

Images of Kali as reflections of Female Defiance within selected examples of Contemporary Asian Arts

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore how the image of the Hindu goddess Kālī has been used as a symbol of female defiance by certain contemporary Asian women artists. My focus is on specific works by Sutapa Biswas and Chila Kumari Burman. Both artists were born in India and migrated with their families to the United Kingdom and currently live and work in London. I will also refer to my own creative production. By comparing and contrasting my production with that of Biswas and Kumari Burman I hope to present a case in contemporary art in South Africa that raises the awareness of the potential of Kālī for expressing defiance. Biswas and Kumari Burman have adopted and adapted images from traditional Hindu mythology not only to comment on the oppressive gender relations of Hindu cultures under patriarchy more generally but also as a means to symbolise female power and assert female sexuality. The oppressiveness of patriarchy in Hindu culture is reflected in the lives of many Hindu women

It is from a particular subject position that I comment thus: as a South African Indian woman with Hindu ancestry and adherence to Hindu custom, I want to speak to this experience of womanhood, and propose that, in spite of the perceptions of women being subservient and passive, there is a place for defiance within the very tradition of Hindu culture for the expression of female defiance. This is offered in the form of the goddess Kālī. I will analyse my own work, which exploits the images of Kali with the aim of producing empowering images of Asian women locating this analysis within a South African art context.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own original and unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I have not submitted this research or any part of it for a degree or examination at any other university.

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