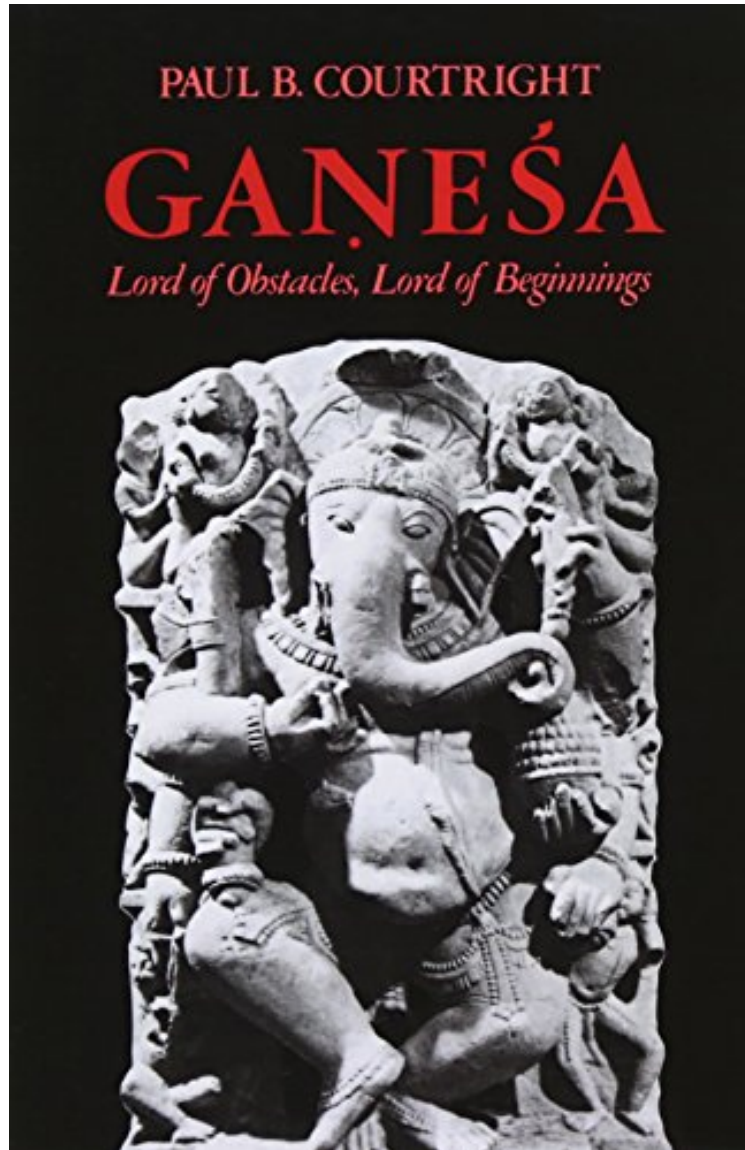


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Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings

Paul B. Courtright

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Paul B. Courtright : Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ganesa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings:

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. oh, these comments speaketh not about the book so much ...By Roman Midnight MusicI'm finding it fascinating that folks are criticizing this book out of being offended that the author came to all these different conclusions and ideas based on the story of Ganesha. What does that say about the book? It says that it's controversial and a lot of people don't like having their religious ideas dissected, related to things

they may not have thought of (that Ganesha is phallic) and turned into a dry study. Does that make this a bad book? No. I am Hindu. I do worship Ganesha. I will say I did find the book in some parts fascinating and other times dry. I found the reading about all the variations of the Ganesha origin story not offensive but interesting because it makes you step back outside of yourself to look at the bigger picture. Yes, the author does seem phallically obsessed, though I wouldn't call it offensive for tone reason ... who says he's right? It's his opinion, yet so many of the comments here treat his opinion like it's high and mighty. It's just an opinion no worse or better than any other. Let alone, every other religion in the world gets dissected, so why can't Hinduism? No one has a problem when Jesus is turned from a real man to a myth, but yet to turn Ganesha into a study brings out the militia. For me, what the author does is push the story to the limit in every direction to try to uncover everything he can about the idea of Ganesha in all contexts. Now, I will say that it is not the book I thought it was going to be when I bought it. I thought it would be more 'human', more 'real life', more 'actual practice' of the worship of Ganesha. I thought it would praise Ganesha through an in-depth study of the story and the facets of Ganesha. It doesn't. It discusses every type of incestuous relationship possible but it never discusses the life and soul of Ganesha that is what most of us turn to. It does not discuss the magic of Ganesha. Well, it does, but in a dry, abstract way that lacks in inspiration. This is not a book for someone who wants to deepen their belief and I think that's the problem with it and that's what folks are expecting. It's a textbook that isn't going anywhere that advertises it as something else.

22 of 30 people found the following review helpful. Challenging Reading, Exploratory Work
By Rajeev D. Majumdar
Having read this book, I find myself refreshed by the author's approach; however, the conclusions he comes to are by no means unique, and plenty of other publications in the Subcontinent and Continental Academia will agree with his lines of thought. As a post-graduate student of Hindu religious philosophy, I appreciated the work for its intriguing nature. This is not necessarily a book for a non-scholar. Casual laypeople, or non-scholars may find the work of the book beyond their interests or background of understanding. When using primary texts, one tends to lose (and apparently anger) those who have come to understand the subject based on popular and built up mythology and popular trends of interpretation. As we know, popular Hinduism is irreconizable from its forms in the 1800s, and even more so from Vedic Hinduism of thousands of years ago. The place of Ganesh in Hinduism has undergone a radical change in status in the last 150 years, becoming very public and prominent, where before uncommon. Indeed, the modern great Ganesh Holiday, Ganesh Chaturthi - was the creation of the revisionist Bal Tilak in the late 1800s. The festival was started to create a communal religious fervor among the Hindus, on the coinciding Muslim holiday. It is in this modern form Ganesh has taken, that it is difficult for academics to proceed in true analysis of early texts and Ganesh's original appearances in Hindu society, and why this book is a useful text.

7 of 14 people found the following review helpful. A controversial book of doubtful scholarship
By Sanjay Agarwal
This book created quite a furor in US, where Mr. Courtright lives and works. The noise eventually reached India, and the publisher (Motilal Banarasi Dass), who are quite respected for works on Indology, withdrew the book from the shelves. There was some talk of banning the book in India, but this did not happen. The book is available outside India, though in limited numbers. Oxford University Press, USA had put out an edition in 1989, which is still available. Mr. Courtright, a respected scholar of comparative religions, specializing in Hinduism, has fallen into a common error: viewing the sacred symbolism of a different culture through his own modern, post Freudian lenses of psycho-analysis. As a result, he sees phallic symbols, oedipal complexes, and sexual conflict everywhere. His interpretations are somewhat similar to what Dan Brown has used in Da Vinci Code. Some of Mr. Courtright's conclusions and speculations would be downright comic and laughable, if these did not concern the divine symbols of an ancient and thriving culture. It has been argued that Mr. Courtright's sexual interpretations of the sacred stem from his own repressed sexuality, as no practicing Hindus ever see this kind of symbolism. Therefore, such interpretation is of almost no value in understanding Hinduism. Others have argued that any new interpretation is useful, as it adds to human understanding (misunderstanding?). This problem of seeing sexual symbols everywhere has a very interesting precedent, and in a most unexpected place. Goswami Tulsidas writes in Ramacharitmanas that when Kamadeva (the god of love) attacked Lord Shiva (the ascetic God) in his samadhi, the entire universe came under a sexual spell. People, animals, trees, rivers, all sought their counterparts to unite with them. Tulsidas ji describes this lyrically over several stanza. Similar imagery is to be found in Kalidas' vision of the seasons (Ritusamharam). Clearly then Mr. Courtright is in esteemed company in seeing the sexual everywhere. Unfortunately for him, though Tulsidas and Kalidas are venerated in India, Mr. Courtright may find it difficult to address a public meeting, without facing a barrage of some of sexual symbols that he seems to be so fond of: bananas, papaya, sausages, eggs... Buy this book if you can. It is well-written and if you have a good sense of humor, you will find it absolutely hilarious. However, if you are a devout person, of any faith, consider avoiding the book, as you may find it irreverent and shallow.

Part animal and part intellectual, an image found in virtually every Indian home, Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, is one of the most important and popular gods throughout India and Hindu Southeast Asia. In this, the first comprehensive, full-length study of Ganesha, Courtright covers not merely the mythology but also the ritual, the political uses, and the modern as well as the Vedic manifestations of the god. The book begins with a consideration of the various myths of Ganesha, stories of his birth, his beheading by his father Siva, and his subsequent restoration as the

lord who gives, or withholds, success in undertakings. In the end, the author turns to the role Ganesa has played in recent Indian history as the patron deity of some formulations of neotraditionalist values and ideology. Throughout the book, Courtright portrays both the complexity of the deity's many roles and stories and the integrated manner in which they come together. Excerpt from the Preface by Wendy O'Flaherty: "Ganesa has everything that is fascinating to anyone who is interested in religion or India or both: charm, mystery, popularity, sexual problems, moral ambivalence, political importance, the works. One can start from Ganesa and work from there in an unbroken line to almost any aspect of Indian culture."

"Excellent intro text."--W. Sax, University of Canterbury (New Zealand)"Reads easily...informative. Gives alternative views, balanced, clear. Recommended as a good source book."--Forrest Wood, University of Southern Mississippi"Paul Courtright's ingenuity and skill have produced a comprehensive, interesting study about one of India's most popular gods....Definitely a must for the mythologist and indologist alike. It is a critical, thorough study that has been long overdue."--New Canadian "Balances rich textural, anthropological, and interpretive resources....An opulent exposition of Ganesa and his worship."--Choice"Intelligent and eminently readable."--Religious Studies "Seasoned and insightful, obviously based on many years of thought, research, writing, and rewriting....Crammed full of information, well organized, and still a delight to read....Masterful."--Journal of the American Academy of Religion"Another of [the] year's treasures." -- Commonweal"Courtright has collected much primary material, especially from the Puranas, presented some possible ways of understanding it, and culled the best of the secondary literature. In these respects, the book contributes significantly to the study of Sanskrit Hinduism and its regional realization."--Journal of Religion

About the Author Paul B. Courtright is at Emory University.