



Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India

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This book offers a variety of scholarly studies in the idea, situation, and definition-including the self-definition-of women in India, from the earliest historical period up to the present day. Both in its range of topics and depth of research, this volume creates a sustained focus that is not presently available in the literature of women in India.

Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India comprises 25 essays contributed by a diverse mix of Indian, Canadian, American, and British women scholars, most of whom have lived in South Asia either for all of their lives or for extended periods. Arranged chronologically, these groundbreaking essays set aside the myths and prejudices that often clutter discussions about women in India. Part I, which is dedicated to the ancient period, defines women's positions as depicted in the sacred law, considers subordinated women in major Hindu epics, describes women's roles in ritual and their understanding of religion, and examines the patriarchal organization of women's lives in Buddhism. Part II begins with an essay on Tantra, a major force in medieval India that influenced both Hinduism and Buddhism and placed women at the center of its sacred rites. Other essays in Part II look at the life and legends of a medieval woman saint poet, the portrayal of a Hindu goddess in medieval Bengal, and the role of women from Mughal harems in decision making. Part III describes the colonial perception of Indian women in the late nineteenth century and shows how women's self-perceptions have been expressed through their art and writing as well as through their political action in the twentieth century.

Providing informed and balanced analysis of extensive primary source material, this book will be an essential resource for students of women's lives in India.

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