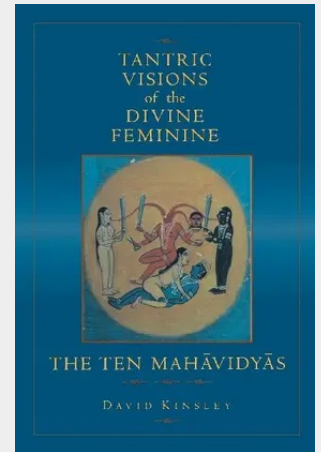


Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine

The Ten Mahavidyas

The Hindu pantheon is rich in images of the divine feminine—deities representing a wide range of symbolic, social, and meditative meanings. David Kinsley's new book documents a highly unusual group of ten Hindu tantric goddesses, the Mahavidyas, many of whom are strongly associated with sexuality and violence. What is one to make of a goddess who cuts her own head off, or one who prefers sex with a corpse? The Mahavidyas embody habits, attributes, or identities usually considered repulsive or socially subversive and can be viewed as "antimodels" for women. Yet it is within the context of tantric worship that devotees seek to identify themselves with these forbidding goddesses. The Mahavidyas seem to function as "awakeners"—symbols which help to project one's consciousness beyond the socially acceptable or predictable. Drawing on a broad range of Sanskrit and vernacular texts as well as extensive research in India, including written and oral interpretations of contemporary Hindu practitioners, Kinsley describes the unusual qualities of each of the Mahavidyas and traces the parallels between their underlying themes. Especially valuable are the many rare and fascinating images he presents—each important to grasping the significance of the goddesses. Written in an accessible, engaging style, Kinsley's book provides a comprehensive understanding of the Mahavidyas and is also an overview of Hindu tantric practice.

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