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Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Krsna Bhakti (Routledge Hindu Studies Series)

By Barbara A. Holdrege



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The historical shift from Vedic traditions to post-Vedic *bhakti* (devotional) traditions is accompanied by a shift from abstract, translocal notions of divinity to particularized, localized notions of divinity and a corresponding shift from aniconic to iconic traditions and from temporary sacrificial arenas to established temple sites. In *Bhakti and Embodiment* Barbara Holdrege argues that the various transformations that characterize this historical shift are a direct consequence of newly emerging discourses of the body in *bhakti* traditions in which constructions of divine embodiment proliferate, celebrating the notion that a deity, while remaining translocal, can appear in manifold corporeal forms in different times and different localities on different planes of existence. Holdrege suggests that an exploration of the connections between *bhakti* and embodiment is critical not only to illuminating the distinctive transformations that characterize the emergence of *bhakti* traditions but also to understanding the myriad forms that *bhakti* has historically assumed up to the present time.

This study is concerned more specifically with the multileveled models of embodiment and systems of bodily practices through which divine bodies and devotional bodies are fashioned in Krsna *bhakti* traditions and focuses in particular on two case studies: the Bhagavata Purana, the consummate textual monument to Vaisnava *bhakti*, which expresses a distinctive form of passionate and ecstatic *bhakti* that is distinguished by its embodied nature; and the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition, an important *bhakti* tradition inspired by the Bengali leader Caitanya in the sixteenth century, which articulates a robust discourse of embodiment pertaining to the divine bodies of Krsna and the devotional bodies of Krsna *bhaktas* that is grounded in the canonical authority of the Bhagavata Purana.



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Barbara A. Holdrege is Professor of Religious Studies and Chair of the South Asian Studies Committee at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her publications include *Refiguring the Body: Embodiment in South Asian Religions*; *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture*; and *Ritual and Power*.

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