. . . the logos that is revealed in laughter is a controlling principle that exists to make sure things go out of control " (292). And further on, " It seems uniquely Indian that part of the deity's function should be to amuse " (365). And further still, " Comedy is an uncertainty principle. It proves relativity with each laugh . . . . In the world of comedy, absurdity itself is the logos " (376). I haven't the space to go into this, but there are potentially interesting implications for a fresh understanding of South Asian cosmologies and their relation to comedy, play, and so forth, were Siegel to develop and integrate these notions, and relate them to the work of David Shulman, Louis Dumont, Bruce Kapferer, and others. (I also might note in passing my own attempts to relate play to the idea of an uncertainty principle, in my *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events.*) As it is, like laughter itself, this book shakes up, fragments, and reorders experience on various levels. But also, like folly, the work is not informed by any sustained and sustaining argument.

In the Epilogue, one of the most amusing sections of this book, Siegel sets out in search of the comic tradition in presentday Delhi. This shift from the study of texts—of carefully crafted and bordered artifice—to the ongoing flow of life is instructive. Wherever he looks, Siegel is sent elsewhere in search of humor—to Bengal, Andhra, Kerala, the ' traditional village,' and so forth. The playful impulse, that most elusive and slippery of phenomena, is always the absent joker, who appears when least expected—the note on which the book ends.

I'm told that Siegel is at work on a book on Indian magic and magicians. He himself is no mean adept of textual sleight-of-hand—and the following tale is especially for him, with wishes that the coming book be as much fun as the present one. Once upon a time, when I was a youngster, an Indian magician named Kuda Bux came to perform at my family's resort hotel in Canada. Kuda Bux was billed as ' The Man With the X-Ray Eyes,' because with his eye sockets entirely stuffed and covered he would do anything a seeing person could, claiming that this art had taken him a decade of study in the high Himalayas. This trick of his fascinated and tormented us, but remained utterly elusive. Kuda fell ill and stayed with us a lengthy period. One afternoon we intruded on the privacy of his room and insisted then and there that he do his trick and read a text provided by us. We stuffed and smothered his eye sockets with fresh dough and swathed his entire head in cloths and towels, and in his lap we opened a Bible to a random page. He commented that the print was very small, raised his mummy's head, and with what I still hear as a grin in his voice, asked, " Could I have my spectacles, please? " Satiric? Humorous? Or . . . ?

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VAUDEVILLE, CHARLOTTE. *Bārahmāsā in Indian Literatures. Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literatures.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986. xv+139 pages. Glossary of Indian words, bibliography, index. Hardcover Rs. 70, ISBN 81–208–0185–7.

This work forms a crucial component of Vaudeville's ongoing exploration of vernacular literature in North India. Such work helps to provide a complementary perspective to the more usual understanding of Indian culture derived from the numerous studies of Sanskrit literature. Building on the work of K. Upadhyay, D. Zbavitel, and A. Nahta, she provides a textual study of the origins and transformations of *bārahmāsā* and a sampling of some of the most intriguing examples of the genre. The volume under review is an enlarged and revised English version of her book originally published in French titled *Les chansons des douze mois dans les littératures indo-aryannes* (1965).

The *bārahmāsā* genre consists of songs about the twelve months of the year. The most popular form within the genre is the *viraha-bārahmāsā*, in which the singer takes on the persona of a young woman separated from her lover; in such songs each of the seasonal changes of the year serve to intensify her torment. Compilations of North Indian folksongs collected in the last hundred years have consistently included large numbers of *bārahmāsās*. Related to these songs are a number of more literary examples of the genre which were popular in Indo-Aryan literatures from the fourteenth century onwards (32). It is such poems in old Mārvāṛī-Gujarātī, Old Bangālī, classical Avadhī, and Marāṭhī which are focus of Vaudeville's slim volume of translations, accompanied by a forty-four page introductory essay.

In Vaudeville's introductory essay, she seeks to reconstruct the development of the *bārahmāsā* genre. Assuming that " such songs are essentially women's songs and must have been composed by village women " (p. x), she speculates that the *bārahmāsā* theme was transformed into a literary genre by men who, nevertheless, maintained the female narrator. In her search for origins, Vaudeville devotes a good deal of her attention to the " scaled-down model " of the *bārahmāsā* called the *caumāsā*, song of four months, because she believes it to be the kernel around which the full-blown *bārahmāsā* developed. The *caumāsā* is invariably a *viraha-caumāsā*, a song detailing the suffering of a woman whose husband remains away during the four months of the rainy season, usually a conventionalized time for lovers' reunion. Vaudeville speculates that the *viraha-bārahmāsā* consists of a *caumāsā* preceded by an explanation of how separation occurred and followed by verses about the additional eight months. Vaudeville argues for origins of the genre in the western India, particularly Gujarat and Rajasthan. She also suggests that it most likely developed among the semi-nomadic tribe of Jādons (Yādavas), whose males leave their families for long periods of time in a manner which seems to match the portrayal of separation in the genre.

The *bārahmāsā* tradition possesses an intriguing diversity. As Vaudeville's translations show, eventually poets composed *bārahmāsās* all over North India, and even in the South Indian Maratha kingdom of Tanjore. Striking, however, is the remarkable diversity of content within what seems to be a highly structured form. Certain kinds of *bārahmāsās* come to function as mneumonic devices linking the various tasks of planting and harvesting to particular months of the year. Poems related to these in form serve to recall each religious festival within the annual cycle and how it correlates with a particular season. She even reports a *bārahmāsā* which tells of the conception and birth of a child. Jains apparently first saw the didactic potential of the genre. Taking up the *viraha-bārahmāsā*, they continued to portray a woman's torment due to separation from her husband, but he never returns because he has decided to renounce this world and undergo Jain *dikṣa* (initiation). This type of poem ends with the heroine's decision to renounce the worldly life as well. A contrasting type of transformed *viraha-bārahmāsā* is the Sufi version by Avadhī Muslin poets. They equate *viraha* with the Persian *'ishq*, a mortal torment bearing one to " a state of

vision or to absorption, after death, into supreme Beauty " (38). The speaker in such poems is male, rather than female, and the poem ends with his death, which is desired rather than tragic.

The larger part of Vaudeville's book contains translations of six *bārahmāsās* and two *caumāsās*, accompanied by the originals in devanagari script. Their limited number, unfortunately, prevents the reader from getting a full sense of their diversity. Nonetheless, she has chosen some of the most sophisticated and literary examples of the genre to translate. Of special interest to historians of religion is the Marāṭhī *Bārahmāsā-Varṇana* (translated by S. G. Tulpule for this volume), attributed to the wife of King Shahājī of Tanjore (1683–1710), which gives copious information about Hindu ritual practices appropriate for each month of the year.

Although Vaudeville's research on *bārahmāsā* is primarily textual, it will be of interest of folklorists. It provides material for a comparative study of literary and folk versions of the same genre. Nevertheless, the reader may find that Vaudeville has not explained precisely what the relationship between folk and literary examples of the genre has been. Both Vaudeville and T. N. Madan, who wrote the lucid foreward, describe the genre using adjectives such as " folk " or " rustic " and assume it to be a woman's genre at the village level. Yet the examples of the genre that Vaudeville chooses to translate are highly literary works. More work on the present day performance context of these songs might shed light on the genre. A few appropriate questions to consider might be: How are *bārahmāsās* transmitted from generation to generation? To what extent do the concerns in the poems actually reflect the real-life concerns and seasonal processes of the singer and her or his environment and to what extent has the content and natural description become highly stylized? Vaudeville's book will be of interest to South Asianists, folklorists, and scholars of comparative literature.

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IRAN

AMANOLAHI, SEKUNDAR and W. M. THACKSTON, transcription and translation. *Tales from Luristan (Matalyā Lurissu). Tales, Fables and Folk Poetry from the Lur of Bālā-Garīva.* With Notes on the Phonology, the Grammar of Luri and Luri-English Vocabulary. Harvard Iranian Studies, Volume Four. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Printing Office, 1987. xiii+248 pages. Bibliography, glossary. Paper US$19.95; ISBN 0–674–86780–8. Distributed by Harvard University Press.

Tales from Luristan is an excellent introduction to the language and folklore of this area of western Iran. The book consists of an introduction, which includes information on the collection of the materials, notes on the transcription and the poetry, a