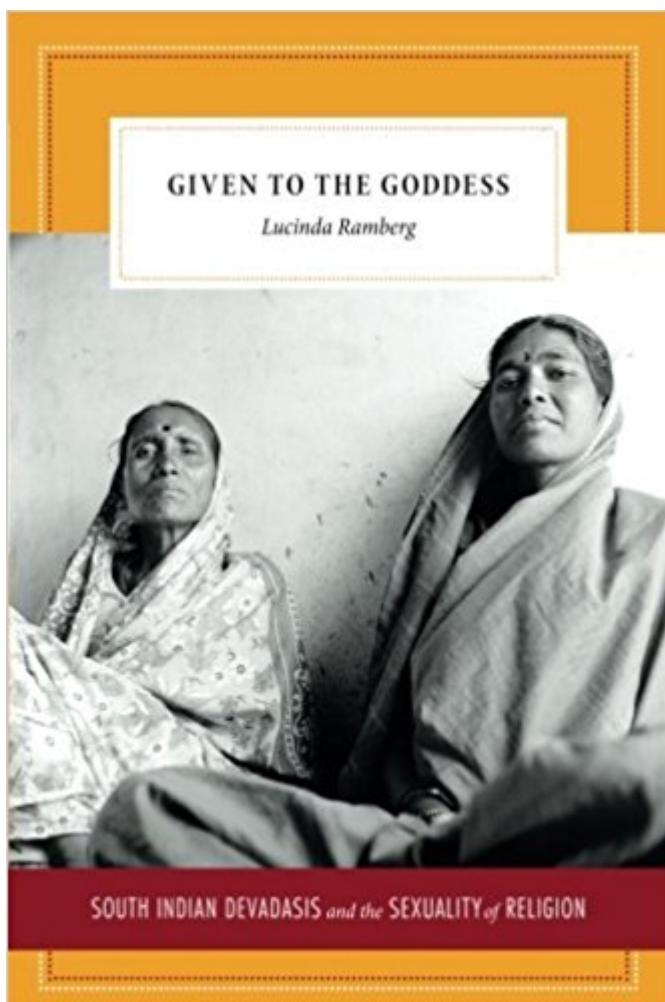


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Given To The Goddess: South Indian Devadasis And The Sexuality Of Religion



Synopsis

Who and what are marriage and sex for? Whose practices and which ways of talking to god can count as religion? Lucinda Ramberg considers these questions based upon two years of ethnographic research on an ongoing South Indian practice of dedication in which girls, and sometimes boys, are married to a goddess. Called devadasis, or jogatis, those dedicated become female and male women who conduct the rites of the goddess outside the walls of her main temple and transact in sex outside the bounds of conjugal matrimony. Marriage to the goddess, as well as the rites that the dedication ceremony authorizes jogatis to perform, have long been seen as illegitimate and criminalized. Kinship with the goddess is productive for the families who dedicate their children, Ramberg argues, and yet it cannot conform to modern conceptions of gender, family, or religion. This nonconformity, she suggests, speaks to the limitations of modern categories, as well as to the possibilities of relations—between and among humans and deities—that exceed such categories.

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Customer Reviews

"Lucinda Ramberg has written a book that charts new conceptual terrain in the anthropology of South Asia. Given to the Goddess indicts both liberal reformism and secular progressivism for their investment in an all too-easy politics of gender that occludes the power (and experience) of stigmatized sexuality. Instead, Ramberg shows how practices coded as anachronistic, or coerced, constitute the conditions of possibility for capacious, non-individuated accounts of sexed agency.

This is an exquisite ethnography of the queer embodiments and ritual imaginaries by which women come to be "given to the goddess." (Anupama Rao, author of *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*) "Lucinda Ramberg's powerful combination of ethnographic observation and theoretical reflection connects the study of a particular social group in South India (devadasis or jogatis) with general issues in anthropology and feminist and queer studies. Given to the Goddess will prove relevant to those, such as myself, who know very little about India but who are concerned with related issues in different contexts." (Afric Fassin, Université Paris-8) "The ethnographic data that Lucinda Ramberg obtained while living with the devadasis is unique. The conversations she relates bring much-needed nuance to representations of these women. Ramberg insists that anthropologists need to take the religious lives of the devadasis seriously. For scholars of South Asia, her most interesting contribution is likely her masterful rethinking of theoretical models of kinship in India." (Joyce Flueckiger, author of *When the World Becomes Female: Guises of a South Indian Goddess*) "A compassionate and rigorous account of the much reviled and celebrated figure of the devadasi, Lucinda Ramberg's book analyzes the central role women's sexuality continues to play in religious and secular political orders. Rather than diagnose this as a moral problem, the author forces us to rethink how the biopolitical state has transformed both religion and sexuality in modern India." (Saba Mahmood, author of *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*) "This excellent book makes a significant contribution to religion and kinship, gender, sexuality, and South Asian studies." Highly recommended. (D. A. Chekki Choice) "This is a beautifully written and theoretically engaged ethnography about a community whose past has been fraught and whose future lies in the balance. It would be appropriate reading for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses and makes an important contribution to the anthropology of gender, sexuality, kinship, religion, and modernity in India." (Cecilia Van Hollen *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 2015-05-20) "We must dwell with, as Given to the Goddess gracefully does, the everyday experiences of devotion, exchange, and one's social relationship to another—human, nonhuman, or even goddess—that make us, quite simply, kin." (Durba Mitra *GLQ* 2016-10-03) "Ramberg's work exemplifies an extraordinary synthesis of animated empiricism and theoretical rigor. It is heartening to mark the arrival of this very important work that signals a critical departure in several ways." (Priyadarshini Vijaisri *Anthropos* 2016-12-20)

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