Culture at Hand: The Anthropology of Creativity and the Making of a Divine Craftsman

Dr. Kirin Narayan, School of Culture, History and Language, Australian National University

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 3:00 PM, IN CRAWFORD HALL 115

Vishwakarma, “Universe Maker,” is a Hindu deity traditionally associated with subaltern artisan castes and more recently with machinists, tool-wielding workers, and designers specializing in manufacture. Craftsmen have historically looked for inspiration to Vishwakarma as a divine ancestor when embarking on creative projects; factory workers now worship Vishwakarma for protection from machines; engineers may seek his blessings for technological innovation. Vishwakarma’s location within kinship networks of craftsmen can also involve worship of his daughter as a boon-granting goddess able to craft her perfect double. This paper explores symbolic and gendered practices associated with the changing ideas, ideologies and infrastructure of technical creativity in contemporary India through a focus on Vishwakarma.

Kirin Narayan is currently professor in the School of Culture, History and Language at Australian National University, after a distinguished career in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. She is the author of numerous books and articles, written across all possible ethnographic genres, including the monograph Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching, folklore such as Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales, the novel Love, Stars, and All That, her memoir My Family and Other Saints, and the writing guide Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov.

Co-sponsored by Center for South Asian Studies, and Ethnic Studies.
For further information, please contact anthprog@hawaii.edu