

God is playful. Like a child building sand castles on the beach, God creates the world and destroys it again. God plays with his (or her) devotees, sometimes like a lover, sometimes like a mother with her children, sometimes like an actor in a play. The idea of Gods playfulness has been elaborated in Hinduism more, perhaps, than any other religion, providing one of the most distinctive and charming aspects of Indian religious life. Lila or divine play can refer to many things: to Gods playful creation of the world and to religious dramas or plays, as well as to various motifs in Hindu art. But despite the importance of lila in the cultural history of South Asia, few comprehensive studies of it are available, partly because scholars have tended to emphasize only one dimension of lila--either the theological or the performative--at the expense of the other. The Gods at Play fills this gap by bringing together scholarly essays on all aspects of this important Hindu idea, providing students with a broader understanding of popular Hindu culture and religion.

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