

*Scripture and the Arts' Material Religion Series Presents*  
Joyce Burkhalter Fluckiger (Emory University)



"Keeping the Goddess in Place in South India:  
Architectural Changes Transforming Village Goddesses"  
*Thursday, April 4, 5:00-7:00PM*  
*Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies (147 Bay State Road)*  
*Room 201*

This talk is part of a larger project that analyzes the agency of five different materialities, beyond what human interactions and/or agency may be in the use of those materials. In this talk, I focus on one of these forms of materiality: the new architecture of small and expanding cement shrines of village goddesses (*gramadevatas*) that punctuate the rapidly shifting urban landscape of Hyderabad and Tirupati. I analyze the ways these "new" structures can be seen as a material history of urban growth and, most significantly, that they have the potential to change the identity or characteristics of the goddess herself. *Gramadevatas* traditionally live in open-air spaces on the boundaries of human settlement and on the banks of water sources, protecting those water bodies and the inhabitants of the *uru* (settlement: home place) from drought and illness. *Gramadevatas* are moving (*canca*) goddesses who have traditionally not permitted permanent structures to be built over or around them; they want to be free to wander beyond their residential sites. However, in the last three decades, *gramadevatas* are increasingly being "kept in place" through permanent architecture, with or without their permission; and this architecture is changing their identities, the personnel who serve them, and the rituals through which they are served. As one goddess said during possession of one of her devotees, complaining about changes in her temple about which she had not been consulted – "What significance do I have?" implying the question "Who am I?"