

dency election. Facing organizational resistance, Bose resigned and later formed Forward Bloc. Talking economically also, Bose favoured strong centralized planning and industrialization, unlike Gandhi's emphasis on decentralized village republics.

The next chapter talks about the critique of Gandhi by the Marxists namely, M.N Roy, Evelyn Roy, Shripad Amrit Dange, R.P Dutt etc. There was diversity within Marxists on how they interpreted the role of Gandhi in the Indian national movement. For example, Dutt and Evelyn Roy, despite critiquing Gandhi, also saw many positive contributions of Gandhi (p. 296). However, Marxists overall challenged Gandhi on the tool of non-violence and how it was a bourgeois tactic (pp. 292-300). Nevertheless, as authors argue, Gandhi tried to eliminate the deep-rooted social and economic conflicts in Indian society, although his means of resolving conflict was very different from that of Marxists (p. 326).

Ultimately the final chapter presents shorter evaluations of Gandhi by Indian and Global figures such as P.C Ray, Visvesvaraya, George Orwell, Saul Alinsky etc. In this chapter, the authors raise a broader question that how did Gandhi's ideas were reinterpreted different political contexts. For example, Orwell admired Gandhi's personal integrity but questioned the universality of his methods. He questioned if Gandhi's idea will be effective against totalitarianism regimes like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. Similarly, the American community organizer Alinsky argued that structures of domination which are entrenched could not be dismantled through moral appeal alone, Mandela, although influenced by non-violence, at last accepted armed resistance as necessary.

Taken together, these chapters reveal the extraordinary breadth of ideological engagement surrounding Gandhi. Nevertheless, the book is a herculean work that does sustained engagement with those who challenged Gandhi. Despite this, the book has certain limitations. For example, the major theme in all the chapters is that the critics are analysed through Gandhi rather than Gandhi being destabilized by them. It looks like the work is a reaffirmation of the paradigmatic status of Gandhian thought and less as a destabilization. Also, the book has limited engagement with subaltern historiography. The book primarily focuses on elite intellectuals but what about grassroots critiques like post-Ambedkarite Dalit intellectual traditions or for example, feminist critique of Gandhian views of sexuality etc. Lastly, the book is primarily synthetic rather than revisionist. It brings in and consolidates the debates effectively but does not radically reconfigure existing historiography.

However, what the book foregrounds is that Gandhian thought cannot be understood in isolation; it becomes intelligible only within the dense of opposite ideas which it isolated. Most importantly, the book succeeds in demonstrating that nationalist movement was not a unified moral struggle, but was a vibrant one. The book compels us to think seriously about a question which the authors have raised many times: Despite all the critiques, how do you explain the popularity of Gandhi? One may agree with Gandhi or reject his intellectual premises, but one cannot ignore his intellectual centrality. Ultimately, this book will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and students of intellectual history of South Asia and political theory.

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THE UNRAVELING HEART: WOMEN'S ORAL POETICS AND LITERARY VERNACULARIZATION IN MARATHI. By Madhuri Deshmukh. NY: Columbia University Press, 2025. 360 pp.

The study of bhakti religious practices in the Indian subcontinent mainly entails the study of the literature produced during the Bhakti movement. More often than not, the study of these

written forms fails to consider the oral since either it is inaccessible due to the historically situated nature of orality, which can no longer be found outside of the written medium, or simply because some oralities remain unacknowledged in the larger scheme of things. The former situation demands that we make the best use of what is available to us, but the latter needs active adjustment to our perspective(s). Madhuri Deshmukh addresses this latter circumstance more than the former in her book. In doing so, Deshmukh's work enters into conversation with broader debates on "vernacularization" and "literary" formation in South Asian cultural sphere(s), particularly those associated with Sheldon Pollock and subsequent critiques of his framework.

Bhakti in the Marathi language is usually studied through the *abhangas*, primarily those of Jñāneśwar, Nāmdev and Tukaram, and the *vacanas* of the Vīraśaiva sampradaya. Now considered the "literary" forms associated with the Marathi bhakti movement. This literariness attributed to the works referred to above comes from their "lithic" nature (D. Venkat Rao's term). This literary stature, however, draws a distinction, separating the literary and the oral in Marathi, as is also observed in other literatures of the bhakti period in India, as well as in various other eras. Although the *abhangas* and *vacanas* were meant to belong to everyone regardless of caste, creed, or gender, the distinction between literary and oral forms ultimately works against this inclusive impulse. In her search for the elusive figure of Janabai ("woman of the people"), she addresses this disconnect by drawing attention to the *ovī*, an oral lyric form sung by women at the grind mills. These songs are spontaneously created, starting and ending with the operations of the grind mill, and find little trace after the menial task is finished, even in the memory of those who sing them. The topics of the *ovīs*, although many a time sung in praise or as a conversation with the deity Vitthal (common in Marathi bhakti), are by no means limited to them and can range from the women's daily lives to their pleasures and woes, and also the act of grinding and song creation itself.

Deshmukh's book asks two very important questions: What constitutes the "literary" standard, and why must the oral be "vernacular", despite the latter being foundational to the formation of the former in South Asia? And why is the "vernacular" (here, *ovī*) always emerging out of the margins of the society? The author explores not only the "poetics of work" but also the politics of legitimacy in the literary sphere. This endeavour is undertaken using an interdisciplinary methodological approach: historical through the linguistic study of archival material (primarily non-textual), combined with the anthropological study of the *ovī*. Deshmukh traces the medieval as well as contemporary histories of the *ovī* as oral culture, not just *expression*. Many of these various strands are present across the five chapters of the book. The first chapter looks at the *ovī* as a tradition of its own, emerging from cultural contexts surrounding the gendered nature of grind mill work. A discussion on understanding "the categories of the oral" through a "literary" lens, where the "oral" has very much enabled the "literary" follows. The next chapter uncovers what remains unwritten in early Marathi bhakti and thus, unacknowledged. Deshmukh makes the case for studying the written and the otherwise not in opposition to but as being in dialogue with one another; and the same with the literary-colloquial distinction. In the third chapter, we see important questions being raised and addressed about what constitutes the "literary": Is it accomplished by established "rules" governing a literary form? How should we account for the more dynamic cultural formations, in the oral and performative spheres, that have been central to the formation of cultures of various communities across the subcontinent and associated identities? Here, Deshmukh traces the *ovī* through time and space. In the process, she also uncovers the religious undercurrents that have been responsible for the sustenance of the Marathi language itself, without royal patronage. The fourth chapter takes this further by looking at the poesis of the *ovī*, or in her terms, "sympoesis"; and understanding the act of creation itself as bhakti. Understanding bhakti as an act rather than a product, although widespread in praxis, is uncommon in academic study of the bhakti intertext(s). This brings new perspectives and also introduces different stakes. The discussion finally culminates in the fifth chapter, discussing the gendered nature of the spaces associated with the grind mill in Europe and in South Asia,

and the “vernaculars” that emerge out of them. She addresses the discourse on the vernacular and points out that major contributors, such as Pollock and Nagaraj, among others, fail to look at the role that gender and caste play in it. Her discussions attempt to bridge that gap. Such non-recognition, often emerging from a lack of acknowledgement, also raises questions about how authorship is understood in the case of what remains unwritten.

While the scope of Deshmukh’s book is large, it addresses only a limited aspect of the contemporary state of the grind mill songs. The anthropological explorations led her to women practising these songs today, primarily to Janabai Thorat, who is an ageing female Dalit practitioner of a “dying” form. Apart from the museumised recordings in *The Grindmill Songs Project* archives, it does not speak enough of how this tradition has changed and in what forms it exists in the current day and age, leaving many questions unanswered.

The Unraveling Heart remains an important example of what it means to seriously grapple with the question of “doing literature.” It also may work to make a strong case for the best of what language scholarship is capable of (and why the funding cuts must subside). In this sense, the book not only enriches the study of Marathi bhakti traditions but also contributes to larger discussions within comparative literature about how literary cultures are formed, preserved, and legitimised across oral and written traditions, and simultaneously sheds light on how to creatively approach the study of not just languages but contexts in which they develop and thrive.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE *BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ*. By Ithamar Theodor. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2025. 210 pp.

In the dense and saturated landscape of South Asian philosophical scholarship, Ithamar Theodor’s *The Philosophy of the Bhagavad-Gītā* (2025) emerges not just as an exegetical addition but as a formidable methodological intervention that re-contextualises one of India’s most revered texts, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, within the framework of world philosophical traditions. The book situates itself at the intersection of Indology and comparative philosophy, thereby challenging the long-standing binary – text as a scriptural artifact or a devotional manual – which has historically bifurcated the study of the *Gītā*. Theodor, the Director of the Program for Hindu-Jewish Studies at the University of Haifa and a scholar deeply embedded in the *Vedantic* tradition, proposes a reading that is remarkably architectural, providing it a rigorous argumentative structure. This can be seen from the opening pages of the book that signals its attempt to move beyond the devotional or historical exegesis to remind the readers that “The *Bhagavad-gītā* is a world classic considered not only the ‘Hindu Bible’ but sometimes the ‘Indian Bible’ as well” (p. ix).

The clarity of the guiding question, which the author asks early in the book, “Can the *Bhagavad-gītā* be treated as a legitimate participant in the world philosophical traditions?” (p. 1) is what distinguishes this work from many other recent *Gītā* studies. This question acts as an intellectual axis around which the entire monograph revolves. Theodor refuses to subordinate the text to *Advaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* or other doctrinal schools; instead, he proposes a structural reading of the text – the now well-known “Three-Storey-House” model – which conceives the text as a hierarchical system linked by an ethical ladder.

The Preface frames the *Gītā* within a comparative philosophical horizon. This setup requires readers to develop a reading method capable of bridging the gap between ancient metaphysical concepts and modern ethical frameworks. This volume follows a structure paralleling the text itself