

his vow he kills a fly that he has been holding, freeing himself to carry out his murderous plans. The story builds to a furious intensity as it recounts how one of the brothers has his throat slit on the temple steps, like a sacrificed chicken.

A contrasting tale from the third slot, "The Marriage of Muttuppaṭṭan," tells of a brahmin who marries two untouchable women, which Blackburn interprets as a fusion of opposite castes (144). But a closer look reveals more: a precipitous decline through the caste hierarchy and a clear call for ignoring caste distinctions. The brahmin (priestly) hero Muttuppaṭṭan botches a public recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Humiliated, he goes off and gains employment as a king's minister, announcing that he is kshatriya (warrior). After insolently insulting the king and being cursed in return, he joins his brothers in setting up a long distance trade in spices and jewelry, thereby embracing the caste duties of a vaishya (merchant). While traveling, he spies two Cakkiliyar (untouchable) women. To win their hand, he does the work of an untouchable, stitching a pair of sandals. In language reminiscent of cultural anthropology, Muttuppaṭṭan denounces hierarchical distinctions in a song whose refrain is "What is a caste? It's a category of the mind!" (202).

These three examples demonstrate how bow songs challenge the reified brahmanically-oriented understanding of Hinduism in Western scholarship. The story of Śāstā's birth shows an irreverence towards the gods not generally associated with Hindu devotional behavior. The account of the Tampimār reveals how the Nadars identify intensely with past heroes who were treated unjustly. It is truly, as Blackburn puts it, history "from the vantage point of the disadvantaged" (9). The story of Muttuppaṭṭan deconstructs the notion of caste. The bow songs, like other regional performance traditions with similarly unique and well-developed world views, reveal the diversity of Hindu tradition. Blackburn's translations and analysis enable us to appreciate the antiquity, sophistication, and richness of a so-called "little tradition" of India. There is little that is small about this tradition, except people's knowledge of it outside of Nāñcil Nāṭu.

One hopes that Blackburn will publish more about the bow song tradition, especially concerning the issue of gender. In several places he indicates the central role of female singers, possessed women dancers, and songs whose protagonists are women or goddesses. Although all three of Blackburn's translations concern male protagonists, they contain songs about special foods made for women's rituals (the Auvaiyār Festival), about the agony of childlessness and widowhood, and about the problems of women married to much older men.

This book contributes a great deal to the scholarship on South Asia. Folklorists and those in the field of performance studies will find Blackburn's analysis of folk motifs, delivery styles, and bards enlightening. Cultural anthropologists will discover a wealth of material about social relations, cultural values, and ritual symbolism in Nāñcil Nāṭu. Historians of religion will appreciate access to these little-known but significant religious texts.

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DELIÈGE, ROBERT. *Les Paraiyars du Tamil Nadu* [The Paraiyar of Tamil Nadu]. *Studia Instituti Anthropos*, 42. Nettetal/Germany: Steyler Verlag-Wort und Werk, 1988. xiii + 306 pages. Map, figures, tables,

bibliography, index. Paper DM 75.00; ISBN 3-8050-0205-X, ISSN 0570-3085. (In French)

The study of an Indian community, a caste or tribe, can be undertaken in two different ways, extensively or intensively. It is extensive if a community is studied in its whole geographical distribution, over a wide area. It is intensive if it is studied in depth in a village or small town, in its economic and social relation and intercommunication with other social groups in this particular locality.

The author of this book under review has chosen the second method of studying the Paraiyar, an untouchable Tamilian caste. His research was carried out at Devakottai, a fairly important town in Ramnad, the southernmost district of India. The section of the town in which the Paraiyar reside—apart from the other castes of the town, since the Paraiyar are untouchables and have to avoid polluting the higher castes—bears the name of Valghira Manickam and is more or less a self-contained village. Introduced by a Jesuit priest and assisted by a Tamilian interpreter of the carpenter caste (thus a little higher in social status), Delière and his wife were able to live for two years in close contact with the Paraiyar at Valghira Manickam and to get accepted first by the Christian Paraiyar community and finally also by its Hindu section.

The author is the first anthropologist to study a Christian Harijan caste community. For though officially Christian Paraiyar are not included among the "Scheduled Castes," they are actually treated as untouchables by the higher castes. For it is the higher castes which decide who is ritually impure and not the Indian Constitution. A change of religion does not make an untouchable ritually pure. For the higher castes a Paraiyar remains always a Paraiyar.

In the approved manner, the author first describes in his monograph the village of Valghira Manickam and its inhabitants, their daily life routine, their diet and housing and living conditions. In the second chapter he describes the village organization, its leadership and disciplinary arrangements, internal tensions and power struggles. In the third chapter the author discusses the ways the Valghira Paraiyar earn their living as brick makers, through occasional labor and seasonal field service.

In chapter four the author deals with the inner caste organization of the Paraiyar, and their relations with the other castes, whether of higher or lower status, and with other untouchable castes. The author also states his views about the problem of untouchability in general. Here, it appears to this reviewer, the author betrays only a slight familiarity with the problem of caste and untouchability in South India. This is not surprising as Delière is rather new to these unique social phenomena, which are moreover so intricate and complex that it requires years of study to become an expert in them. Besides, the author restricted himself more to the intensive study of one particular village only, while the problems of an untouchable caste like the Paraiyar—so widely spread over South India and in economic and social symbiosis with such a great variety of other castes and populations—cannot be dealt with adequately within the confines of a single village community as that of Valghira Manickam. The author also makes the mistake of seeing the untouchability problem as a purely Indian phenomenon, whereas it is a worldwide phenomenon, and as such not at all a purely religious or ritualistic one.

In chapter five the author deals with the crises of the individual life, first of marriage and family life, then of birth and infancy, and of inter-familial relations. As far as marriage and family customs are concerned, the author finds that the Valghira Manickam Paraiyar do not strikingly differ from the other South Indian castes.

In the last chapter, the sixth, the author finally describes the religious beliefs and

practices of the Paraiyar. At Valghira Manickam the majority consist of Christian converts, while the Hindu Paraiyar are in a minority. The Christian Paraiyar experience peculiar difficulties which result from their low social status in spite of the fact that the Christian faith does not permit the kind of avoidance and social discrimination which the Hindus practice. They, of course, justify it by their belief in *karma* and rebirth. In Tamilnad many Christians of higher caste, even the clergy, practice untouchability, which in modern times the Christian Harijans, especially the younger generation, find reprehensible, and rightfully so. Thus a number of Christian Paraiyar have left the Church and embraced Islam, as the Muslims promised them social equality and financial benefits of which the Harijans were deprived when they became Christians.

The author further describes the religious beliefs of the Christian and Hindu Paraiyar and shows that the Christian Paraiyar after all do not differ much from their Hindu counterparts. Since their instruction in the Christian religion is very rudimentary, and they are not welcome to take part in the religious life of the parish, they share the traditional beliefs of the Hindu Paraiyar, but give their old gods Christian names. Their ideas about death and after-life, morality, purity and sin, poverty and suffering are practically the same as those of the Hindu Paraiyar. Like the Hindu Paraiyar they firmly believe in the existence of evil spirits and in spirit possession. They exorcise these evil spirits through certain charismatic individuals who derive their power from the Virgin Mary (Arockyai Mary) or other saints, such as St. Anthony or St. Sebastian. The Hindu Paraiyar exorcise their evil spirits in a similar manner through magicians who get possessed by a stronger and benevolent spirit.

The folklorist, however, will not find much of interest in this monograph. The author has not included any myths, folktales and folksongs, riddles and proverbs in his otherwise very informative description of Paraiyar life in Valghira Manickam. We are especially grateful to him for this study of a Christian Paraiyar community because no such study has so far been published in India.

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RICHMAN, PAULA. *Women, Branch Stories, and Religious Rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text*. Syracuse, N. Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1988. xii + 273 pages. Tables, figures, bibliography, index. Hardcover US\$19.00; ISBN 0-915984-90-3.

In the introduction to his monumental translation of the *Pañcatantra* (1859), Theodor BENFEY, following A.L.A. LOISELEUR DESLONGCHAMPS, noted that a majority of the *apologues* in the text bore a family resemblance to Indo-Buddhist pedagogical literature. He therefore concluded that the stories of the *Pañcatantra* must have arisen in India because Indians were thoroughly accustomed to Buddhist educational storytelling in the form of parables and moral-ethical tales. While Joseph BÉDIER's *Les Fables* (1925) definitively put Benfey's (and his admirer Emmanuel G. COSQUIN's) larger diffusionistic theories to rest, the question of the relationship between Buddhist modes of storytelling and the general Indic pattern of moral-religious instruction through narrative still remains open. Had Benfey known Tamil, he may have cited *Maṇimēkalai*, the sixth-century Buddhist text discussed by Paula Richman in the book under