

Public Abstract

First Name:Michael

Middle Name:Joseph

Last Name:Kremer

Adviser's First Name:Signe

Adviser's Last Name:Cohen

Co-Adviser's First Name:Bob

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Flanagan

Graduation Term:SP 2009

Department:Religious Studies

Degree:MA

Title:Is the Guru a Feminist? Charismatic Female Leaders and Gender Roles in India

The Hindu tradition is currently going through a radical reformation in the realm of gender relations. Contemporary female Hindu gurus and their respective cults or religious followings are reevaluating the traditional, socio-religious position of women, especially with regards to motherhood. Ammachi and Anandamayi Ma, two twentieth-century female Hindu gurus, will stand here as case studies to ground this overarching claim. Through their respective cults, both Anandamayi Ma and Ammachi have empowered women by way of their metaphysical teachings and socio-religious organization of their movements. They have engaged and challenged traditional understandings of gender within the Hindu tradition and promoted gender equality on a social level. Through juxtaposing these two womens movements and teachings, I will clarify each gurus position with relation to gender and present two different authoritative voices involved in the debate. Although their perspectives differ significantly from Western feminist ideals, I argue these gurus, as living goddesses, can be labeled feminists in the loosest sense of the word as those who value a more egalitarian society.