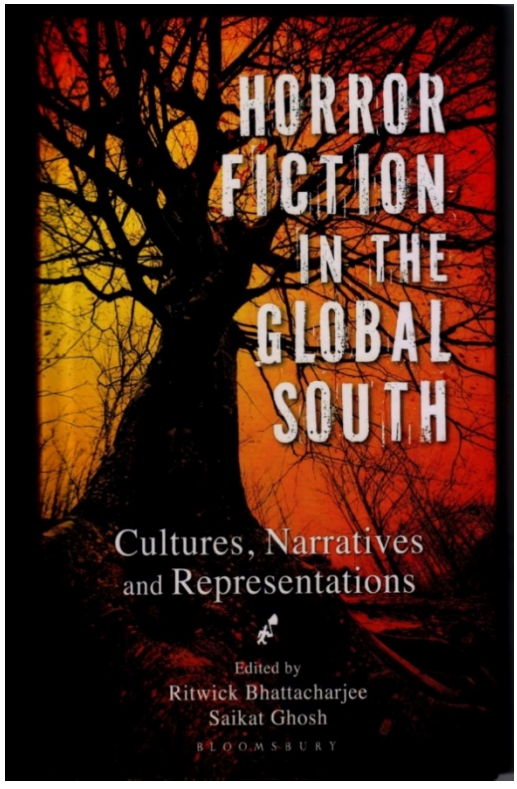
**Ritwick Bhattacharjee and Saikat Ghosh, eds. *Horror Fiction in the Global South: Cultures, Narratives and Representations*. New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2021. i-xii + 214 pp. ISBN 978-93-90077-26-7.**




Horror as a subject of representation has been of great interest for writers, filmmakers, critics, and academic scholars. Popular horror narratives evoke uncanny feelings in viewers/readers and the element of mystery often leads to a serious interrogation of the relationship between the humans and the weird characters. As a matter of fact, horror narratives, either in the form of gothic fiction or film, are predominantly products of the Western imagination. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Howard Phillips Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) are specific instances of such horror stories. However, academic research does ignore the rich galaxy of horror narratives written in the cultural context of the Global South. The present book under review offers insightful readings of horror fiction from a specific geo-cultural space and is indeed, a welcome initiative in the area of horror studies.

In the Introduction of the book, the editors provide a vivid description of the concept of horror emerging from the Global South. Beginning with a reference to Jibanananda Das's translated poem "A Day Eight Years Ago," the Introduction sets the tone of the book by attempting to define horror from a unique perspective. Das's poem, the editors argue, elucidates an interactive dimension between a human self and a ghost, amplifying in the process a sort of horror that is representative of the "Bengali South Asian imagination" (3). This dimension of horror locates "the self, the cosmos and the ghost" (5) in a complex network of association(s), rendering an "experiential" (3) aspect of fear. This seeks to dislodge the Western rational approach to horror that conceptualises the difference between the human self and the ghost from the perspective of a "reductive binary schema" of "natural and supernatural" or "modern/premodern" (3). The editors further discuss some "methodologies" (10) which can be effectively used to study a variety of horror narratives produced from the Global South. While providing examples of such horror tales associated with various socio-cultural backgrounds, they claim that these stories can be conceptualised as ideologically different from that of the West. Apart from the Introduction, which ably reflects the intensive theoretical research conducted by the editors and offers an appropriate prelude to the theme of horror in the Global South, the book is divided into two sections, namely "Cultures" and "Narratives and Representations." "Cultures" contains seven essays and deals with the possible methodologies which can be used to analyse various horror narratives from the Global South. The eight essays in the second section mainly focus on critical studies of some horror stories.

In the first essay of the "Cultures" section, Shweta Khilnani analyses Junji Ito's horror text *Tomie* which contains graphic illustrations of blood, death, and murder. This text presents the story of a young Japanese female character, Tomie, who is murdered by a man and whose body is cut into pieces. Pictorial representations of Tomie's dismembered body generate horror in the minds of readers/viewers, and this phenomenon is theoretically approached by Khilnani to explain horror from the perspective of affect. She refers to a number of affect theorists: Noel Carroll, Brian Massumi, and Sara Ahmed to elucidate the affective dimension of horror in the context of a Japanese horror fiction. Jarrel De Matas in his essay focuses on the representation of the Caribbean monsters in Brobder's and Chariandy's fictions, *The Rainmaker's Mistake* and *Soucouyant*, respectively. These fictions, according to Matas, present monsters signifying the terrors of colonialisation of the Caribbean islands. He examines the history of the colonisation to analyse the aspect of monstrosity in these fictions which are typically reminiscent of the "horror of colonialism" (48). In the third essay, Puja Sen Majumdar offers an interesting critical intervention in the area of horror studies by theoretically studying the figure of the goddess Kali and its representations in select Bengali horror fiction. She extensively discusses the holy

figure as a "*devi*" (52) which is a symbol of both terror and seduction, and insightfully analyses this sacred figure through the theoretical concept of the 'abject' (53). The next essay entitled "Spirits and Possessions" deserves a special mention because of the originality of approach. The author Rajarshi Bhattacharjee refers to the presence of "*bhoot*" and "*preta*" in Hindu mythological narratives and studies the impact of these weird characters on the Indian psyche (63). In order to theoretically interpret the relationship between the human self and the spirits, Bhattacharjee uses the Freudian "oedipal system" (64) which includes three functioning characters (the mother, the son, and the father). This functioning system according to him also includes a "*fourth*" (64) character that remains invisible and appears in the form of "ghost spirits and demons" (69). This "*fourth*" is "the position of the divine, the other worldly" and it influences the son in the triadic oedipal structure (65).

The fifth, the sixth, and the seventh essays in this section have been written by Meenakshi Sharma, Samarth Singhal and Sushrita Acharjee, respectively. In her critical piece, Sharma explores a curious connection between the monstrous villain Dracula (portrayed by Bram Stoker) and the evil figure of the "*vetal*" (72) as represented in Richard Burton's *Vikram and Vetal*. Sharma convincingly proves that the character of Dracula bears multiple traits of the orient villain, *vetal*. The primary focus of Samarth Singhal's essay is the evolution of the genre of Indian horror fiction which often employs various "tropes of Orientalism" (83) to make novels more appealing. He extensively studies Shweta Taneja's *Cult of Chaos* to elucidate this perspective. Sushrita Acharjee attempts to read post-2003 gothic Iraqi narratives as they offer interesting cases of understanding the ghosts which appear in these stories to articulate the trauma, "anxiety," distress, and "horror" of the Iraqi civilians who lost their lives while fighting against the US army (92-93). These Iraqi gothic narratives, Acharjee observes, "offer corporeality to the disembodied, dismembered spectres" (97) of the war victims who seem to be "moving among the living in search of justice and liberation" (98).

Among the eight essays in the second section, the first one written by Anhiti Patnaik seeks to critically investigate the visibility of the ghostly characters in the contemporary Indian horror films through the lens of "spectrality" (107). Patnaik analyses two Indian horror films, *Manichitrathazhu* and *Stree* to emphasise the significance of the corporeality of the ghostly figures and how this generates an "uncanny" fear in the minds of the audience (107). Sakshi Dogra's article also examines the genre of Indian horror films. The basic thrust here is "the genre of Folk Horror" films which use the rich storehouse of "indigenous folk" stories to create a new "aesthetics" of horror films (114) and interprets the folk horror movie, *Tumbbad* to elaborate the features of this new kind of genre. Based on an astute understanding of postcolonial theory, Srinjoyee Dutta's essay explores the relationship between the Indian myths and the structure of fairy tales in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Fairy Tales at Fifty*. Chatterjee's text is a "classic" instance

of "anti-fairy tale" (134) which seeks to offer an alternative discourse on selfhood and postcolonial subjectivity.

A similar reference to alternative discourse is offered by Aina Singh in her critical study of Vijaydan Detha's short story "A Double Life," in which a female ghost intervenes in the life of a frustrated young woman, who is unable to cope with the heteronormative order in her family. Singh asserts that the trope of "feminine utopia" plays a significant role in establishing a sexual bonding between these two women, allowing them to escape from the horrors of "compulsory heterosexuality" (139). Meenu B's and Arunima Chandra's articles are fascinating studies on horror tales dealing with children and their interactions with the evil spirits. These studies foreground insightful analyses of child psychology, explicating the possible reasons for the desire to communicate with the ghostly beings. Soumyarup Bhattacharjee discusses the Western Gothic tradition and its contextualisation in the Asian socio-cultural realities. The Gothic has, Bhattacharjee opines, culturally mutated to acquire new forms and features in a different cultural context. To amplify this "transcultural dispersion of Gothic" (181), some Asian Gothic texts have been discussed. The last article in the second section by Krushna Dande describes the idea of terror in Liu Cixin's science fiction writings.

All the essays in this well-planned volume offer distinctive views on horror, and in doing so, present strains of critical ideas which may be developed to investigate the concept of horror in innovative ways. Though the theoretical perspectives discussed in the book are very appropriate, there is one critical lens which is not addressed by the editors and this relates to the pedagogic dimension to horror studies. In an article entitled "The unlearning: Horror and transformative theory" Michael A. Arnzen amplifies the critical issues associated with teaching horror narratives in the classroom. He explains the "pedagogical function" (Arnzen) of horror fiction focusing on the behavioural responses of the learners in the classroom space. Arnzen's theoretical views of horror can be explored to study the impact of horror fiction of the Global South on the psyche of the students. Apart from a few typographical errors (cf. p.57, 65), the book is thematically and theoretically well-organised. The front cover design contains a picture of a black and barren tree against a semi-dark background. This image appropriately describes the theme of horror by evoking cinematic representations of terror narratives in which barren trees and bleak settings are used to create an aura of fear. On the whole, this book is bound to generate interest among the academics and the research scholars working in the area of horror studies.

**Arnab Kumar Sinha**
**University of Burdwan, India**
**Email: arnab.ks@gmail.com**

**Work Cited**

Arnzen, Michael A. "The unlearning: Horror and transformative theory." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, vol. 1, 2008.