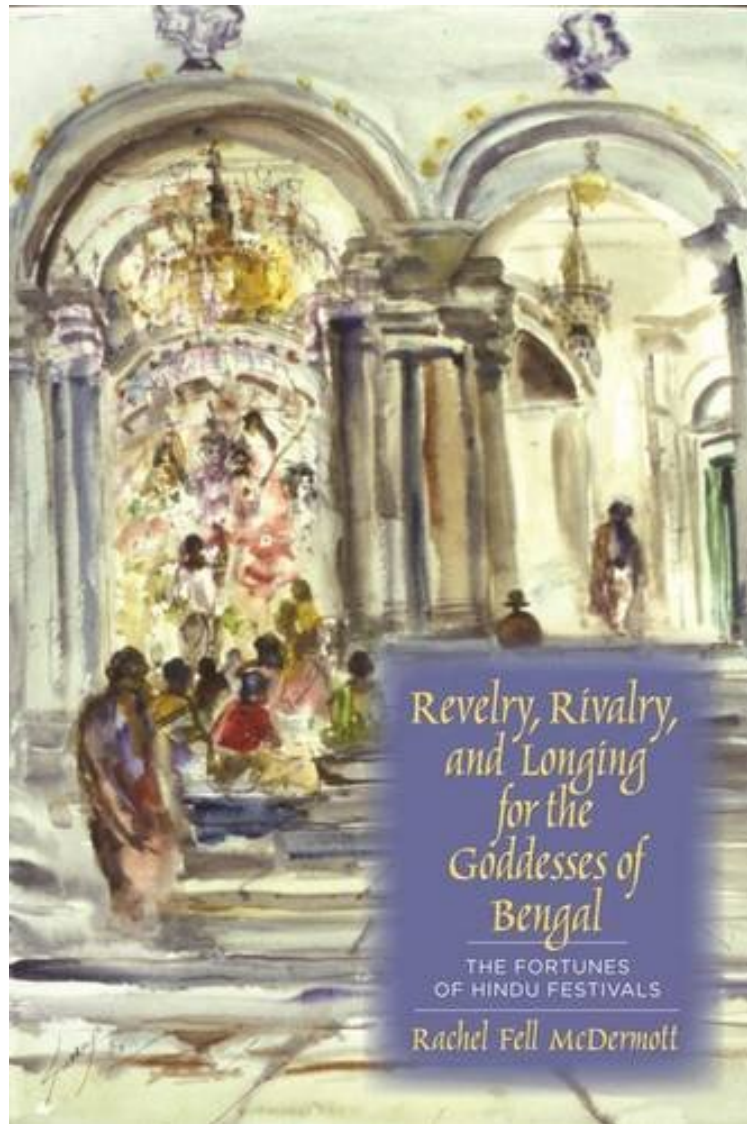


(Free) Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals

Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals

Rachel Fell McDermott

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Rachel Fell McDermott : Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals:

Annually during the months of autumn, Bengal hosts three interlinked festivals to honor its most important goddesses: Durga, Kali, and Jagaddhatri. While each of these deities possesses a distinct iconography, myth, and character, they are all martial. Durga, Kali, and Jagaddhatri often demand blood sacrifice as part of their worship and offer material and spiritual benefits to their votaries. Richly represented in straw, clay, paint, and decoration, they are similarly displayed in elaborately festooned temples, thronged by thousands of admirers. The first book to recount the history of these festivals and their revelry, rivalry, and nostalgic power, this volume marks an unprecedented achievement in the mapping of a major public event. Rachel Fell McDermott describes the festivals' origins and growth under British rule. She identifies their iconographic conventions and carnivalesque qualities and their relationship to the fierce, Tantric sides of ritual practice. McDermott confronts controversies over the tradition of blood sacrifice and the status-seekers who compete for symbolic capital. Expanding her narrative, she takes readers beyond Bengal's borders to trace the transformation of the goddesses and their festivals across the world. McDermott's work underscores the role of holidays in cultural memory, specifically the Bengali evocation of an ideal, culturally rich past. Under the thrall of the goddess, the social, political, economic, and religious identity of Bengalis takes shape.

This is a book of superior, indeed pristine scholarship that significantly advances our knowledge on a number of fronts, historical and theoretical. What is so artful about this particular work is the way it handles multiple, sometimes abstract theoretical issues (iconography, ritual theory, colonial history, mythology, postcolonial theory, sacrifice, censorship, poster art, prostitution, environmentalism, and diaspora and immigration studies) through very concrete historical details and, most important, a single, overarching historical narrative spanning some three to four centuries. This is a truly comprehensive book, and it will become the definitive study of the subject. (Jeffrey J. Kripal, Rice University, author of *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*) McDermott's pioneering study is a scholarly achievement that is impressive, enlightening and enjoyable to read. (Chris J. Fuller Pacific Affairs) McDermott's *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing* is a wonderful book that thoroughly presents the development of three of the most important festivals in Bengal. (Journal of Hindu Studies) About the Author Rachel Fell McDermott is professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures at Barnard College. Her books include *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kali and Uma from Bengal* and *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West*.