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VATUK, VED PRAKASH. *Studies in Indian Folk Traditions*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979. 221 pages. Hardcover Rs 55.

Studies in Indian Folk Traditions is a very interesting collection of nine essays that were written by Ved Prakash Vatuk (one is co-authored by Alan Dundes and four are co-authored by Sylvia Vatuk). These essays were written between 1966 and 1974 and appeared in scholarly journals such as *Asian Folklore Studies*, *The Journal of American Folklore*, *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *The Journal of South Asian Literature*, and *The International Journal of Addictions*. The essays cover a broad range of topics in the folklore and folklife of India. Vatuk's motivation for these studies is summed up in the opening essay entitled "Method and Interpretation in the Study of Folklore in India-A Comment." Vatuk states that the "field of folklore scholarship in India is characterized . . . by a number of basic defects which call into question the usefulness of much if, not all, of the published literature, either for informing the reader as to the actual nature of the oral literature of village India, or for drawing conclusions of a theoretical or historical nature . . . Inadequate field-data collection methods and improper handling of the raw folklore material appear to mark much of Indian folklore scholarship . . . In general, Indian folklore scholarship seems out of touch with the developments of folklore scholarship in other parts of the world." (1-2). This unfortunate situation has been somewhat corrected in recent years with the work of trained folklorists such as Stuart Blackburn and Brenda Beck. Vatuk's own efforts have also been very influential in this recent trend toward the application of rigorous scholarly methodologies to field data from India.

In "Method and Interpretation in the Study of Folklore in India-A Comment", Vatuk points out a number of the ways he feels Indian scholars have not used proper methodologies. He points to inadequate field work, some of which is focused on reminiscences and memories rather than on field transcriptions and descriptions of the context. Some of the poor methodologies are the result of a cultural bias against the artistry of folk traditions. Many Indian editors have also "purified" the materials that they have collected and have lost the village dialects entirely in their "transcriptions." Vatuk concludes this essay with the exhortation that "a basic change in attitude and the instilling of devotion to principles of objective scientific investigation would go very far to ameliorate the conditions I have pointed out in this paper" (12).

Two of the essays focus on the intricacies of the metrics employed by folk artists. In "Poetics and Genre-Typology in Indian Folklore," Vatuk quotes several Indian authors who claim that there is no system of metrics in Indian folksongs or in other types of folk poetics and then demonstrates why they are wrong. Vatuk surveys a

number of folk genres (folksongs, riddles, and proverbs) in which he feels there is a close relationship between content and style. In "Some Characteristic Meters of Hindi Riddle Prosody" (co-authored by Dundes), a more detailed study is presented to illustrate the complex metrical patterns used in oral performances of riddles. Vatuk and Dundes clearly demonstrate that the oral vernacular poetics are as varied as the formal Sanskrit literary poetics. This fine article also discusses the uses of riddles in India, gives many examples of the contexts in which riddling takes place, and provides explanations of the meaning of the riddles in their particular social contexts.

Three essays deal with particular types of traditional performances. In "The Anthropology of *Sang-A* North Indian Folk Opera" Ved Vatuk and Sylvia Vatuk provide a very interesting discussion of the performances of the musical plays themselves, background information about the training and composition of the traveling troupes of players, and the reasons for the decline of such troupes in recent years. In "*Malhor*. Type of Work Song in Western Uttar Pradesh, India", Vatuk describes this work song that is peculiar to the sugarcane field workers. The workers take turns singing a series of couplets to the cadence of the work. The performance setting is clearly described and examples of the different types of subject matter dealt with in the songs are provided. In "The *Bhajnopadeshak* as an Agent of Social Change", Vatuk again presents an interesting description of a type of folk performance. *Bhajnopadeshak* songs are very particular ones performed to make some sort of social or moral point. They are sung by trained social activists who have dedicated their lives to the process of social change. The songs and the contexts of their performance are clearly described in this fine article.

One of the articles co-authored by Sylvia Vatuk is an interesting contextual study of seven multiforms of the Cruel Stepmother motif (T-418) in ballads, songs, and folk drama productions in western Uttar Pradesh. There is a short discussion of previous scholarship dealing with this motif but the main focus of this article is a discussion of the motif in the context of Indian society using the seven examples. This analysis brings out some very interesting aspects of the illicit relationships that are peculiar to the Indian cultural context.

The remaining two essays (which were also co-authored by Sylvia Vatuk) are not as interesting or as well written as the other ones. "System of Private Savings among North Indian Village Women" is a case study of the financial arrangements among women in a village in western Uttar Pradesh. This essay is little more than a description of a particular economic arrangement in the context of a village sociological system and seems a bit out of place in this book of folkloristic studies. "*Chatorpan*. A Culturally Defined Form of Addiction in North India" also seems a bit out of place in this collection. The discussion is not very interesting until toward the conclusion of the paper where this type of sugar addiction is described as something of a folk explanation for anti-social behavior in general.

This fine collection of essays is worth reading for a number of reasons. Vatuk applies his knowledge of literary poetic metrics very skillfully to the study of oral folk poetics. The sociological and contextual analyses of the various types of Indian folklore are clearly presented and well illustrated with examples. The discussions are not overly technical and should be of interest to a general audience.

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