Aarushi Bhaskaran
Amma/Mātā/Ma — Deconstructing Depictions and Discourse on Motherhood in Hinduism

Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world — and possibly the broadest. Its approach to gender, womanhood, motherhood, and the feminine cannot be boiled down to one simple narrative or belief. This project explores both depictions of motherhood in Hindu texts and traditions, and discourse around such depictions and how they are interpreted. Various conceptions of motherhood are explored in their complex and often contradictory nature. Equally important is how these beliefs shape the realities of mothers and women in India, where Hinduism originated and is most dominant. Questions about when depictions and accompanying discourse are empowering, when they are repressive, when they pay lip service to women without reflecting their realities — these are what drive this research. This project looks into feminist reclamations of certain goddesses, the relationship between motherhood and women's bodies in the context of Hinduism, and the centrality of motherhood to Hindu conceptions of womanhood.

Aarushi Bhaskaran is a senior Political Science major with a triple-minor in Women's and Gender Studies, English, and Secondary Education. Her first true exploration of gender within the context of the religion she was raised in was in multi-genre writing project for a course during her sophomore year — she has wanted to explore the topic more deeply since. Growing up hearing stories about goddesses and ordinary women in epic tales has imparted within her the perspective from which she approaches this research.