

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

in ascending from the realm of dilemma to that of freedom. The chapter ‘*Dharma, Karma-Yoga and Dharma-Yoga*’ address *karma-yoga*, establishing its basis as a structural pivot of the work. Theodor claims that “*karma-yoga* is actually *dharma-yoga*, a combination of *dharma* and *yoga*” (p. 15). Theodor’s argument represents more than just a terminological or syntactical revision of the text; it represents an ethical reorientation of the text. Instead of understanding *karma* simply as a neutral and mechanistic mode of action, Theodor uses a moral lens that binds *karma* to moral order, thereby transforming the traditional understanding of detached duty into a living and dynamic ethical discipline. What makes this section especially compelling is its ability to flow easily both between the analytical examination of the text itself and the conceptual reflection upon its implications, and it shows how progressively social obligation and yogic practice converge.

The author’s treatment of rebirth is similarly interesting as he views it as a pivot point within the text’s metaphysics. Theodor writes – “The idea of rebirth ... enables the turning of *karma* into *karma-yoga*, and it enables examining *svabhāva* or human nature from an external point of view, or ‘from above’, so to speak” (p. 37). This statement expresses the book’s commitment to a broader methodology rather than just merely reading each doctrine separately. This methodological approach has significance within a larger structure that includes philosophical implications for developing an ethical agency and sense of self. The placement of rebirth in the intermediate level of the hierarchical model as constructed by Theodor, aids in understanding how the metaphysical underpinnings can facilitate moral metamorphosis. The effect of the analysis provided here is subtle, but it displays how one is able to interpret traditional constructs in a contemporary manner without compromising their scriptural connections.

The chapters ‘Yoga in the *Bhagavad-gītā*’ and ‘*Sāṅkhya* in the *Bhagavad-gītā*’ continue this integration. Theodor interprets yogic practice, looking past esoteric traditions/ways of being, but expanding the understanding to include all methods of meditation (*dhyāna*), ethical cultivation, and devotional awareness (*bhakti*) in one framework. He interprets the *Yoga-Sūtra* tradition, using caution to suggest continuity without collapsing differences, and in a similar way examines the *guṇa* theory, placing the focus on ethical implications of *Sāṅkhya* not only as metaphysical speculation, but also as a psychological process of moral growth. The various themes discussed in these two chapters demonstrate that the author has developed a method for translating complex categorization in Sanskrit into language that is philosophically substantive and accessible, without violating the integrity of the original ideas.

Perhaps the most engaging section of the book is its sustained reflection on *bhakti* which he discusses in the chapter ‘*Bhakti* in the *Bhagavad-gītā*’. He resists the urge to depict *bhakti* simply as an emotional outlet, but rather seeks to show how this loving devotion has a place both intellectually and structurally in the text of the *Gītā*. He notes – “*Bhakti* appears in both pure and mixed forms; mixed *bhakti* is also termed *miśra-bhakti*” (p. xii). This distinction allows him to follow how *bhakti* develops through ethical and epistemic evolution, to ultimately act as the binding tie that connects all of the philosophical elements of the *Gītā*. The discussion is both analytical and empathetic, revealing a scholar deeply attentive to the experiential dimensions of religious practice without sacrificing academic rigour.

The chapters ‘Concepts of Divinity in the *Bhagavad-gītā*’ and ‘The *Bhagavad-gītā*’s Educational Doctrine’ on divine concepts and education by Theodor demonstrates his creative approach towards methodology. Instead of using common Western terms such as ‘deism’ or ‘pantheism’, Theodor creates a nuanced vocabulary that uses the poetic language and theological plurality of the *Gītā*. The author engages with the philosophy of religion by exploring how inherited conceptual frameworks can be inadequate, but he also offers an alternative understanding of personhood derived from the text itself. The final section of this chapter on the *Gītā*’s educational teachings extends this exploration into modern ethical discussions where *Gītā* in its entirety is presented as a source for educators to consider the relationship between virtue, ecological consciousness, and spiritual development.

What ultimately gives the book its distinctive appeal is the balance it maintains between reverence and critique. Theodor writes neither as an uncritical devotee nor as a detached sceptic; instead, he embodies what might be called a 'constructive philosophical reader'. This perspective enables him to traverse historically significant debates — singularity versus multiplicity of authorship; philosophy versus theology — without reducing the text into a singular doctrinal perspective. Thus, the text *The Philosophy of the Bhagavad-Gītā* allows a compelling invitation to rethink a foundational text on Indian thought through a philosophical perspective. The clear analysis of both traditional texts and current philosophies combined with a unique structural approach, will allow the readers to see how the *Gītā* relates to a larger context of comparative philosophies and theologies today.

Above all, the book succeeds in rekindling curiosity — encouraging readers not merely to understand the *Gītā* but to enter into dialogue with it. Although the book retains the essential Sanskrit vocabularies, but the author presents them in a philosophical structure that makes the ethical and metaphysical implications clear to a universal audience, thereby, making it accessible beyond cultural or doctrinal boundaries. Thus, the readers with diverse intellectual traditions are able to engage with the text as a philosophical discourse rather than a tradition-bound religious manual.

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