

Portraits of God: Word Pictures of the Deity from the Earliest Times Through Today

Louis Baldwin

McFarland, 960 NC Hwy 88 W, Jefferson NC 28640 (Box 611). Website: <https://mcfarlandbooks.com>. 2011. 192 pp. \$19.99. PB. ISBN 9780786467204.

The chapter ‘The Projected Self-Image’ (107–8) in the book under review adds a brilliantly sarcastic insight into one of the ‘extreme leftist offshoots of Hegel’ (107). We are speaking here of Ludwig Feuerbach, who was ‘an early proponent of scientific humanism [and] whose thinking formed something of a bridge between Hegel and Karl Marx and [who] was a harbinger of Sigmund Freud’ (107). To find Feuerbach in this book was a pleasant surprise. Baldwin, in this witty book, has presented to us humorous portraits of God, and more wonders follow.

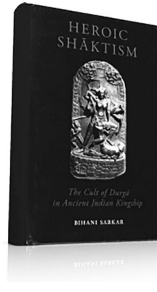
While Feuerbach saw God as ‘the epitome, [and] not the embodiment, of human love’ (108); Sigmund Freud, according to Baldwin might ‘have implicitly agreed with Jesus Christ that the overweening love of self is the root of all evil, although he [Freud] might not have honored the copyright’ (132). ‘The Father Fantastic’ (130–2), which discusses Freud on God, touches upon the issue of theodicy: ‘What is real in this world [according to Baldwin’s study of Freud], in the world we know at first hand, is evil—the pain and other suffering from which there is no escape except by chance’ (131). Again, for this reviewer, this chapter on Freud is surprising in this sort of a book. Baldwin is analytical, but he never loses sight of the idea of God that every one of us has constructed in our minds. He also deals, though inadequately, with the Upanishadic Brahman (14–7).

Karen Armstrong does a good job of writing on God in her books, so does Neil McGregor in his *Living with the Gods: On Beliefs and People* (2018), but Baldwin’s book is not merely supplementary to Armstrong’s works or McGregor’s book; it is essential reading for both philosophers and theologians. One glaring omission in this book is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work on the rhizomic nature of the Buddhist ‘mandala’.

Had Baldwin added this to his ‘human portraits’ of God, this book would have been truly a source-book on anthropomorphic reflections on God.

Baldwin’s book is vast in scope, and yet, it is written so clearly that it will appeal to even those who do not agree with the existence of anything transcendent.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay



Heroic Shaktism: The Cult of Durgā in

Ancient Indian Kingship

Bihani Sarkar

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP, UK. Website: <https://global.oup.com>. 2017. 295 pp. £75. HB. ISBN 9780197266106.

Bihani Sarkar’s monograph is one of those religious monographs written by someone who knows the languages of the yesteryears, knows a lot of ancillary materials, but has actually no personal experience with the Mother in her various forms. The names of these forms, Sarkar can rattle off since her next postdoctoral funding depends on her being able to publish or perish to languish in the backwaters of the tenure-hopefuls in the UK. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has begun in the UK, perhaps she is rooting for a plum post as a savant on the Mother Goddess in some hallowed and sanitised hall of some bleak college ruled by an inflexible, iterative, and tautological structuralist like herself.

Chapters 3 and 7 show Sarkar at her archival, plodding, and non-syncretic best. In ‘Taking Over Skanda’ (97–114), Sarkar shows her huge deficits as being part of any faith community except the sort that armchair scholars of religion have been doing throughout the last century. She reduces Lord Shiva to nothing more than a detritus who is so ephemeral that it would surprise a non-Hindu reader to find that actually Shiva is offered worship within Advaita Vedanta, in its Kashmiri Shaivite form, and within other living traditions of Hinduism. These, apart from the way Shiva is seen by the Virashaivas and Lingayats of contemporary South India. They would be horrified to know that both Devi Durga and Lord Shiva are all