituality and inter religious dialogue along with extended discussions on prayer and the contemplative life The material presented in these talks reveals Merton s wide ranging intellectual and spiritual pursuits in the final year of his life and fills a long standing lacuna around Merton s visits to Redwoods Monastery forming a necessary bridge to the Asian journey that was to come Practical and applicable as well as searching and inspired Thomas Merton in California is essential for Merton readers and scholars and all those interested in deepening their spiritual lives

**Ritual Soundings** Sarah Weiss,2019-03-16 The women of communities in Hindu India and Christian Orthodox Finland alike offer lamentations and mockery during wedding rituals Catholic women of southern Italy perform tarantella on pilgrimages while Muslim Berger girls recite poetry at Moroccan weddings Around the world women actively claim agency through performance during such ritual events These moments though brief allow them a rare freedom to move beyond culturally determined boundaries In *Ritual Soundings* Sarah Weiss reads deeply into and across the ethnographic details of multiple studies while offering a robust framework for studying music and world religion Her meta ethnography reveals surprising patterns of similarity between unrelated cultures Deftly blending ethnomusicology the study of gender in religion and sacred music studies she invites ethnomusicologists back into comparative work offering them encouragement to think across disciplinary boundaries As Weiss delves into a number of less studied rituals she offers a forceful narrative of how women assert agency within institutional religious structures while remaining faithful to the local cultural practices the rituals represent

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