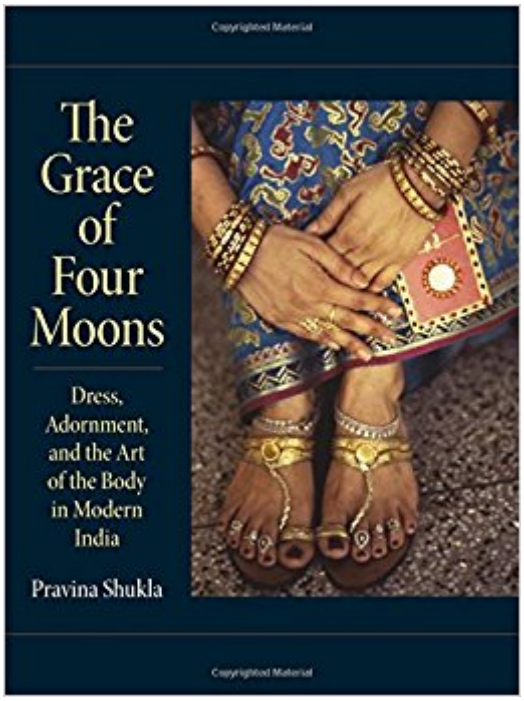
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The Grace Of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment, And The Art Of The Body In Modern India (Material Culture)



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Synopsis

Because clothing, food, and shelter are basic human needs, they provide excellent entries to cultural values and individual aesthetics. Everyone gets dressed every day, but body art has not received the attention it deserves as the most common and universal of material expressions of culture. The Grace of Four Moons aims to document the clothing decisions made by ordinary people in their everyday lives. Based on fieldwork conducted primarily in the city of Banaras, India, Pravina Shukla conceptualizes and realizes a total model for the study of body artÃ¢â ¬â •understood as all aesthetic modifications and supplementations to the body. Shukla urges the study of the entire process of body art, from the assembly of raw materials and the manufacture of objects, through their sale and the interactions between merchants and consumers, to the consumer's use of objects in creating personal decoration.

Book Information

Series: Material Culture

Hardcover: 528 pages

Publisher: Indiana University Press; First Edition edition (January 17, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0253349117

ISBN-13: 978-0253349118

Product Dimensions: 7 x 1.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,470,263 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #40 inÃ Â Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Weddings > Gown #818 inÃ Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales > Folklore #852 inÃ Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales > Fairy Tales

Customer Reviews

In this unique and fascinating volume, the author calls the realm of her concern 'body art,' which is intended to denote all aesthetic modifications and supplementations to the body. Using rich firsthand interviews and information from modern India, folklorist Shukla (Indiana Univ.) traces the art of the body through the production of saris, bangles, and other goods and commerce and shopping, both of which are the arena of men. From this point, the author interviews individual women on personal adornment and finishes her study with a discussion of body art in the life cycle, with particular reference to weddings. For folklorists and cultural anthropologists, this is a treasure

trove of information. For students of religion, it provides the material reference to the system of beliefs. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All levels/libraries.Choice, September 2008 (Choice 2008-01-00)"For folklorists and cultural anthropologists, this is a treasure trove of information. For students of religion, it provides the material reference to the system of beliefs.... Highly recommended." Ã¢â ¬â •Choice, September 2008 (Choice 2008-01-00)"The Grace of Four Moons provides a wealth of information about clothing and jewelry as an outlet for women seeking freedom of expression in India, while staying with a traditional framework." Ã¢â ¬â •India Currents Magazine, June 18, 2008 (India Currents Magazine 2008-01-00)"The book is skillfully organized, written in a clear, jargon-free, unpretentious style... and it is an outstanding first work by a most promising young scholar." Ã¢â ¬â •Charles G Zug III, Journal of Folklore Research, October 15, 2008 (Charles G Zug III Journal of Folklore Research 2008-01-00)"Pravina Shukla refines folklore scholarship and its study of material culture through her pioneering work on women and their body art." Ã¢â ¬â •William Ferris, co-editor of Encyclopedia of Southern Culture (William Ferris, co-editor of Encyclopedia of Southern Culture)"Shukla's book will stand as one of the benchmarks for future material culture scholarship." Ã¢â ¬â •Gerald Pocius, author of A Place to Belong (Gerald Pocius, author of A Place to Belong)"Well-researched and well-produced, The Grace of Four Moons is a welcome addition to the scholarly canon for a wide range of academic as well as more popular objectives." Ã¢â ¬â •Western Folklore, 69.1, 2010 (Western Folklore 2010-01-00)

"Shukla's book will stand as one of the benchmarks for future material culture scholarship." --Gerald Pocius, author of A Place to Belong "Pravina Shukla refines folklore scholarship and its study of material culture through her pioneering work on women and their body art." --William Ferris, co-editor of Encyclopedia of Southern Culture

I received this product on time and in very safe packaging. Cutting a watermelon was the first opportunity to use it.It sliced through the whole melon easier than any product I've owned before. Can't beat that. I'm happy. just fine. i think it is very good , very kind and the best seller. as the price.

The Grace of Four Moons' subtitle promises (and delivers!) an exploration of dress and adornment in modern India. The author's discussion is engaging and well-written putting her into dialogue with dress scholars such as Valerie Steele and Joanne Eicher. The book is beautifully illustrated, scholarly, and written in accessible language making it a `must read' for anyone interested in how people everywhere communicate through their appearance. In writing this ethnography of dress,

Shukla provides a model for those concerned with material culture in general and dress in particular. Designers, curators, folklorists, and anyone who enjoys learning about the rich possibilities of dress and adornment will find this book a fascinating read.

Pravina Shukla's The Grace of Four Moons: Dress, Adornment and the Art of the Body in Modern India is an elegantly written, yet accessible text that documents everyday art of and on the bodies of her collaborators in Banaras, India. This book not only documents and elaborates individual case studies, but envelopes them in a larger meta-study of the way in which scholars have (and have not) approached the study of body art as a simultaneous reflection of self and community.This ethnographic text rooted in Folkloristics, illuminates how choices of individual "adornment" in Banaras become integrated into the different layers of individual life processes and culturally rooted aesthetic-frames from which generalizable principles for the study of body art across disciplines and the globe become abundantly clear. Readers will see that the individuals involved are not those who choose to adorn themselves. The research frames comes to include, the families of the women being featured, the makers of jewelry, the salesmen, as well other social and consumer networks that all relate back to the object and radiate outward to include national and global markets, which implicitly integrate notions of the interconnected "local and global" into the study of individual creativity. The integrated focus of this book brings together the dynamics of individuals-as-artists (of varying sorts whether physical craftsmanship or the art of assemblage) with the objects that they "speak" through, as well as the lenses through which beholders "see" through and read out culturally, regionally, gendered, aged, and class based messages.This text highlights the hallmarks of folkloristic scholarship that is the focus on individuals as artists, and ability to document tradition and variations within parallel systems of production. This study does not focus on a single women, but multiple women, enacting their realities through material culture in different creative ways--India is by no means demographically homogenous, and we can implicitly read this discourse of regional and cultural diversity out of this text. One of the key elements in this text is the notion of choice. While privilege and caste might bring certain option to the table, the participants here shape their lives of their own volition, choosing each day how to represent themselves, on their own terms to the worlds in which they live. However, choice is also modified by implications of the larger social and cultural systems in which these women live, such as the influence of Hindu religious beliefs and the popularity of contemporary Bollywood films. Reader are able to see the ways in which these larger social phenomena become part of the discourses of the self in India, as they would in any modern, media saturated society.More explicitly, Dr. Shukla creates explicit dialectics between

contexts of production and display through use, which are brought together in a unique social and cultural contexts. Readers can see the way in which personal aesthetics are both individual and cultural, as part of intertwined discourses of the self as produced by a series of participants--jewelry and sari makers, knowledgeable vendors, experienced customers as well as the ultimate factor, personal preference. Where women appear to be the focus, we see the interchange between men who make saris, jewelry and assemble bangle sets, and women who create personal assemblages to adorn their bodies are active, mutually constitutive participants in this larger process of self-adornment in India. This perspective is clearly articulated by the way in which the chapters flow, as displaying and wearing body art in this context is prefaced first by the processes of making and buying it.This is the perspective that has ultimately been missing from previous studies of dress and adornment. It is at the intersection between contexts where function and meaning gain powered as they are obscured, contested, and ultimately realized. It is the art-object's movement through these places and spaces that facilitates its meaning, which culminates on the wearers body in an intimate microanalysis arising from the interactions that negotiate social and personal aesthetics and expectations--display is however, but one stage in the life of these objects. Through the explication of similar objects in multiple contexts ranging from stages of production, consumption, and display, one sees the convergence of forms in the special context of the wedding. Readers get the range of everyday choices, and the specialized context of wedding attire, which includes the rearticulating of everyday types of art-objects (saris, bangles, and other jewelry) in a ritual context, heightening their relative meanings.In these spaces between contexts, which are linked through art-objects, interactions between the images of real people become qualified by a person's interactions with the ideal images of gods that pervade Hindu culture, adding yet another qualifying layer from which to modify the meanings of what outsiders might consider simple artifacts.The author makes nuanced distinctions between what people bring to and take away from their "home" locations, who they are, and what sorts of resources (for instance, financial and cultural capital) they have at their disposal to adorn their bodies to illustrate the utter complexity of often disregarded everyday adornment. She chooses to focus on individual case studies of women in Banaras with comparable resources in order to highlight diversity among rather than between social groups. A focus across between casts would only reaffirm social disunity without illuminating the nuances of personal expression, which allow the reader to experiences these women as agents of their own identity making, rather than solely products of their castes. This is not a study of India, this is the story of multiple Indian women as individual artists living within differentially connected or disconnected social networks that in-turn influence their personal aesthetic choices.Implicitly readers are able to understand, that while

adornment is part of the creative repertory of each of the women that are part of this larger story, it is not their only or preferred creative outlet. The text by no means claims that these women's worlds area defined by dress or confined by their bodies, rather Dr. Shukla points to accompanying examples such as outside professions and domestic food preparation as parts of a larger body of creative opportunities in which these women assert their own tastes and make beautiful things in their own lives.Within this text readers begin to experience a vocabulary-of-dress as part of a communicative system, that much like verbal communication, both gives and receives messages, and in each interaction modifying the subsequent exchange. This discourse of body art is therefore active rather than stagnant, constantly being rethought and reevaluated through agents. This is not a book about how all Indian women dress and have always dressed (as essentializing discourse of static adherence to "traditional norms") but it is about current, living women expressing themselves through their body art now.The author complicated the notions of display by highlighting culturally defined norm of both seeing and being seen in this area in India. Being seen and seeing become complimentary, reciprocal activities. The role of beholder is a culturally embedded phenomenon as well as an experience between individuals who share a sign system. Readers are also allowed to enter that relationship, although mediated by time and space, through beautiful photography we are allowed to make out own assessments--to create our own discourse about the art under discussion.Throughout the text there is a wonderful sense of empowerment, where women are controlling their personal aesthetics and in essence expressing to the participants in their world. "This is how you may view me today." This implied through references the way in which gaze may be turned inward, as women's choices affect how they want to be seen and how they see themselves. At the same time, the reader may understand that not all choices are made to attract gaze, a women may want to distance herself from her husband or family and this chooses an aesthetic to detract gaze from her body (337).Here we are looking at dress and the body as composite parts of a culturally and socially embedded semiotic system of understanding mobilized through tangible realities of color, texture, length, fabric, and pattern etc. We are shown the relationship of the individual simultaneously engaging with their own trade, aesthetics, and social role, with other individuals in roles of, producer, seller, and audience as a series of cultural mediators.In The Grace of Four Moons, the author allows us to see that in terms of notions of beauty and art, objects are not where notions of aesthetics begin, but rather where they end. They reflect deeply held personal and cultural beliefs of life, beauty and the production of identity. Terms like "vanity" "modesty" "hygiene" "style" "creativity" "public" and "private" merge onto a continuum of the relative values of personal aesthetics. These elements, positioned relative to the body, then

move with the body through geographic contexts, and in their movement, we may see how art becomes laminated on the body to express how an individual becomes situated in and between spaces potentially indicating both physical and social transitions. This perspective illuminates how one may study clothing and body art in diasporic contexts where concepts of home become by force or choice, relocated.What is most important about this book is the way any reader or researcher working on body art can seamlessly integrate their work in the this multi-part model synthesized here. This is not a work about India, or how Indian women adorn their body, it is a comprehensive model for the study of body art across the world that emphasizes the complexity of self-adornments and how in temporary, transitory and permanent ways becomes simultaneously intertwined in multiple social, personal and economic contexts. By connecting discussions of micro contexts on the body and in the closet, and macro contexts of regional and national trade and commerce, this text shows readers how body art not only allows individuals to enact identities based on social expectations, but to simultaneously recalibrate those enactments in the face of personal desires and social change.-Rachel GonzalezDoctoral StudentDepartment of Folklore & EthnomusicologyDepartment of AnthropologyIndiana University-Bloomington

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