

in re-telling the mythical tale of Chitrangada; brings in European style of staging to assist an Indian puppet-style dramatization in *Tasher Desh*; offers stage directions merely through the poetic dialogues of *Raktakarabi*; or in choosing to narrate the life story of Valmiki, the thug instead of Valmiki, the composer of the *Ramayana*, showcases a postmodernist pattern of retelling-of-a-tale way ahead of its times. The myriad-mindedness of Tagore may, at times, seem intimidating and the present compilation shall come in handy therein for, the essays are all well-grounded in either the playwright-performer's artistic ideologies or spiritual philosophies. The very title may seem limiting the scope of the book if one misses out on the contemporary understanding of theatre as a mixed medium inclusive of film and television adaptations. That said, for students and scholars interested in researching Tagore's dramatic oeuvre, particularly its representation in mass media, many of these essays shall make a phenomenal contribution.

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ART CINEMA AND INDIA'S FORGOTTEN FUTURES: FILM AND HISTORY IN THE POSTCOLONY. By Rochona Majumdar. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. 313 pp.

The history of film in an independent India has been charted in multifarious ways across the seven and a half decades of independence. The title of Rochona Majumdar's book *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures* presents to the readers a paradox. How can the future, which is yet to take place, be forgotten? Majumdar uses this paradoxical phrasing to aware the readers of the past, while simultaneously warning them about the dangers that Indian art cinema is potentially about to face in the next few decades, should the country's attitude towards cinema remains to "not [be] recognized as an industry by the state" (Majumdar: 2021,4). The author handpicks the films from a range of options, to highlight the dual aspect of postcolonial impact and understanding of Indian cinema in the twenty-first century while dwelling on the categorisation and canonisation of what constitutes 'Indian Art Cinema' in parallel strands. She uses the entourages of Marie Seton and the archives of film societies and institutes to discuss the possibilities that Indian Art Cinema can explore in the days to come.

The book is divided into two parts, each comprising three chapters. The first part entitled The History of Art Cinema starts with the chapter 'Art Cinema: The Indian Career of a Global Category'. Here, Majumdar begins the discussion by admitting that there is no stable definition of Art Cinema in India. She charts the history of talkies in India, noticing how "from 400 in 1931 (the year of the first Indian sound film), the number of permanent cinemas rose to 1265 in 1939 and further to 2090 in 1945" (Majumdar: 2021, 27). The chapter then moves on, through the history of cinema in India, to the stalwart figure of Marie Seton. Using the unique flowchart by Seton that she had used to structurally read *Bicycle Thieves* as a tool, Majumdar highlights how this film was a story of ordinary people in ordinary circumstances, something that Satyajit Ray learned and manifested in his unique way in *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*). Majumdar's identity as a Bengali affects her choice of directors and locale in this book. She mentions Indian Art Cinema but a large section of her book covers cinema from Bengal. She uses frames from the films of Ritwick Ghatak to comment on the hybrid nature of Indian Art Cinema. Even if one assumes that Majumdar's choice is representative in terms of art and aesthetics, geographically her book becomes restricted and favoured by the people of Bengal.

The second chapter 'The "New" Indian Cinema: Journeys of the Art Film' begins with the argument that Satyajit Ray "made the term "Indian New Wave" far more contentious than it would have

been otherwise. His was not the only sceptical voice about the claims of 'new cinema,' (Majumdar: 2021, 54). Rochona Majumdar goes to great lengths to identify the impact that Ray had on the new wave of cinema, harbouring her favouritism for Ray very subtly in the process. Ray's articles on the 'New Wave' of cinema get more precedence in the initial pages of this chapter than do his films that have contributed significantly to the development and progress of New Wave cinema. Following this, Majumdar charts the rather difficult territory of nomenclature. The question about what to call the rather productive decades of Indian cinema has been covered surreptitiously in the section entitled 'New, Parallel, Middle...'. This chapter also brings to the fore the three waves of new Indian cinema, the 1950s-60s Bengal, 60's Bombay and 70s south India. While dealing with these topics, the importance of the Film Finance Corporation (FCC) had to come up, and this book takes a neutral stand on its effect and affect on the production of cinema in the last half of twentieth century India. The chapter ends with a detailed analysis of Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome*, which despite being a Hindi film, is directed by a Bengali. Like in the previous chapter, here too Majumdar's inclination and selectiveness become visible.

The third and final chapter in the first part of the book, 'Debating Radical Cinema: A History of the Film Society Movement' offers a justification of Majumdar's unending devotion towards Calcutta as the hub where the journey of Indian Art Cinema began. She cites the first-ever Film Society in India, which was formed in Calcutta by Satyajit Ray and others, that led to the accumulation of "over a 100,000 film society members across the country" by 1981 (Majumdar: 2021, 92). This chapter tries to trace the history of these film societies and their contribution to developing what Majumdar defines as Indian Art Cinema. This attempt sits very well with the ongoing trend of situating the history of India's art forms post Independence by Postcolonial thinkers and scholars of South East Asia. These film societies started showing films from Europe at regular intervals to their members, allowing them to break free from the stereotypes that had already started to develop in cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and so on. Erum Hafeez in her article 'History and Evolution of Indian Film Industry' writes about how Satyajit Ray "inspired his several colleagues including Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak, Aravindan, and Rituparna Ghosh who produced globally recognized films in that era and are regarded as the founding fathers of Hindi parallel cinema" (Hafeez 2016, 63), and Majumdar agrees with this notion throughout this chapter, and in the rest of the book as well.

The second part of the book takes a more straightforward turn towards Bengali cinema of the twentieth century. In many ways, the second half of the book presents to the readers a more raw and toothy exploration into cinema as Rochona Majumdar sheds off her pretence to cast light upon 'Indian Art Cinema' and steps into the domain she is most comfortable with: Bengali cinema. She starts the fourth chapter 'Ritwik Ghatak and the Overcoming of History' with the proclamation that "[m]any Bengali film commentators had an entirely negative view of this aspect of his work" (Majumdar: 2021, 128). However, throughout the chapter, she tries and refutes these very negative views of Ghatak's works. She establishes the long-lost relationship that Ghatak had had with the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore. In this process, she analyses the role of Ghatak's prose and the genre of prose-poetry that was arguably developed and popularised by Tagore in Bengal. This chapter, too, flows like poetry from one film's analysis to the next, from one genre to another. It is in this chapter that we see Majumdar in her element, structuring the chapter exactly like a well-made film, with a beginning, middle and an end. Majumdar concludes the chapter with a sigh of resignation, and the well-known anecdote of Ghatak's untimely death and lack of appreciation during his lifetime, mostly due to his ideologies. However, this chapter allows the readers to bear witness to a unique perspective on Ghatak from the postcolonial angle.

'Anger and After: History, Political Cinema, and Mrinal Sen' rows the book towards a sublime glory. This penultimate chapter begins with the reference to Sen's (in)famous Calcutta trilogy *Interview* (1970), *Calcutta 71* (1971) and *Padatik* (1973). Majumdar rightly says that these films "arguably marked the first on-screen appearance of the figure of the angry young man in Indian

cinema” (Majumdar: 2021, 161). This argument is significant in the last half of the twentieth century, when the angry young man has already been popularised in England and elsewhere, with the advent of Kitchen Sink drama and the iconic character of Jimmy Porter. What follows in this chapter is a detailed textual analysis of *Calcutta 71*, why the year 1971 was chosen, how it allowed for a political voice to be raised without any propaganda, and so on. The discussion, rich in references, serves as a critical commentary on the working class of Bengal in the nineteen seventies, while simultaneously dwelling on the reception, art and techniques of the film in surreptitious detail. Padatik follows a similar road in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Majumdar attempts to understand the salient features of the angry young man of Sen, who, despite odds, fought tooth and nail to survive in a belligerent world.

Satyajit Ray’s influence on the book and the writer comes to timely fruition in the last chapter of the book, ‘The Untimely Filmmaker: Ray’s City Trilogy and Crisis of Historicism’. Before going into the three films which constitute Ray’s City Trilogy: *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970), *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971), and *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman, 1975), the chapter offers a summary of his earlier works that allows the reader to better understand the position and development of his films over time. This essentially relates films from the past with more contemporary films, an attempt that was also visible in the earlier chapters of this book. It is here that the title of the book stands out, as Ray is rightly shown as a director ahead of his time, bound by the derelictions of money, equipment, technology and mindset. The city of Calcutta becomes a character in these films, as it did in Sen’s trilogy. The contemporary scenario, with the economy taking a hit and the employment reaching an all-time low, is depicted through stark dialogues like “*Ei shohore ki tumi ar ami mile ekta chakri o pabo na?*” (In this damned city, will neither of us get a job?)¹. This chapter, like Ray’s films on Calcutta, is bleak but honest in its representation of the truth about Art Cinema in India.

The book then offers an epilogue which correctly states that there has been a decline in the production of art cinema, and most producers these days are concerned with making a profit rather than supporting quality content. However, Majumdar ends with a positive note, one full of possibilities and opportunities, that would lead India to a new dawn of Art Cinema.

Notes

¹ Translation by the author of this review.

Works Cited

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A FEMINIST MYTHOLOGY. By Chiara Bottici. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 216 pp.

First published as *Per tre miti, forse quattro* (Manni, 2016), Chiara Bottici’s *A Feminist Mythology* (translated by Sveva Scaramuzzi and Claudia Corriero, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022) is presented by the author’s *Introduction: a book of books* (pp. 1–14) as a “journey through the myths of femininity [...] *sub specie modernitatis*” (p. 22). If Danto warned against the risks of expressive reduction, inherent in the attempt to restrict philosophy to the sole genre of professional paper¹,