

BECK, BRENDA E. F., PETER J. CLAUS, PRAPHULLADATTA GOSWAMI, and JAWAHARLAL HANDOO, editors. *Folktales of India*. Richard M. Dorson, General Editor. Folktales of the World. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987. Xxxi+357 pages. Notes, bibliography, index of tale types and motifs by story, index of tale types, index of motifs, general index. Cloth US\$29.95; ISBN 0-226-04080-1.

Folktales of India is one volume in the multi-volume (thirteen volumes to date) "Folktales of the World" Series published by the University of Chicago Press. This series was conceived by the late Richard Dorson as a vehicle for the publication of folktales collected from oral sources by contemporary fieldworkers using the high standards of modern fieldwork techniques in a wide variety of cultures around the world. The series has been of consistently high quality and has been an important resource for all people (scholars as well as non-scholars) who are interested in traditional narratives. There are several significant features of each volume in the series, such as the forward/introduction to each volume that discusses the history of folktale scholarship in the featured country as well as accompanying indices and notes which deal with the standard tale types and tale motifs represented in the collection. This latest volume upholds the high standards of the series and even surpasses its predecessors in some respects.

In *Folktales of India*, there are 99 tales collected from oral sources and translated by eighteen regional specialists. There are oral tales from remote villages as well as from urban centers from all over India. No single collection could hope to include all of the language and cultural traditions of the diverse peoples who live within the Indian borders but this collection does an excellent job of representing India.

The foreword by A. K. Ramanujan provides an excellent overview of the previous narrative collecting work in India. He points out the major problems with the collecting techniques used by the missionaries, travelers, and British officials who were responsible for the bulk of 19th century and early 20th century field collections. The lack of contextual information about the performance setting as well as the tendency to editorialize/bowdlerize makes analysis of the thousands of tales collected by the early collectors all but impossible. The editors of this fine volume have been very careful to provide information about the performance context as well as to translate directly without alterations to the text. The contextual notes and analyses of the individual tales are for the most part very well done.

Some scholars might very well classify some of the narratives included in this collection as myths rather than as folktales but there is no clear genre distinction within the Indian tradition itself. The editors have organized the tales very appropriately into sections that relate to the social relationships of the main characters (e.g. suitors and maidens, new brides and grooms, parents and children, and sisters and brothers), common forms of social interaction (e.g. domestic strife, moral virtue or its lack, etc.), and origin tales.

This collection sets a clear standard for future collections of oral tales from all corners of the Indian subcontinent. It is the type of book that can be enjoyed by all readers who love a well-told tale as well as by scholars of traditional narrative and scholars of India in general.

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