

# Indian Folk Epics: A South Indian Perspective

Ambedkar University Delhi



Professor Brenda Beck,  
University of Toronto

## Course Co-ordinators

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## Overview

An epic story, skillfully retold, can effectively engage the imagination of large human groups. Recounting an epic-style legend under the right conditions serves to direct the listener's mind, encouraging it to ponder large and important issues: to consider the essence of ethical behavior and the justice (or injustice) of social norms, helping the audience to articulate and define their cultural values in general. Epics also address matters of regional identity and the qualities of a good leader, as well as the challenges brought about by social change. Epics discuss changes resulting from war, from conquest, from migration, from technological transformation, from natural disasters, from human infertility and much more. India is blessed with having a deep historical past that is rich in epic stories. Many of these legends are not yet well known, let alone properly studied. This course will examine the potential of epic narrations to speak to a range of broad social issues facing us today. It will use one localized, medieval South Indian oral epic as its key example and entry point for discussion. The instructor will discuss and illustrate the use of a variety of tools and approaches, surveying the current field of options available to scholars conducting such work. The application of these techniques to India's still partially unknown epic heritage will be encouraged. The goal of the course is to focus young scholars on research of this type, and to motivate them to share their future results with a broad public audience. The potential such research holds is the possibility of deepening of our understanding of India's world-renowned story telling heritage. The wished for outcome is a better focused, practically applied advancement of knowledge in the field of Indian (folk) epics, knowledge that will hopefully lead to greater tolerance and better cross-group understandings amongst Indian citizens at large, as well as amongst interested others around the world.

Course participants will learn these topics through lectures and collaborative groupwork.

<b>You Should Attend If...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ You are a graduate or advanced undergraduate student with an interest in literature, folklore, social anthropology, Indian sociology and psychology</li><li>▪ You are a faculty member with interest in literature, folklore, South Indian epic traditions and interdisciplinary approach to texts and traditions</li><li>▪ You are practitioner in the field of folklore and folkloristics and interested in curriculum development and educational theory</li></ul>
<b>Fees</b>	There is no participation fee. However, note that AUD does not have facilities to accommodate outstation participants.

## The Faculty

Brenda Beck is an award winning Full Professor (now Adjunct) in the Department of Anthropology, the University of Toronto. She has been an active scholar of South Indian culture and folklore for over 55 years. Dr. Beck has studied and published extensively on matters relating to Indian Folklore, Social Anthropology, Metaphor, Story Theory, Educational Theory and Indian Diasporic Cultures generally. Her specialty is an Indian oral folk epic collected in an interior region of Tamilnadu during her initial two years of anthropological field research. She was enrolled at Oxford University at the time, in the Department of Social Anthropology, where studied for her M. Phil. and D.Phil. under E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Ravindra Jain.