

INDIA

LUTGENDORF, PHILIP. *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmacaritmānas of Tulsidas*. A Philip E. Lilienthal Book. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. xvi+469 pages. Glossary of names, bibliography, index, illustrations. Hardcover US\$48.00; ISBN 0-520-06690-1.

The *Rāmacaritmānas* is a sixteenth-century retelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic. It is perhaps the most influential religious text of the Hindi-speaking heartland, and its influence extends far beyond. In Oriya-speaking villages on the border of Madhya Pradesh, the term "*Rāmāyaṇa*" is reserved exclusively for performance genres of the literary Hindi text of Tulsidās; Oriya performance genres are distinguished by the term *Rāmlilā*, whether or not they take on dramatic form (FLUECKIGER 1991, 47-48).

The strong emotional appeal of the *Rāmacaritmānas* is difficult for a Westerner to appreciate simply by reading the bound volumes on library shelves, for the epic was composed to be performed, and it is through performance that Tulsidās's text comes to life. This is the "life" that Philip Lutgendorf so masterfully captures in this volume, through beautiful photographs, rich ethnographic descriptions, and historical analyses of three contemporary performance genres of the Tulsī text: *pāṭh* (recitation), *kathā* (formal recitation and exposition), and *rāmlilā* (dramatic enactment). Lutgendorf approaches each genre through a performance lens which assumes that performance does not "simply enact a preexisting text. [Rather] performance is the text in the moment of its actualization . . ." (FABIAN 1990, 9).

The genre of *pāṭh*, "recitation" (chapter 2), itself covers a wide spectrum of styles, some performed by individuals, others by families, and still others by many people in large-scale rituals (one of which involves 108 Brahmin male reciters [page 80ff.]). The entire *Mānas* is often recited in a thirty-day cycle by individuals and families as part of their personal worship and devotion (*pūjā-pāṭh*), whereas the nine-day or "unbroken" recitation (*akhaṇḍ pāṭh*) is characteristic of public performance. Lutgendorf gives living form to each *pāṭh* style through ethnographic descriptions of specific recitation events, the richness of which cannot be conveyed in an overview like this. He contextualizes the *pāṭh* tradition in the framework of Puranic recitation, whose rewards are *phalśruti*, "fruits," obtained less through understanding the sacred word than through reciting and listening to it.

Perhaps the most interesting *pāṭh* style is one the author stumbled upon in the serendipitous way that often characterizes fieldwork. The style has no indigenous name, and traditional scholars of the epic as well as Lutgendorf's high-caste informants dismissed it as something only "uneducated people do," and therefore something unworthy of study. The style, which Lutgendorf calls "*Mānas* singing," is performed in informal settings by groups of men who meet on a regular basis to sing not only out of devotion but also for companionship and entertainment. The melodies in which the epic is sung relate to the Hindu calendrical cycle; each season has its typical "moods" and associated melodies. "The singing groups use the *Mānas* as the primary text on which to build performances in seasonal styles, embellishing the text with lines from folksongs to create an improvised composite piece that is at once expressive of the epic story and evocative of the seasonal mood" (101). This style of epic singing/recitation is also common among both men and women in the Chhattisgarh region of Madhya Pradesh where I have conducted folklore fieldwork. Because the style has no indigenous "name," it was difficult for Lutgendorf to know how or where to categorize it. He includes it in the chapter on *pāṭh*, but I would suggest that a style of this sort in which singers develop the *bhāv*, "emotion," of particular scenes and verses, is closer to

the style of *kathā*, “text and exposition.”

Lutgendorf strongly emphasizes the *emergent* character of *Mānas* performance. The shifting forms and meanings of the epic are dependent not only upon immediate, carefully laid out performance contexts, but also upon the historical contexts in which they have developed. Lutgendorf has engaged in painstaking historical research from both written and oral Hindi sources to provide this context for each genre under consideration. The emergence of *pāṭh* recitation as a genre available to nonprofessionals, for example, is closely related to the advent of the printing press and the consequent availability of inexpensive editions of the *Mānas*.

The second major performance genre of the *Mānas*, *kathā* “recitation with exposition,” is the focus of chapters 2 and 3. Lutgendorf asserts that it is as audiences to *kathā*, performed by highly trained male professionals, that the “majority of devotees, urban and rural, literate and illiterate, have for the past four centuries come to know and love the epic” (115). *Kathā* is “slow, systematic, storytelling recitation, interspersed with prose explanations, elaborations, and homely illustrations of spiritual points” (115). Again, emphasis is placed on, and examples are given of, the flexible, shifting dynamics of this performance genre. Lutgendorf wisely chooses to provide us with only selective transcriptions of *kathā* performances, but with detailed descriptions of the performers, their training, and the performance settings; for, again, the life of the *kathā* lies not in the printed word but in performance.

A significant contribution of Lutgendorf’s analysis of both *kathā* and *rāmlilā* is its articulation of an indigenous understanding of exposition and commentary. The *vyas* performer of *kathā* perceives the text to provide its own commentary (243); his role is to “evoke, celebrate, *realize*, the text” (244). Lutgendorf suggests that it is the *enacted* text, the *rāmlilā* (chapter 5), that is perhaps the ultimate commentary, elaboration, and realization in this Vaishnava sense. This discussion illustrates most clearly what it is that performance “does,” what is created through performance.

The author first contextualizes *rāmlilā* performances in the *rasik* devotional and meditative practice current in Tulsīdās’s time, an innovative juxtaposition for Western Rāma scholarship. The *rasik* tradition peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the *rāmlilā* developed into its current form. Lutgendorf suggests that the “frequency of verbal icons and tableaux in the *Mānas* can be better understood in the context of . . . [these religious practices], especially the role-playing exercises, which not only aimed at a visualization of scenes verbally crafted by poets but sought to effect the practitioner’s entry into them” (313). Under the patronage of the Banaras royalty and with the guidance of their *rasik* advisors, “what began as a play was transformed . . . into a city and kingdom not only reimagined but physically transformed into an enduring ideological statement” (321). With this historical background, the rest of the *rāmlilā* analysis focuses on this grand, thirty-day Banaras *rāmlilā* tradition, with contrastive descriptions of local neighborhood performances.

The last chapter begins with a consideration of the text’s “meaning” and of the often controversial (at least in the West) question of its social and spiritual “message.” Various readings of these passages are given by Indian and Western scholars, traditional apologists, and a few “common” disciples. The performative lens of the earlier chapters, which would seem to maintain that these meanings are created in the text *performed*, is temporarily lost in the author’s own textual (albeit insightful) exposition. Lutgendorf ends his study, however, with a return to the performed text in innovative settings, such as the television and cassette industry, and, perhaps most significantly, its appropriation by religiopolitical movements in their call for a return to the golden-age *Ramraj*. The Ayodhya religious-political controversy is still unfolding, but readers

of this book, through their understanding the "life" of the *Mānas* tradition in northern India, will be better prepared to contextualize some of the relevant issues.

Lutgendorf's field study of *Mānas* performance is situated in the city of Banaras, the "city of Tulsi," the heartland of Hindu orthodoxy. This rather unique context (and the elite, male Hinduism and dominant discourse of his informants) is reflected in the genres that Lutgendorf surveys and the indigenous perspectives that he offers (with the possible exception of the "*Mānas* singing" style). One wonders where the women are and what their perspectives might be. How do they experience and perform Tulsi-dās's Rāma story; do their wedding songs, *maṇḍali* (group singing), and other performance genres suggest alternative understandings? Although women and low-caste Banarsis participate in various audiences of all three performance genres, their own performance genres deserve the kind of intensive study that Lutgendorf has devoted to *pāṭh*, *kathā*, and *rāmlīlā*. But, as he would say, "That is outside the limits of this *kathā*" (439). *The Life of a Text* is a rich, lively, and definitive study of *Mānas* performance in the heartland; the exploration of its performance on the outer social and physical boundaries is left to others.

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TEIWES, HELGA. *Kachina Dolls: The Art of Hopi Carvers*. Historical photographs by Hanna Forman. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991. xvi+160 pages. Photographs, color plates, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$29.95; ISBN 0-8165-1226-4.

Almost everyone has had the experience of buying a folkcraft item as a memento of a trip. By purchasing the item we hope that memories of our visit will attach to it, so that it can serve as a type of instrument for evoking reminiscences of the place we have been to. This being so, the most suitable souvenir is one that bears something of the distinctive nature of the area where it was made; with an ordinary, commonplace item the association between the item and the trip is weaker, and it loses its ability to stir our memory.

What sort of item is it that expresses the distinctive character of a place? To answer this question it is best to consider the type of folkcraft usually bought by people when they travel. Regardless of personal tastes, the favorite choices are generally craft items that are more or less traditional in nature. The more traditional the craft item is, the less likely that it can be imitated in any other place. Traditionality, therefore,