

### September 23

Dr. Michael Carnahan

Senior Adviser to the Finance Minister, Government of Afghanistan

***"Winning both the war on terror and the war on drugs in Afghanistan"***

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### September 30

[Brian Spooner](#), Professor of Anthropology

Museum Curator for Near Eastern Ethnology

University of Pennsylvania

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### October 7

[Isabelle Clark-Deces](#), Associate Professor of Anthropology

Princeton University

***"Looking For "Culture" in all the Wrong Places: a return to Fieldnotes a Decade Later"***

Based on her documentation of the Tamil post-funeral ceremony in the early 1990s, Isabelle Clark-Deces speaks about the difficulties of searching for anthropological categories of meaning

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### October 13

Shahid Amin, Professor of History, University of Delhi

***'Domesticating the Turkish Conquest of North India: a Warrior saint and the Women of the Gangetic Plain'***

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### October 14

[Kathleen M. Erndl](#), Associate Professor

Department of Religion, Florida State University

***"The Play of the Mother: Possession and Power in Hindu Women's Goddess Rituals"***

In the Kangra Valley area of Himachal Pradesh, as in many other regions of India, it is not uncommon for women to become possessed by a goddess, to speak with her voice, and to act as healers and mediums in their communities. Divine possession as a form of religious expression is interconnected with such practices as pilgrimage to temples, puja (image worship), recitation of sacred texts, fasting, and meditation that comprise the bhakti (devotion) and tantra (esotericism) oriented religious complex of Saktism or Goddess worship in the region.

Some of the questions considered will be: To what extent do women's ritual activities, especially those connected with Goddess possession, articulate a discourse that reproduces, legitimates, and validates the social order (i.e. the elite Brahminical ideology of women's subordination), and to what extent do they articulate a discourse that challenges, alters, and transforms the social order? To what extent do these rituals reflect women's roles in the domestic sphere, and to what extent do they transgress these boundaries? How does Goddess possession transform women's identities and socio-religious roles? In what sense are goddess-possessed women and their devotees powerful?

I begin with the premise that the possession experience is continuous with ordinary lived experience, so that women's experience in a possession ritual both influences and is influenced by their everyday lives. Moreover, I argue against the so-called deprivation theory, proposed by anthropologist I.M. Lewis and other scholars, which holds that women and other low status people turn to possession and other ecstatic religious expressions in order to compensate for their relative lack of power in secular life. Besides simply noting the fact that many high status women, as well as men, are involved in ecstatic religious practices in the Hindu context, I argue that religious or spiritual power is valid in its own right, not inferior to or

derivative of economic or social power and that religious and secular power are not completely separable and often reinforce each other

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**October 18**

[David Ludden](#), Professor of History  
University of Pennsylvania

***"Hindutva after the 2004 Lok Sabha Elections"***

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**October 28**

Alf Hildebeitel, Professor of Religion  
[George Washington University](#)

***"The Importance of Friendship in the Mahabharata."***

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**November 4**

[Ann Grodzins Gold](#), Professor  
Department of Religion and Department of Anthropology  
Syracuse University

***"Deep beauty: Elusive females in goddess shrine origin tales"***

In 2003, I recorded origin tales and miracle tales at about twenty regional Rajasthani shrines. These vary delightfully, but one of the more common motifs is a female who evades the touch or gaze of a pursuing male by sinking into rocks, where her shrine is later established and her power emerges. The actual circumstances of pursuit and descent may differ enormously. Exploring permutations of this sequence, I focus on one Rajasthani goddess, Sundar Mata ("Beautiful Mother") whose story I tracked from several established, offshoot shrines back to her original vanishing place. Along the way slight variations in each rendition of the story shift its meanings to deliver positioned sociological and theological commentaries. What might vernacular mythologies teach us about gender, power, locality and hierophany?

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**November 11**

[James Fitzgerald](#), Professor and Associate Head,  
Department of Religious Studies  
University of Tennessee

***"The Unknown Yudhistira of the Mahabharata"***

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**December 2**

Philip Lutgendorf  
Associate Professor, and Co-Chair, South Asian Studies Program, University of Iowa

***"Something Fishy About Hanuman: How Sexuality Still Sometimes Swims around the Ramayana's Reservoir of Brahmacharya"***

Among the Ramayana's second-tier characters, Hanuman has come to enjoy a unique status as the recipient of popular worship throughout much of India. Central to his religious role as an embodiment and facilitator of "power and devotion" (sakti and bhakti) is his "unbroken celibacy"(akhand brahmacharya), which is frequently invoked in texts in his praise, visually coded in the "tightly-bound" loincloth visible on his images (sometimes labelled an "adamantine chastity-belt" or vajra kaupin), and articulated in the ideology of his numerous pahalvan (wrestler) and sadhu devotees (among others). Such expressions and celebrations of chastity form part of the wider South Asian discourse on self-control and especially on male strength through semen-retention, of which Hanuman is considered a preceptor and exemplar. Yet the abundant folklore which also celebrates the monkey hero, both in South and Southeast Asia, reveals

lingering concerns about the misogyny that often comfortably coexists with patriarchal brahmacarya ideology. Such concern particularly resurfaces in a piscine female who retains a shadowy existence in numerous legends as an unacknowledged "wife" of Hanuman and as the mother of his acknowledged "son." This paper will argue that this vestigial acknowledgment of the simian and human norm and of the dominant householder lifestyle suggests not merely the curious persistence of paradoxical motifs in Hindu mythology, but a lingering counter-mythology of the divine monkey that problematizes ascetic and misogynist paradigms. This lecture is open to the public.