



Absent Mother God of the West: A Kali Lover's Journey into Christianity and Judaism

By Neela Bhattacharya Saxena

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This book about the missing Divine Feminine in Christianity and Judaism chronicles a personal as well as an academic quest of an Indian woman who grew up with Kali and myriad other goddesses. It is born out of a women's studies course created and taught by the author called The Goddess in World Religions. The book examines how the Divine Feminine was erased from the western consciousness and how it led to an exclusive spiritually patriarchal monotheism with serious consequences for both women's and men's psychological and spiritual identity. While colonial, proselytizing and patriarchal ways have denied the divinity inherent in the female of the species, a recent upsurge of body-centric practices like Yoga and innumerable books about old and new goddesses reveal a deep seated mother hunger in the western consciousness. Written from a practicing Hindu/Buddhist perspective, this book looks at the curious phenomenon called the Black Madonna that appears in Europe and also examines mystical figures like Shekhinah in Jewish mysticism. People interested in symbols of the goddess, feminist theologians, and scholars interested in the absence of goddesses in monotheisms may find this book's perspective and insights provocative.

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Editorial Review

Review

While this book joins an established tradition of feminist theological critique, and efforts at reclaiming suppressed aspects of the feminine in Judeo-Christian androcentric dualist thought, Saxena's unique perspective as a Hindu/Buddhist Kali-loving Indian woman, to use her own words, and her grounding in an overtly gynocentric tradition, make for a valuable contribution to this field. (*Reading Religion*)

[*Absent Mother God of the West*] became a window into her scholarship and spiritual practice that fueled my desire to read the works she references and visit the places she does.... [T]he book takes one on a complex journey between faiths and philosophies, physical places and the Divine Feminine in her multitudinous forms. (*Patheos*)

This book is the work of a deeply self-aware Bengali Vajrayani woman devotee of Kali, Neela Saxena. In a voice that is warm and compassionate but with adamantine clarity, it offers us a stunningly enlightening and moving reversal of the gaze on western modernity and its religious roots, discovering there an underground and suppressed presence of the Mother God. It is saturated with sophisticated and complex readings of a wide gamut of feminist and other writings. *Absent Mother God of the West* is both profound and a delightful read, exemplifying in its style the non-duality of samsara and nirvana, of transcendence and immanence. It effortlessly blends personal experience, philosophy, science, and popular culture, delivering to the reader a hope-filled alternative to the androcentrism and colonizing ethos of western modernity, offering the possibility to transform its 'dueling dualisms' into what Saxena calls 'dancing dualities.' (Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, Smith College, author of *Subversive Spiritualities: How Rituals Enact the World*)

This work is a bold and stimulating study on the contested history of the divine feminine in the west. In her journey across continents, Saxena has endeavored to restore one of the most fascinating figures of the feminine archetype in her several incarnations and cultural contexts, whether as the marginalized figure of the Virgin Mary in Christianity, or the mysterious and sublime persona of Shekhinah in Judaism, or the all-pervasive 'global Mother Kali' in Hinduism. The book makes a very significant contribution to gender studies and religious history across civilizations, and it will be an eye opener to the modern scholars and seekers of goddess spirituality. (Madhu Khanna, Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilizations, Jamia Millia Islamia)

In this impressively wide-ranging volume, Neela Saxena takes her readers on a journey across cultures to encounter the figure of the Divine Mother. This journey is intensely personal, while at the same time grounded in historical knowledge that is characterized by both depth and breadth. Building on her earlier work on the Hindu Goddess Kali, Saxena deftly handles materials from as far afield as Japan and ancient Greece to create a portrait of a Mother Goddess honored in a wide array of forms and manifestations around the world. Many have argued that our alienation from this Divine Mother in the West has been at the root of an array of cultural maladies on many levels, from the individual to the global. Saxena, however, concludes on a note of hope, and shows us that the absent Mother God of the West is perhaps not so absent after all. (Jeffery D. Long, Elizabethtown College, author of *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism, Jainism: An Introduction, and The Historical Dictionary of Hinduism*)

About the Author

Dr. Neela Bhattacharya Saxena is professor of English and women's studies at Nassau Community College.

You can visit her website at <http://neelabhattacharyasaxena.com/>.

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