

TOPITSCH, Ernst

1958 Vom Mythos zur Philosophie [From myth to philosophy]. *Studium Generale* 11: 12-29.

Gaudenz DOMENIG
Zürich, Switzerland

TIBET

HIS HOLINESS THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA OF TIBET. *My Tibet*. Photographs and Introduction by Galen Rowell. A Mountain Light Press Book. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 161 pages, maps, color photographs, chronology of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, index. Cloth US\$35.00; ISBN 0-520-07109-3.

One may think that *My Tibet* is a farfetched choice for a review in this journal. It is, no doubt, neither a treatise on Buddhism nor a report of Tibetan folklore, it is a very personal document of Tibetan culture produced through the cooperation of one of the culture's most eminent representatives with a most sympathetic outside observer. This cooperation gives the book its character because many of the captions to the photographs are spontaneous comments by the Dalai Lama: memories and reflections elicited during a slideshow by Rowell.

The comments cover an astonishing array of aspects of Tibetan life, not just of the monks but also of the common people. In fact, they become a direct illustration of an idea expressed in one of the essays, *viz.*, that Buddhism is not the only philosophy to shape Tibetan culture, and that it itself is deeply shaped by the particular Tibetan environment. These comments are naturally short but their ideas are more extensively argued in the six essays. There the Dalai Lama explains in simple language the basic tenets of his thought, such as compassion, peace of mind, and happiness. He speaks of these states of mind as being the source for an all-embracing peace that also includes the environment. The essays reveal not only the author's gentle assuredness concerning his own culture but also a great amount of tolerance.

I hasten to say that the photographs are as essential to this book as the comments and that the combination of both is a most happy one. Rowell describes his own work as "participatory photography," saying that he wants to be part of the events he portrays and not simply their spectator (17). Whether his subjects are individuals, scenes from Tibetan life, or landscapes and wildlife, they all bespeak his own personal involvement without imposing his interpretation on the viewer. Quite to the contrary, they invite the viewer to make his own discoveries under the guidance of the comments and so they come alive within a wider cultural context. Such discoveries become richer and richer as the viewer or reader grows familiar with the book's style and message.

The message is peace and so it is quite fitting that it starts with the citation of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Dalai Lama in 1989. How this peace is to grow out of compassion for all sentient beings and of a sense of responsibility for the whole environment is the topic of the essays. Coming from a leader very much concerned for the culture of his people, this book's message is something like a comment to the concerns treated in this issue of *Asian Folklore Studies*. Seen from this angle, *My Tibet* is a document of how one can be deeply rooted in a culture, be confident and secure in this attitude, without becoming exclusive or judgmental towards other and different

cultures. The Dalai Lama's love and esteem for his culture is tangible on every page, but he also says that when he meets people he tries not to think of himself "as an Easterner or a Tibetan or a Buddhist, but simply as a human being who wants to exchange different ideas and experiences with other human beings" (33). This attitude is firmly grounded in his appreciation of Tibetan culture and yet does not attempt to use (real or assumed) cultural specifics to attain political or other selfish goals. From this point of view *My Tibet* certainly merits being meditated upon also by students of folklore, to help them avoid reducing folklore to a matter of national(istic) endeavor.

Peter KNECHT

INDIA

BLACKBURN, STUART H., PETER J. CLAUS, JOYCE B. FLUECKIGER, SUSAN S. WADLEY, editors. *Oral Epics in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. xi + 290 pages. Figures, tables, maps, appendix of performance features, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$40.00; ISBN 0-520-06324-4.

Although Blackburn acknowledges the importance of textual and textural features in defining Indian oral epics, he suggests they "are better understood as traditions, as transmissions of story and performance that create cultural identity for large regions and often support complex religious cults" (15). His comment indicates the orientation of this volume, the fruit of a 1982 conference on South Asian oral epics held at the University of Wisconsin, sponsored by the Social Science Research Council. In part one of the book, papers analyze specific epics; part two presents a useful reference guide to selected Hindi, Tamil, Chhattisgarhi, Rajasthani, Telugu, and Tulu oral epics.

The volume places oral epics within the contexts of both wider recent knowledge about the extent of this genre and new methodology. Until the 1960s most scholars assumed the performance of oral epics had become nearly extinct. Recent fieldwork, however, has uncovered many ongoing oral epic traditions, especially in South Asia. Further, because scholars have moved beyond older scholarship that sought to record "the" authoritative text, they have uncovered varying ways in which narrative incidents have been sung and enacted, framed or punctuated by ritual possession or clowning, generated from and intended for a variety of social contexts.

Blackburn's introduction argues that the usual definition of oral epics as narrative, poetic, and heroic must be expanded for South Asian materials to include both song as well as poetry and also female and non-martial heroes as well as male martial ones. Blackburn classifies South Asian epics as martial, sacrificial, or romantic. Thus, in addition to what is often considered oral epic, he includes a number of fascinating Indian oral traditions that focus upon the death and/or apotheosis of women (labeled "sacrificial epics") as well as those that celebrate the pursuit of love and individual achievement, often achieved in ways that threaten societal norms (labeled "romantic epics").

The next three papers discredit the idea of a single authoritative version of an Indian oral epic existing in isolation; instead, they demonstrate how oral epics emerge from social and performance contexts. Joyce Flueckiger's paper effectively contrasts two tellings of the Lorik-Canda epic in two different communities: in Uttar Pradesh the epic dramatizes the solidarity of a single caste (the Ahir) and its values, but in the Chhattisgarh region, Madhya Pradesh, the epic is identified with the whole region