

Taken as a whole, the volume is remarkably successful in presenting us with the rich and fascinating spiritual world of the Altaic peoples, a spiritual world that has not only maintained itself in Central Asia, but also radiated far-reaching cultural influence to adjacent lands.

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### INDIA

FLUECKIGER, JOYCE BURKHALTER and LAURIE J. SEARS, editors. *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia*. Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia No. 35. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, 1991. x+161 pages. Cloth US\$26.95; ISBN 0-89148-062-5. Paper US \$14.95; ISBN 0-89148-063-3.

Taken together, the scholarship in the seven short essays contained in this volume questions the boundaries between categories often assumed to be separate: South Asia and Southeast Asian performance traditions, written and oral texts, classical and local elements, performers and audience. These essays, preceded by a helpful introduction by Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears, grew out of a panel discussion at the Association of Asian Studies in 1986. The volume's virtue lies in how it juxtaposes material in a manner that broadens notions of the relationships between performance and fixed texts from two narrative traditions: Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa.

The scholarly apparatus and introduction by Flueckiger and Sears direct the reader away from traditional philological methods of viewing texts and towards the perspectives of discourse analysis, scholarship on orality, and performance-oriented approaches. Even the transliteration policy highlights their theoretical stance: although names of specific textual versions (such as the Malay *Hikayat Seri Rama*) appear in italics, the editors do not italicize "Rāmāyaṇa" and "Mahābhārata" in order to emphasize that they denote flexible traditions, rather than the fixed texts envisioned by the classical Indological tradition. The introduction identifies common questions that the essays explore: "What do performers and audiences mean when they identify something as 'Ramayana' or 'Mahabharata'? How do they conceive of texts? What are the boundaries of the texts?" (1). Different contributors address these questions in different ways, but the overall endeavor challenges the generally assumed dichotomous relationship between text and performance.

In India and Southeast Asia written texts have existed for centuries, as have oral performances, but the precise interactions between them vary. Some performances entail the extremely accurate presentation of verses from written texts, as Blackburn shows in his analysis of the place of Kampan's Tamil text in the Kerala leather puppet tradition in "Epic Transmission and Adaptation: A Folk Ramayana in South India." Yet even when a text has this much control over content, the performers mediate between and innovate around the fixed text, adding improvisational commentary, frames that shape how listeners interpret certain verses, and legends about Kampan that make him seem closer to the audience than the official biography of a court poet would imply. The situation is even more complex in Mahābhārata performance in Java,

where classical texts, court culture, local puppeteers, and modern academics have influenced performance patterns in a number of different ways during the last fifty years, as Sears shows in "Javanese Mahabharata Stories: Oral Performances and Written Texts." The Javanese court, which had been a prestigious center of written tradition for shadow theater for centuries, began court schools in the 1920s to teach periodic "upgrading" sessions for local puppeteers, although the sessions were based on the teaching of techniques rather than reading texts. In contrast, the present-day colleges of performing arts have emphasized the reproduction of fixed texts.

Performance traditions maintain a complex balance between a commitment to particular fixed pieces and a desire to link the text to local audiences. Mary Zurbuchen's essay "Palm Leaf and Performance: The Epics in Balinese Theater" demonstrates how Mahābhārata shadow puppet theater mediates between the prestige of verses in the archaic literary language called Kawi (Old Javanese) and the immediacy of contemporary linguistic usage through performances where a manuscript line is read in Kawi, followed by a paraphrase in modern Balinese. In Philip Lutgen-dorf's "Words Made Flesh: The Banaras *Rāmlīlā* as Epic Commentary," he explores the notion of a performance as a commentary on verses from the Hindi *Rāmcaritmānas*. The introduction of dialogue composed under the supervision of court expounders of the text, as well as the actors' intense religious discipline undertaken to identify with the drama's characters, creates a performance that retains the prestige of the venerated Hindi text while enabling the performers to go further than, or as they would say, deeper into, the text. Flueckiger's essay "Literacy and the Changing Concept of the Text: Women's Ramayana Mandali in Central India" shows how gender functions to domesticate the performance of a high-status text. Particularly striking is Flueckiger's account of a performance by women in Chhattisgarh focused upon the wife of the boatman who ferries Rāma across the Yamuna River. Although the female character appears nowhere in Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmānas*, these women see their performance as based on his portrayal of the episode of Rāma and the boatman; they are inspired by Tulsīdās but not limited by his text.

Wendy Doniger's "Fluid and Fixed Texts in India" and Amin Sweeney's two essays "Literacy and the Epic in the Malay World" and "Epic Purpose in Malay Oral Tradition and the Effects of Literacy" all reflect on the larger cultural dynamics at stake in Indian and Malay society that shape the purpose, form, and indigenous conception of texts. Doniger does an insightful analysis of the use of texts as diverse as the Ṛg Veda, the Guru Granth Sahib, and South Indian Kolam art in terms of four categories—fixed, fluid, written, and oral—in which she elucidates the multiple ways in which combinations of these characteristics can shape the reception and preservation of religious texts. Sweeney, in addition to providing a persuasive critique of the label "epic" when used to refer to certain Malay narratives, identifies and explores the implications of the distinction between stylized and non-stylized speech as a way of understanding the transmission of the products of significant cultural communication.

This volume has much to offer, both theoretically and in relation to performance traditions in different regions. Contributing to the recent growing interest in the history and diversity of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata traditions both in India and the United States, the volume under review expands scholarship about diverse tellings and raises a number of intriguing questions. By juxtaposing materials from northern India, southern India, Java, Bali, and Malaysia, the contributors add to scholarship on the specific logic and creativity of tradition. Although half the essays here have appeared in expanded or modified form in monographs since that time, this volume remains useful because the essays appear together in a way that both highlights the common issues

that they explore and makes the book appropriate for use in folklore courses. It is also recommended for those interested in South Asian and Southeast Asian civilizations, performance theory, and anthropology.

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RICHMOND, FARLEY P., DARIUS L. SWANN, PHILIPP B. ZARILLI, editors.  
*Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance*. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1990. xiv+487 pages. Maps, plates, tables, glossary, index. Hardcover US\$48.00; ISBN 0-8248-1190-9. Paper US \$24.94.

This book is a gold mine of information for laymen and theater specialists alike. I, who place myself in the former category, found something new and interesting on virtually every page. But I am familiar enough with Indian theater and with theater people in India and America to expect that even they will find a great deal in the book that they didn't already know. India has such a welter of different languages and subcultures, each with a long list of traditional theater forms, that no one, not even an Indian, is likely to be fully acquainted with all of them. I regard this book as indispensable for specialists in Asian theater, for courses on comparative Asian theater, for all university and college library reference shelves, and for Indologists of all disciplines.

Although the editors modestly state that the goal of the book is to introduce Western readers to the many dimensions of Indian theater, it really does much more than that. The book is truly encyclopedic in its coverage. Rather than give a simplified overview, genre by genre, the editors have chosen representative traditions to exemplify the tremendous range of forms Indian theater has assumed over the millennia. Each chapter is written by a specialist in a particular region or realm of tradition, and covers the whole range of topics necessary for an understanding of a particular theater tradition: actor training, scripts, costuming, staging, audience expectations, economics, the social standing and life-style of the artists, and whatever other characteristics distinguish that tradition. The result is a superb coverage of the material, with descriptions that are not only sophisticated but also easily accessible to the nonprofessional. For those who want more, the editors and authors have provided bibliographic guides to the technical literature on each genre.

The book is divided into six sections representing different categories of theater traditions. The book's general introduction does a fine job of identifying those features which all Indian theater traditions share, while the individual sections deal with sets of generic differences. Each section is introduced by one of the editors and provides an overview of a variety of the different genres in a particular category. The editors wisely define the categories by the "organizational impetus"—the primary intention behind how and why the genre is performed.

The first section covers India's classical theater tradition, which can be traced through literary documents back to 200 B.C. It primarily used Sanskrit, the court language of ancient India, but at all times incorporated colloquial languages as well, frequently within a single play. Rooted in the dramaturgical manual, the *nāṭashastra*, the early period of Sanskrit theater is known to us today through a handful of ancient