

https://dspace.org/

Images of Kali as reflections of female defiance within selected examples of contemporary Asian arts

Chhiba, Reshma Daya

2013-08-12
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/13032

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

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

---

Reshma Daya Chhiba

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities or the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Fine Arts.

Johannesburg, 2013

Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore how the image of the Hindu goddess Kāli 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 Kāli 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 Kāli. 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.

_____

Reshma Chhiba

11.06.2013

Acknowledgements

Firstly I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Karel Nel, who served as my supervisor at the beginning and end of this dissertation. I thank him for his insight and wisdom which led to a great spiritual enhancement of this research

I thank Prof. Penny Siopis who, as supervisor of this research activated the aspect of female defiance through her guidance and knowledge of feminist theory and practice. Her insights into both my artistic production and written dissertation are invaluable.

To Nontobeko Ntombela for her brave criticisms of my position and constant encouragement to engage with topics of relevance with contemporary South African art and feminist theory.

To David Brodie for the use of Art Extra for the display of Kali (2008), in partial fulfilment of this degree.

I would also like to thank Joni Brenner, Natasha Christopher, Clive Kellner, Musha Neluheni, Carmen Jerrard and Anthea Buys.

A very special thank you to my mother for her patience, guidance and encouragement through my many late nights and absences during this research; and to my father, who never got to see the fulfilment of this dissertation, thank you for your initial support and love.

And lastly, thank you to my dear friend and teacher Anusha Pillay, for her consistent engagement, commitment and inspiration throughout this process. I thank her for sharing her vast knowledge of dance and expert participation in the production of some aspects of practical component of this degree.