

Among the fertility motifs she takes up rice and *dengke porngis* (plentiful fish), saying that these fertility motifs may comprise the idea of purification or have the magic meaning of "cool" in an indigenous form of expression. An example showing this aspect would be the rite where "at sowing, the seed rice is carried to the fields along with a twig of the waringing tree" (143).

As an instance of a temporal motif the author points to the way of speaking about two periods of existence for the individual soul, the first is while the soul stays in the body, the second when it lives in the spirit realms after death. And she sees the period of staying in the body as being divided into several stages by rites of passage.

The author has succeeded to show how much, in Toba Batak society, textiles are part of the women's realm, and how important they therefore are. With this, she has opened up a new field in the study of Toba Batak society.

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#### INDIA

ARCHER, WILLIAM G. *Songs for the Bride. Wedding Rites of Rural India*.

Edited by Barbara Stoler Miller and Mildred Archer. Studies in Oriental Culture, Number 20. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. Xi+181 pages. Map, illustrations, bibliography of the writings of William G. Archer, notes. Hardcover US\$27.50. ISBN 0-231-05918-3.

This is a thoroughly delightful and instructive book. It does credit to an old I.C.S. man of the traditional school who was not only an able administrator, but also a keen student of Indian art and culture. After many years of Indian Civil Service the author

had to leave India, as soon as India gained political independence, and return home. But he left his heart in India, for throughout his further life he wrote on Indian art and published a number of books, as the list of publications after his retirement shows.

*Songs for the bride* is a posthumous publication. The material for it was collected and written into a manuscript between the years 1940 to 1944, but its final revision was deferred until 1979. Unfortunately the author could not complete it, as he died in the same year. In 1982 the widow, Mildred Archer, requested Barbara Stoler Miller to prepare the manuscript for publication; she also wrote an appreciative Foreword.

*Songs for the bride* is a collection of marriage songs which Kayasth women in Bihar sing during weddings. The author was not content merely with a translation—in poetic form—of the songs. In fifty pages he gives first a detailed description of the wedding rites as the Kayasths perform them. (The author does not state whether Kayasth wedding rites conform closely to the marriage rites of other high Hindu castes, nor whether the marriage songs of the Kayasths differ from the marriage songs of the other castes in the region.)

The author's description of the Kayasth marriage rites is much enlivened and aptly illustrated by the accompanying songs, so much so that one would wish that Indian wedding rites should always be illustrated and explained by the songs with which the women accompany each rite. This could of course be better achieved by women observers, as the celebrating women might resent it if male observers listened to and noted down, their songs.

The Kayasths are "a high-ranking Hindu caste whose male members were traditionally employed as scribes and accountants. According to various census reports, they are usually landholders and members of "learned professions", such as clerks, schoolteachers, and civil servants" (172). Thus we can expect somewhat sophisticated texts, though Kayasth women, at least in the rural areas of Bihar, are not generally as highly educated as their menfolk.

The author unfortunately gives the English translation only and nowhere the original text in the vernacular. Thus it is impossible to check how faithful the translation is. The author's poetic rendering of the text might have more or less highly idealised the character and quality of the songs. The vernacular language is commonly quite forthright and prosaic, but an author who sees his subject through an idealised vision might be tempted to give his translation of the text a highly poetic form. W. G. Archer surely had a strong poetic sense which perhaps resulted in the conversion of a quite prosaic couplet into a highly poetic and pleasing verse! His favorable attitude towards Indians might excuse him for rendering a plain text of the marriage songs into a much superior poetic form.

From pages 101 to 169 the translation contains other than wedding songs in the strict sense. They are mostly songs which are rather loosely connected with marriage, either preceding or following it. Included are, further, songs recited by the women when a child is born or when women are grinding flour. But each kind of songs is given a short introductory explanation and is well annotated by footnotes which at the same time reveal the author's deep acquaintance with the rural culture of Bihar.

The book contains also thirteen pages with reproductions of wall-paintings, as they can be found in Kayasth houses in the rural areas of Bihar. The artists usually are the women of the house and the murals are painted whenever a wedding takes place.

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