



Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal

June McDaniel

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In *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls*, June McDaniel provides an exhaustive, accessibly written overview of Bengali goddess worship or Shakti. McDaniel identifies three major forms of goddess worship, and examines each through its myths, folklore, songs, rituals, sacred texts, and practitioners. She traces these strands through Bengali culture and explores how they are interwoven with each other as well as with other forms of Hinduism and other forms of religion. McDaniel also discusses how Shakti practices have been reinterpreted in the West, where goddess worship has gained the values of sexual freedom and psychological healing, but lost its emphases on devotion and asceticism. She takes the reader inside the lives of practicing Shaktas, including religious professionals, hymn singers, philosophers, visionaries, gurus, and even a businessman, and offers vivid descriptions of their rituals, practices, and daily lives. Drawing on years of fieldwork and extensive research, McDaniel paints a rich, expansive portrait of this fascinating religious tradition.

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