

The major strength of the book *South Asian Writers* lies in the intricately detailed analysis which refines and re-defines the points of convergence in global literary cultures, highlighting the ways in which literature transcends spatiotemporal boundaries. Kantor ends her book on a quote from Hamid's novel *Exit West*, and exquisitely sums up her argument thus: "Perhaps this is where we end, as well: in a moment of connection where, in spite of everything, a dream lives on. There may not be portals in this world. But there are books that can take you from the cafes of Lahore to the deserts of Chile, if only you make room on the shelf" (188).

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THEMATIZATIONS OF THE GODDESS IN SOUTH ASIAN CINEMA. By Anway Mukhopadhyay and Shouvik Narayan Hore. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2023. 256 pp.

The book under review contributes immensely to a growing field of academic research which is concerned with the cult of Goddess feminism and the superstructure of *Theological* discourse. The twenty chapters that follow the editors' 'Introduction' on the significance of "living goddess traditions in the domain of cultural production in South Asia" (1), deal primarily with the socio-historical and psycho-phenomenological dimensions of the cult of Goddess feminism in South Asian Cinema. In the editorial introduction, cinema is defined as "one of the most potent and effective mediums for facilitating such creative interactions between the Goddess and the contemporary South Asian subject" (3). Hence, this edited volume attempts to explore the emblematic functions of the Goddess (Devi) in South Asian cultural life.

In the first chapter entitled, "The Goddess Kumari in Kathmandu: Blending Myth and History", Dhruva Karki elaborates on the mythical and historical cult of Kumari Puja through a documentary named *Living Child Goddess*, where the Kumari is treated as a manifestation of Goddess Durga. In the next chapter, Prabal Bhowmik deals with a Bangladeshi supernatural thriller, *Debi: Misir Ali Prothombar* through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The chapter probes into the story of Ranu and scrutinizes the conversations of Goddess Rukmini with the film's protagonist through the psychoanalytical phenomena of the real, symbolic and imaginary. The reading delineates the Goddess as a composite figure – both as a destroyer and preserver, in keeping with the Hindu tradition of Shaktism. The chapter emphasizes the affective, experimental and performative angles of Theology through the inclusion of the meta-psychological. In Chapter Three, Srijani Chowdhury constructs a coherent account of the cultural and political obstacles which keep *Sharda Pith*, one of the oldest Shakti *Pithas*, enveloped in the socio-political veil of oblivion by referring to a 2017 documentary on Sharda Pith. The chapter ends with a poignant and thought-provoking question: "Can there be a political and cultural solution to this crisis which might heal the wounds in the stone and the wounds in the soul simultaneously?" (43). In Chapter Four, Ritushree Sengupta attempts to establish the relationship between man and God more as a spiritual discourse than a materialistic one through *Mookuthi Amman*, a Tamil fantasy comedy film directed by RJ Balaji. The dynamics between the journalist, Ramaswamy and the Goddess may apparently appear humorous but are tinged with deep theo-political undertones. Balagopal S. Menon's chapter on the Malayalam film, *Sexy Durga*, develops the underlying atrocities committed against women in the domestic or non-religious sphere. The sacred-profane dichotomy intrigues the readers and compels them to re-ponder on the justification of censorship on the film. Neha Chatterjee in chapter six, re-conceives the hideous violence on women as a result of toxic masculinity while revisiting the Bengali film, *Devipaksha* and Raja

Basu, in the next chapter undertakes a thorough analysis of Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* to delineate the desecration of women in a patriarchal society once she is bereft of conventional roleplaying. Through the background of Partition and the consequent plight of refugee women, the film offers "a critique of this middle-class patriarchal society as he deftly links the everyday gendered violence to the mythical and metaphor-forming deification of women" (78). In Chapter Eight, Takbeer Salati analyses how socio-political corruption forces a 'lone' woman to fight for her justice in the politically unscrupulous Nation State of India, through a detailed study of the Hindi film *Kahaani*. In her struggle against the corrupt system, Vidya becomes one with the positive vigour of Goddess Durga. The movie offers multifarious signifiers in the political and cultural sphere emphasizing on the goddess-women dynamics endowing new meanings to specific signs. Ankita Sundriyal, in Chapter Nine reflects on the T-series regional documentary on Nanda Devi entitled *Raj Jat*, where the mountain goddess Nanda Devi's identity appears both as a daughter and Goddess. A shade of local hymns coupled with the environmental awareness linked with the myths of the Goddess of Uttarakhand render a holistic approach to the essay. Praggnaparamita Biswas undertakes a critical stance while analyzing the Hindi film *Chingaari* in Chapter ten, where she studies the tenets of patriarchal Goddess worship and theology within the ambit of caste, class and religious hierarchy. Tumbbad, a Hindi gothic mythological movie centering round the Earth Goddess or Bhudevi, dealt with by Dipannita Chatterjee and Gourab Singha, employs the Platonic concept of 'chora' and Jungian concept of the 'mother archetype' to bring out the heterogeneous and polyphonic aspects of the Goddess. Utkarsh Chaubey's exploration of the socio-political themes through the Bhojpuri film *Bandhu Singh ki Faansi: Maa Tarkulha Devi*, in Chapter twelve, centers round the establishment of the Shakti Peeth of Maa Tarkulha situated in the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. In Chapter thirteen, Adity Roy illustrates the troubled memories of Partition that perpetually haunted families, and especially women for a long period of time. Subarnarekha, a film by Ritwik Ghatak, and Pinjar by Chandraprakash Dwivedi have been explored by Roy to depict the variegated issues related to gender. The following chapter by Jaya Sarkar explores the dual aspects of Goddess Kali, both as a destroyer and preserver, by analyzing Satyajit Ray's *Devi: The Goddess* and Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul*. The former reveals Kali as "a beautiful mother" (173) and the latter as an embodiment of "self-assertion and power" (173). The malevolent and avenging portrait of Goddess Kali has also been dealt with by Dipanwita Paul in Chapter Fifteen, where she illustrates various Indian horror thrillers, including *Bulbbul*. Satyajit Ray's *Devi* has also been dealt with in Chapter Sixteen, along with the popular Bengali film *Marutirtha Hinglaj*, by Sreejit Datta and Ahana Chaudhuri to present an Indic emic understanding of the psychological, social and cultural dimensions of human beings in relation to the Divine Will. Chapter Seventeen by Nabanita Paul and Abhishek Chowdhury outlines the unwavering belief of the common folk on the grace of the Goddess in spite of her ineffectiveness in saving Subol, a character from the film *Kaaler Rakhal*. Monisha Mohan and Gigi J. Alex trace the converse of a caste and gender-biased theological discourse through the Malayalam film *Bhadrakali* which stands as an epitome of 'united Kerala' as there are no barriers of gender and caste in worshipping the Goddess. In Chapter Nineteen, Sreenu Gopan undertakes a critical reading of the Sinhalese movie, *Vaishnavee* and examines it in light of the Rasa theory. The chapter critically draws upon the theological elements of Bhakti Rasa, the relationship between the theistic and artistic and the Hindu concept of Devata. Shouvik Narayan Hore, in the last chapter, offers a summary of Sakama and Nishkama Bhakti in *Maa Durga Divya Haathi*, a Tamil film, and two Bengali films, *Sadhak Ramprasad* and *Sri Ramakrishna*, where "dialectized Bhakti re-arranges the theological realm for the Sublime" (5).

The book is systematic and structured with distinct chapterizations, section-divisions and endnotes. The integrated table of contents and Works cited also ensures that the reader is not baffled in the wilderness of titles and authors. In a field where relatively, little academic work has been undertaken, the editors have performed a commendable yet challenging job in attempting to delineate the discipline of theology in a philosophical and systematic manner. The content of the book holds true

to its title; it encompasses the thematization of the Goddess in South Asian films of Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka within its trajectory, ensuring a holistic presentation. The book is unique with regard to its relationship to the academic disciplines of feminism, philosophy and theology and it will contribute immensely to the researches on feminist religious discourse.

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WITTGENSTEIN AND AESTHETICS. By Hanne Appelqvist. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 74 pp.

The question of aesthetics in art and philosophy is by no means a recent one. It has been asked and answered by thinkers as early as Plato and Aristotle. In the Indian tradition as well, the centrality of aesthetics cannot be understated. In fact, the ancient text of *Natyashastra* can be read as Bharata's seminal contribution as an aesthetician. Yet, the question had remained unsettled and engaged the intrigue of various ages in particular ways. Along its long evolution, approaches have been many and varied, drawing and differing from each other, contributing to the contentious and dynamic status of aesthetics today.

Hanne Appelqvist's book *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics* presents an insightful account of Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding of aesthetics and marks it as a significant milestone in the history of aesthetics. The author places aesthetics at the centre of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and argues that his engagement with aesthetics is integral and not secondary to his principal investigations on language. Through the Kantian affinities that the author observes in Wittgenstein's thought, the latter's position in the philosophical history of aesthetics is established. The book, therefore, has much to offer readers who are specifically interested in the philosopher as well as those who wish to explore aesthetics as an interdisciplinary domain.

The introduction to the text performs the function of a glossary and elucidates certain crucial features of Wittgenstein's conception. Appelqvist anticipates the ambiguity that can arise from the usage of the term "aesthetics" and takes the effort to describe the particular meaning that it holds for Wittgenstein. The author clarifies that Wittgenstein's conception of aesthetics, though it does concern itself with beauty, is not limited to art, and is applicable to broader philosophical questions. What is proposed by Wittgenstein is a perspective that can provide solutions to both artistic and philosophical puzzles. It is also clarified that aesthetic judgements are assertions of conviction and not statements of facts. What is then provoked is the question of artistic essence, of whether it is to be located in the object or in the experience of the object. It appears to the reviewer that such a binary is dissolved in Wittgenstein, and what is instead proposed by the philosopher and emphasised by Appelqvist is a relation between the experience and the experienced. Through these clarifications, the author is able to simultaneously enrich the notion of aesthetics for the reader while refining their reading of Wittgenstein.

The book also functions as an archive by collecting and connecting Wittgenstein's reflections on aesthetics that appear in *Tractatus*, *Philosophical Investigations*, and in the lecture notes available as *The Blue and Brown Books*. Although Wittgenstein does not approach the study of aesthetics in a systematic manner, the development of his conception is perceptible through the remarks scattered across the various periods of his philosophical career. Appelqvist takes up the challenge of coherently structuring these instances into a system of aesthetics that evolves alongside Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. However, it must be noted with appreciation that the documentation offered by the author preserves the "digressions" and examples that are critical to Wittgenstein's understanding of aesthetics.