



The Open
University

A103_7 Studying religion

Looking for Hinduism in Calcutta

Faculty of Arts

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

A103: An Introduction to the Humanities
TV15: Looking for Hinduism in Calcutta

Programme Number: 1/FOUA474D
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Duration: 29'02"
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Producer: G D Jayalakshmi
OU Academic Consultant: Gwilym Beckerlegge
Production Assistants: Penny Luker-Brown, Vivien Broome

Participants: G D Jayalakshmi (Commentary)
Supradipta Dhar
Dr Dhar
L. K. Jha
B. Panda
Brij Moham Kumar Puri
Keshab Chandra Sarkar

A103 Generic Title Sequence:
(Piano Music under): opens with composite wood/hand playing violin, mix thru to composite coin/hand with brush, mix to ammonite fossil - mix to composite bowl/fruit/hand with paint brush, mix to hand with feather mix to composite book/hand with feather, mix to 2 faces and title `An Introduction to Humanities, lose faces and end with just caption cut to:

WS: Ext, Day: Calcutta Rooftops

Programme Title Graphic : Looking for Hinduism in Calcutta

GVs: Ext, day: Calcutta, Hooghly River and boats

GVs: Ext, day: Jetty, people waiting, views from Boat

GVs: Ext, day: people in street, cart

GVs: Ext, day: people living/sitting on street

GVs: Top shot Calcutta pan R

GVs: Ext, day: street stalls selling fruit, images of gods etc

Generic Title
 Music: Dur:
 23"



G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

This is Calcutta, by Indian standards, it's not an old city. Calcutta was established a little over four hundred years ago by the British. It was thought of as the foremost city of the empire, and has always been a cosmopolitan place. For many people outside India, the very name Calcutta conjures up images of poverty. There's no denying there is poverty, but those who visit it may also be surprised, by its vigour and liveliness.

Most people who live here, like people everywhere in India follow the ancient traditions and practices, we now think of as religion called Hinduism.

But labelling Hinduism a religion will mislead us if we then expect it to be a tidy system of clearly defined beliefs and practices.

WS: Building lift up and right to interior temple, people praying.

WS: Banana tree being carried to river

MWS: Indian dancer (Supradipta)

MS: L. K. Jha praying

MS: Mr Dhar and family praying

MS: Women praying

GVs, Ext, night: moon and sky tilt down to GVs of Durga Festival. Boats on the river, crowds, Images of Goddess Durga being thrown in to the river.

GVs: Images of Goddess Durga being thrown into river.

So where in Calcutta should we go to find religion? The answer is almost anywhere

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

And what should we look for? Almost anything. The most visible aspects of Hinduism in Calcutta are daily worship and annual festivals. Even these don't fall into any one pattern.

The most important event in Calcutta's calendar is the festival of Durga, it takes place in October and is a central event in the lives of many Calcuttans. The festival is dedicated to the goddess Durga The mother goddess who's particularly revered in Calcutta.

The public celebration of this festival, the Durga puja, started in the eighteenth century and during India's fight for independence it was used with pride. The goddess became a symbol of India the motherland. Nowadays the Durga puja period is a national holiday.

The festival lasts for nine days, and on the tenth day along with her four children, the goddess Durga is immersed in the Hooghly, the river which runs through the city.

Actuality:
Indian Music played in temple when shooting.

Dur: 49"

Actuality:
traditional Indian drumming at Durga Festival. Unknown.
Dur: 1'06"

MCU: Supradipta Dhar
Graphic: L3: Supradipta Dhar,
Student

GVs: Int, day, temple, people
worshipping Goddess Durga.

GVs: Ext, day: Hooghly River

GVs, Ext, day: men washing in
Hooghly river

Gvs, Ext, day, men praying at street
shrine.

Gvs: Mr L. K. Jha praying at street
shrine.

SUPRADIPTA DHAR:

It is believed that goddess Durga with her children comes to her parent's house, er and after ten days, she goes back to her in-law's place. So during these ten days, we worship her here on earth.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

The Hooghly is a tributary of Ganga, Ganges to the British, the holy river of the Hindus. The river is sacred, and plays an important part in Hindu ritual.

Daily worship or puja, often begins by the riverside. Many of those who come here are migrants from neighbouring states. They have poorly paid jobs, often as porters in the railway station across the river, or in the nearby flower market. As they bathe in the sacred river, they offer prayers to the sun god Surya.

Hinduism is not a centralized religion, it's customs vary enormously throughout India. Most people fall into a pattern based on tradition and learnt from childhood, but they're free to add to it or change it with very few restrictions.

L. K. JHA (HINDI SYNC):

English Subtitles:

main cat

Actuality:
traditional
Indian
drumming at
Durga Festival
Dur: 11"

Subtitles in vision with English translation:

MCU: Mr L. K. Jha

Graphic: L. K. Jha, Electrician

GVs: Ext, day Mr Jha praying at Tree shrine.

We clap because Lord Shiva is lost in meditation.

He needs sound to wake Him up
So we ring bells and call out loudly to Him

Every morning I come here after I bathe
And during the day, whenever I get time
I think of God
I offer water in His name.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Living Hinduism retains many of its ancient customs. Like the river, other elements of nature: sun, water, earth stones, trees, they're all treated as worthy of worship. Little shrines may be created under trees which are considered sacred.

GVs: Day, ext, dusty and hazy street, Banana Tree procession with drummers to the river.

Nature plays its part in the Durga festival too. One of the first events is the bathing of a young banana tree. People from all over the city bring the plants to the Hooghly.

Actuality:
Banana tree procession traditional Indian drummers unknown.
Dur: 34"

GVs: Banana trees being bathed in river

The banana tree is bathed, decorated, and made human by being dressed in a sari as part of the ritual. She becomes a symbolic bride. She is then taken to wed Ganesha, the god of good fortune shown with an elephant's head. He is the son of Durga.

GVs: Banana trees being wrapped in Saris

CU: Image of Ganesha (pink elephant)

GVs: Supradipta Dhar dancing in Temple.

Durga puja is also celebrated in other ways. High art is an aspect of the Hindu religion.

Music:
Traditional Indian dance music. Dur: 1'59"

GVs: Image of goddess Durga

This dance tells the central story of Durga puja in a stylized form. Different gods give Durga their best gifts strength, wisdom, cunning, weapons and so on, so she can kill a demon Mahishasura, thereby destroying evil, and restoring the world.

GVs: Supradipta dancing in temple

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Supradipta is a student of business administration, but her dancing is much more than a hobby.

SUPRADIPTA DHAR:

I feel that classical dance is a form of religious activity. When I dance it depends where I'm performing. If I'm performing on stage, there I'm dancing for the audience, but when I'm practising myself, then I think yes I'm dancing for the lord.

GVs: Int, day: potters' workshop in Kumar Tuli. Potters making images of gods for festival.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

For some people, the festival of Durga is more than an annual celebration, they earn their living by it all year round. This man is actually a potter, but the potters in the district of Kumar Tuli in north Calcutta, form a special caste who spend most of their time making images or murtis, of gods.

GVs: Storehouse containing rows of images of various Indian gods.

The worship of the images plays a central role in Hinduism. The clay for these images is taken from the Hooghly, in fact from the Nimtala Ghat, where they are finally immersed.

Actuality:
Music in
pandal/temple.
Traditional
Indian
unknown.
Dur: 51"

The relationship between the potters and the goddess is one of deep affection, not to mention that the festival provides them with their livelihood.

GVs: Ext, day, Street Temple (Pandals), people on foot and in car going by.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Once the images are complete, they're installed in marquees or pandals set up on the roadside, allowing people to glimpse their beloved goddess, as they pass through.

GVs: Ext, day, Calcutta Streets and buildings.

Durga is worshipped by almost any Hindu who lives in Calcutta, but Hindu migrants from other parts of India bring their own personal gods for their every day worship.

Gvs, Int, day in shelter. B Panda praying to Jagannath at Shrine. C/As of Images of Jagannath.

In this ornate shelter, migrants from the neighbouring state of Orissa, live and pray to Jagannath. Jagannath is the most popular god in Orissa, just as Durga is in Bengal.

B. PANDA (HINDI SYNC)**English Subtitles**

Subtitles in vision with English translation

My clothes, my few personal belongings and my gods.

My Gods are sitting there.

Jagannath is my personal God

Its about 20 or 30 years since I brought Jagannath here.

Its 29 years since I myself came here

I go back to Orissa once or twice a year

There, I have everybody, my family, a bit of land and a few cows.

My brother, my son, my brother's wife, my younger brother are all there.

But I've come here to make some money and earn a living.

MCU: B Panda
Graphic: B. Panda, Priest

GVs: B Panda praying to Jagannath

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Gvs, Int, day: Shelter occupied by several Brahmans

In fact, it's through worship that he earns a living.

These people are Brahmans - the highest caste among Hindus. The Brahmans are the only caste entitled to perform rituals, they can be seen in temples, in the marquees set up for Durga Puja, and even in ordinary houses on special occasions.

CUs: Int, day, discarded religious images

GVs: Int, day, Brahams in shelter

In return for their services, they're normally given food, clothes and money. But even for them, the casual treatment of religious images is not sacrilegious. When an image has served its purpose, it can be discarded. These Orissa Brahmins live here in eight hour shifts, with father and son sharing the same space. They may be the highest caste in the religious hierarchy, but in material terms they're poor. Some do have paid employment of the most humble kind, but most of their living still comes from religious duties. .

GVs, Int, day, B Panda worshipping Gods in shop.

They go out to shops and commercial establishments, where each shopkeeper has a few gods who must be worshipped before business starts for the day. It's the Brahmin who conducts this worship, nowadays normally for a fixed monthly fee.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

So most Hindus, not being Brahmins, have to call upon the priestly caste from time to time, to this extent, at least, Hinduism is an organized religion.

GVs, Int, day, Dr Dhar worshipping at shrine/puja room in his house.

But ordinary daily worship at home is something that people do for themselves, whatever their caste or occupation. Doctor Dhar, a heart specialist, is not a Brahmin.

MCU: Dr Dhar
Graphic: Dr Dhar, Heart Specialist.

GVs: Dr Dhar praying at shrine/puja room.

MCU: Dr Dhar

Still:
CU: Image of Goddess from Dr Dhar's Puja Room. Traditional Indian drawing, source and artist unknown
Dur: 16"

GVs: Int, day: Supradipta praying in Puja Room.

Still:
CU: Different Image of Goddess from Dr Dhar's Puja Room. Traditional India drawing, source and artist unknown
Dur: 8"

MCU: Supradipta Dhar

DR DHAR

I have my own duty I worship them every day. So in that, the practice that I do have today, this has also evolved very naturally over these years. Not that what I practice today I was practising three years, four years back not at all. I cannot explain it in so many words, but er there has been elemental change, er over these years, that I have felt in myself, er since I have started this puja or that. But then er, you see if you ask me to express it in so many precise words it would be difficult for me, very difficult for me.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Even within the same family, worship or puja takes different forms and has different meanings for each member.

Dance is not the only way that Supradipta, Doctor Dhar's daughter worships.

SUPRADIPTA DHAR:

Every day after taking bath, I go into our puja room, where we keep all our deities and I try to concentrate on what I had done last few days, what I should have done and what I had done, and what I should do with the day and erm, to make it, to make the best er of it, both for myself and everybody around me.

GVs: Supradipta praying in Puja room, lighting incense sticks.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

At the end, Supradipta lights incense sticks. Normally, Hindus don't blow any light out with their breath, not even match sticks, because light is divine.

GVs: Kali praying in Puja Room, pouring out water, cleaning floor.

For Kali Doctor Dhar's wife, worship involves service to her family.

Housework is part of worship. As a traditional wife and mother, she cooks cleans and keeps house, all be it with the help of a few servants. Here she's pouring out holy water or Ganga Jal from the Hooghly river, which Doctor Dhar uses in his daily ritual.

GVs: Kali wrapping sari around shoulder and bowing to gods

Cleaning the puja Ghar (room), is worship for her. She has to do the cleaning herself, for servants normally belong to a lower caste, and don't enter this room. Before she leaves, she drapes her sari around her shoulder, as a mark of respect as she bows to the gods

Gvs, Int, day, Mr Puri performing Durga festival rituals.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

But there are occasions when all the people in the house including the servants pray together. The oldest member of the household Mr Puri, performs the family rituals associated with Durga puja, the ten day festival.

This worship is performed in a more public space, allowing room for all to participate. As part of the celebrations, everyone is presented with new clothes. Durga is just one of Mr Puri's deities.

MR PURI:

Some of the gods, I have ever taken in my prayers, from the childhood, but some of the gods I adopted later on also.

MCU: Mr Puri
Graphic: Brij Moham Kumar Puri,
Company Director

Actually all these gods and goddesses, are the ever representation of the same almighty power or god, which we call Brahman, and according to their qualities or functions, we give them different names.

I choose these gods, for a purpose... for my prayer on a particular day, depending on my mood, when I'm in a particular mood, I involve that god or goddess, that gives me, more solace and more peace, that's why I do not stick to only one god or goddess.

GVs, Ext, day: Temple, people waiting at doorway.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Apart from street shrines, the temple known as Mandir, is the normal space for public worship. Although most Hindus do go to temples, there's no compulsion to do so. Indeed you could be a Hindu without ever going to a temple. This complex in south Calcutta is dedicated to goddess Kali. Like most temples it has a thriving market just outside. Traditionally cities in India have grown around temples, because the market place has been an important part of the complex. Hinduism has never had rigidly separate categories of the religious and the secular.

GVs, Ext, day: Temple complex and market

Gvs, Ext, day: topshots of Kalighat

This area is Kalighat known for its love of Kali. The worship of Kali pre-dates the founding of Calcutta by the British. Some stories even claim that Calcutta got its name from Kali. Indeed Kali is worshipped throughout the city, and is regarded as another form of Durga

Actuality:
Traditional Indian music from temple. Unknown. Dur: 10"

GVs, Ext, night: Dakshineswar temple.


GVs, Int, night, temple, priest offering prayers to deity, people praying

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

At the other end of Calcutta, is Dakshineswar, another famous temple dedicated to Kali. Hinduism generally is not an organized religion, it leaves people free to worship as and when they please, but temple life is more structured. Communities come together to build and run them. Certain times of the day are considered particularly sacred and auspicious. At these times, the official priest, again belonging to the Brahman cast, has to make ritual offerings to the deity. The temple is the earthly home of gods and goddesses. They are treated as if they were honoured guests.

Here, Kali is bathed, dressed and fed, as if she were a human being. She is offered water, cloth, flowers and a fan to cool her in the hot weather.

Actuality:
cymbals and drums in Temple.
Dur: 1'52"



music (cont)

G D JAYALAKSHMI:

Kali is Durga in another terrifying guise. She is the force of destruction necessary before any creation occurs. For all her ferocity, she is still the mother goddess, treated by worshippers as part of their family. She wears red bangles, a sign of being married in Bengal, and she has a set of keys tied to her sari, typical of many married Bengali women, who wear their keys as a mark of their status, revealing that they run large households, with kind firmness.

GVs, Int, Krishna and Radha Shrines.

It's not only Kali who's worshipped here. Krishna the god of love, and his consort Radha, are also worshipped. Several temples dedicated to Shiva also form part of the same large complex.

GVs: Ext, day, Shiva Temple complex.

Dakshineswar had a famous priest RamaKrishna. He was a nineteenth century Hindu holy man, particularly revered for his piety. RamaKrishna himself is now worshipped, and across the river is this temple at Belur Matt, dedicated to him.

WS: Ext, day, Belur Matt temple.

GVs, Int, day, Belur Matt temple,
image of Ramakrishna, people
praying

MS: Keshab Chandra Sarkar
Graphic: Keshab Chandra Sarkar,
Information Officer

GVs: Int, day, Belur Matt temple,
people praying

KESHAB CHANDRA SARKAR:

He is considered to be an incarnation of
god, so it is he who is being
worshipped. We call it in Bengali,
'manush puja', man as god, he is being
worshipped, in the morning and in the
evening, he is worshipped inside the
temple, inside your heart, he is held up
as an idiom, of human beings.
Spiritually, and also materially.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Belur Matt is the headquarters of the
RamaKrishna mission. It was
established by Vive Kananda. One of
his disciples who took Hinduism to the
west.

In its turn, the organization of Belur
Matt, has itself been influenced by the
west. Reverential silence is the norm
here.

GVs, Ext, day Belur Matt Temple
complex.

GVs, Int, day, Belur Matt Temple,
people praying.

KESHAB CHANDRA SARKAR

There is a serene atmosphere
prevailing all over the campus. Once
you get into it, you are in a completely
different atmosphere. At the temple, is
a place where anybody from anywhere
has an easy access.

GVs: Ext, day, Belur Matt Temple complex

Gvs, Int, day, Belur Matt Temple, people praying.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

The architecture of Belur Matt is modern and quite different from traditional Hindu temples. Elements from Muslim and Christian architecture, are fused with Hindu icons, and in places, we can see a buddhist influence. The institution believes that this reflects the composite culture of India, and the oneness of all faiths. In keeping with this, Belur Matt marks the major festivals from other religions, but its most important celebration by far, is of the same Hindu festival as the rest of Calcutta, the Durga puja.

GVs: Goddess Durga image.

GVs: Ext, night, people praying in front of Pandal

GVs, ext, day, people in street, playing cards

GVs, Int, day, women holding farewell party to Durga, smearing red powder on forehead, cheeks. Gvs Men seated watching.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Throughout Calcutta, people have very different personal religious habits, and nowadays with urbanization, different lifestyles. Yet they come together to organize the festival to decorate the marquee or pandal, to pray together, to eat together, and to indulge in endless hours of gossip. And it's time spent with the family because the belief is that Durga comes back to her mother's house, children, no matter how old they are, go back to their ancestral homes. In a country where increasingly people leave their own states to work elsewhere, sometimes moving hundreds or even thousands of miles. The puja ensure's that a family keeps in touch with all its members. The festival is a social as well as a religious occasion. People don't spend all their time at worship.

On the tenth and last day of the festival, the women give Durga and her children, what amounts to an affectionate farewell party.

Actuality:
Drumming and bells in front of Pandal during Durga Festival.
Unknown
Dur: '1'00"

Actuality:
Indian Music played into the street. Dur: 22"

Actuality:
cymbals, drums and horns during Durgafestival in temple.
Dur: 54"



Ext, day, GVs of procession through streets taking image of Durga to river

GVs, ext, Night, Durga Festival in Calcutta, people walking along streets.

They're even given pan, the betel leaf chewed after a feast. Durga is smeared with a red powder sindoor, a sign of being married. The greatest blessing a woman can have is Sada Sumangali Bahva - may you always remain married. While the women play with sindoor their men watch with appreciation and indulgence.

And then Durga is taken for immersion. But before that, all night long celebrations are called for. For three nights during the festival, nearly all of Calcutta is on the streets. People go from one celebration to another, totting up how many puja's they have seen. Public transport runs throughout the night, and religious music has given way to film songs and folk tunes, which blare out from the marquees.

GVs, Calcutta Street, trams.

GVs, Ext, night, Festival Lights.

It's a time for buying special festival presents. A fantastic display of lights, has more to say about modern lifestyles, than about the traditional stories of gods and goddesses.

No one disapproves of all this, not even the most devout. Indeed icons from other religions too are absorbed, and become part of the celebration.

Actuality:

Drums and bells in street procession.
Dur: 5"

Actuality:

Indian music played into street
Unknown.
Dur: 11"

Actuality:

Indian music played into street
Unknown.
Dur: 48"

GVs, Ext, night, Durga Festival, people in street walking along, lorries etc.

G D JAYALAKSHMI V/O:

Hinduism is all encompassing able to absorb any experience that life provides. Even in contemporary secular India, it's difficult to establish the boundaries of Hinduism, and thus a distinct compartment, which might be tightly labelled 'religion'. Many Hindus would simply say, that Hinduism is their way of life.

Actuality:
Indian music played into street.
Unknown.
Dur: 44"

End Credit Roller

Academic Consultant:
Gwilym Beckerlegge

Participants:
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Supradipta Dhar
L. K. Jha
B. Panda
Brij Moham Kumar Puri
Keshab Chandra Sarkar

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music (out)

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VT Editor

Peter Bailey

Series Producer:

Amanda Willett

Producer:

G D Jayalakshmi

End shot: WS, Street, Ext, Night,
two people in F/Ground walking
away from camera, freeze shot @2"
after appearance of last caption and
music ends @8" after appearance of
last caption.

BBC

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