

- PANI, JIWAN. *Ravana Chhaya*. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, n.d. 35 pp., 13 black and white photos, appendix and map. Paper 12 Rs.
- THAKUR, S.S.S. Karyala, *Folk Theatre of Himachal Pradesh*. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, n.d., n.p. 21 black and white photos. Paper 20 Rs.¹

Two recent publications from the National Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi reflect the broad range of interest in Indian folk-drama: the unevenness of the editorial policy in these two publications is not usually found in the excellent journal published by that organization. The first illustrates the quality of editorial supervision.

Sri Jiwan Pani has served for some time as the assistant director of the National Sangeet Natak Akademi. Pani is himself from Orissa, and writes with knowledge, warmth and persuasion about a very nearly lost art form of that state; *ravana chhaya*, a form of leather shadow play.

Discovered in 1971 by a team of researchers headed by Pani, the performer, Kathinanda Das, and his stock of leather figures and his performing techniques, served as the basis for this carefully documented pamphlet.

The author discusses the variations of the then-known forms of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa and suggests that the Orissa style is exclusively one in which there are no articulated parts to the puppets. (Yet both Karalese and Karnatak forms do have non-articulated puppets as well.) Indeed, he refers to the Karnatak technique of "presenting at times a composite colorful scene depicted in one puppet-figure." (This reviewer has now identified well over six hundred such non-articulated figures which relate *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* in the Karnatak tradition.) The brief survey of Indian leather puppet styles identified by the author when this pamphlet was written lists only those four, of what has by now grown into six identifiable varieties in India: those of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, plus Tamil Nadu and another little documented form found in the village of Pinguli on the Goa-Maharashtra-Karnataka border.

There is a cursory geo-historical survey of leather puppetry throughout the world with a concentration of a comparison of the Javanese *wayang* particularly, since there has been such controversy over the origin of the Indonesian form and their relationships to those of India and China. The author offers the view that the study of current shadow-play techniques and conventions by a field-study approach rarely taken by scholars of Indian theater could illuminate many different relationships; those of India and Indonesia, those of Indian Sanskrit theatrical performances and dramatic literature. He suggests that performance methods and terminology of folk-theater forms may enlighten techniques of performance not clearly articulated in the *Natyasastra* or other theatrical treatises and may shed further light on the relationships to Southeast Asian shadow play traditions. He cogently argues possibilities of substantiating the existence of the leather shadow play form in ancient India and attempts to reinforce the theories advanced by Sanskritists Pischel, Winternitz and Lüders with respect to the antiquity of Indian shadow play as the precursor of shadow play in other parts of South Asia. Though he does not pursue his arguments into the forms found in Thailand, Cambodia or Malaysia, or for that matter, other parts of Indonesia than Jawa, he has laid some of the ground work for such a study by linguistic examples of technical terminology in Indonesian, Oriya and Sanskrit—sometimes readily accepted, at other times somewhat forced.

He relates the design forms of the Orissa puppets to those derived from Buddhist, Jaina and Vaishnavite influences, though he gives no examples, and proceeds to give historical evidence of the shadow play in these religions. He offers an interesting philosophical explanation of the name "ravana chhaya"—the shadow of Ravana—as contrasted to the possibility of calling the form after its subject matter "Rama nataka." Rama, the god does not cast a shadow, and indeed is philosophically the source of light. Pani offers the suggestion that "ravana chhaya" is added evidence in Orissa of Jaina influences on the shadow play.

He discusses the preparation of the parchment (deer skin) for the creation of the puppets. (Sri Pani suggested to the reviewer in 1974 that I go to Bhubanesar to see Kathinanda Das, and arranged for him to come to that city. I persuaded the old gentleman to make some puppets for me and two months later in the midst of New Delhi summer returned to the office of the American Institute of Indian Studies to find an overwhelmingly powerful package awaiting me—several puppets made from the fresh raw skins of newly slain deer. The stench was incredible!) Though he does not discuss the quantity of puppets required in a performance, in the table in which the presentation structure is shown, I have counted at least one hundred fifty-five different figures required. This equates with a similar number in other Indian forms. He includes in the table in which these are presented reference to the two stock introductory comic characters of a barber and his grandson.

The author refers to many of the elements which are found amongst other puppeteers and traditions in India, but makes little comparison or attempt to draw any inferences of relationships or differences: i.e. the stock comic characters cited above with Bangarukka or Killekyatha and Kethigadu of Karanataka and Andhra Pradesh respectively, or the Brahmin comics of Kerala; ritual disposal of worn puppets; manipulators squatting or standing to perform; *puja* ("to breathe life into a puppet") at the time the eyes are finished; episodes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* employed in one locale and omitted from another. Strange that in attempting to find concordances with puppet forms outside of India, he did not develop those within. His arguments for the antiquity, originality and strength of the Orissa form would have been reinforced by a more thorough explication of the other Indian forms which he reports.

He discusses the music and percussive accompaniment employed and supplies the reader with good photographic illustrations. The table within the text is a major portion of the work. The six kandas of the Orissa *Rāmāyaṇa* taken from Viswanath Khuntia's *Vicitra Rāmāyaṇa* are taken up in chronological order detailing the scene of the events performed in each kanda, a synopsis of the action, and the puppet figures required to perform the scenes with the appropriate ragas for musical accompaniment. It is regrettable that verbatim translation of at least one scene is not provided.

The text intrigues by suggesting so much, by briefly exploring some philosophical ideas, including that of the animated illustration of a musically narrated story related to the ancient and venerated tradition of shadow play, by offering insights into the possible historical dispersal of the form to Indonesia. As noted above, a further exploration of the historical and geographical appearances of the shadow play in all of Asia, a detailing of the specific appearance of the various puppet characters and scenic elements (nearly unique to Orissa) and their iconic representation, translations of the oral texts of Kathinanda Das would have greatly enhanced the contribution of this work. It is a fascinating monograph waiting to become a book.

An appendix gives details of documentation: films, slides, tape recordings made by the Documentation Unit, Sangeet Natak Akademi.

This very useful, well-written and organized monograph was printed in late 1979,

for Pani mentioned it to me when I visited him in December of that year. It is a bargain. It is highly readable, crisply printed and full of information. It is regrettable that in the proofreading notes are presented without an accompanying reference, that notes and bibliographies contained inversion of dates (i.e. A. C. Scott's *Theatre in Asia* is dated 1916 rather than 1961 in the bibliography, and 1972 in a note), that there are varieties of spelling which can only be ascribed to printing carelessness.

The second publication illustrates editorial supervision which is ineffective. In his conclusion the author states that "modern theatre lingua of West (sic) which makes the message incomprehensible even to the connoisseurs let alone the commoner" might serve as a critical review of the author's own work. Though there does appear to be some organizational intent on the part of the author, his discursive and infelicitous use of the English language quickly discourages the reader.

To repeat a quotation from a performance of *Karyala* supplied in the text:

What is the longest ailment or predicament?

To be, O, Sage!

What is the remedy?

To dwell on that?

The ailment of this piece is its existence. My remedy will be brevity of comment. Only those familiar with some forms of Indian folk-theater could begin to make sense out of this rambling, dreadfully edited paper of twenty five unnumbered pages.

Conscience forced me to attempt to report those bits of information which are of value. They are as follows:

[1] The photographs sometimes give the reader a sense of what a performance must look like, though only one picture shows any sizable portion of audience—which appears to be primarily youngsters.

[2] The parts of the performance are delineated

- a. *Jung* played on the *Dhol* (a musical introduction)
- b. *Pujawal* (to the god Bijju)
- c. Dance by Chandravali and companion (they may be interpreted to be Siva and Parvati. The companion may also serve as Vidushaka.) He introduces item
- d. *Swang of the Sadhus* (a dance, followed by a discussion of Indian spiritualism.) This is reported to be the longest item in the overall performance. How the vidushaka, known as *Poorbia* and the *Poochhnewala* in this item related to each other, though I infer that there is a relationship, remains a mystery!
- e. *Jhoolna* (a series of couplets punctuated by slapstick with a large phallic gourd used to strike the versifiers)
- f. *Sahab Ka Swang* (satirizes the English with a mask for the Sahab)
- g. *Nawab Ka Swang* (deals with sexual trade-offs and magic) apparently close to extinction.
- h. *Kanchani Ka Naach* (another dance portion which also permits the audience to participate as dancers)
- i. *Jogi and Jogan* (another sexual / spiritual dialogue)
- j. *Daag and Daon* (witchcraft is the chief subject)

In addition the author wanders over a number of different areas of Himachal Pradesh confusing the information he presents by giving various local names, though

he concentrates on his own area of Simla. He also writes about makeup, the arena in which the performance is given, Brecht and alienation, Shakespeare, and material which disclaims violence, sexuality and the showing of death. He does not mention the Greeks however.

As with other Indian writers whose involuted use of the English language obscures, rather than clarifies meaning, this pamphlet would benefit from a knowledgeable person wielding a blue pencil. Only the most dedicated person wishing to learn something about this form could possibly be advised to look at it.

It is probable since these two pamphlets were received by the Editor of *Asian Folklore Studies* at the same time, that the second was printed at about the same time as the first. Proof-reading, insofar as the spelling is concerned, seems better than in the former. Small comfort.

NOTE

1. Both publications can be obtained from Sangeet Natak Akademi, Rabindra Bhavan, Feroze Shah Road, New Delhi-110001, India.

Melvyn Helstien
Theater Arts,
University of California, Los Angeles

ROGHAIR, GENE H. *The Epic of Palnāḍu: A Study and Translation of Palnāti Virula Katha, a Telugu Oral Tradition from Andhra Pradesh, India.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. Xx+399 pp. Includes plates, maps, bibliography, glossary, list of principal characters and index. Cloth £22.50. ISBN 0-19-815456-9

Modern Indian folk culture contains a number of regional oral epic traditions that are very much alive. Oral epics of considerable length and complexity, performed by costumed semi-professional reciters and musicians, accompanied by rituals, cults, sacred sites, etc., are being discovered, recorded, and studied all over the country. The top-heavy image of Indian culture created by classical Sanskrit-based Indology is being healthily corrected. It is an exciting time for folklorists: they have in the tape recorder an invaluable new tool of which their predecessors could not even dream, and now for the first time actual oral performances can be preserved, studied in detail, and translated.

Gene H. Roghair has given us a fine study of one such oral epic. A bit more than a third of his book deals with the background of the *Palnāti Virula Katha*, a Telugu oral epic from Andhra Pradesh. Roghair begins with a discussion of the Palnāḍu tradition in Telugu literature, and emphasizes the ways in which guardians of the elite tradition have sought to co-opt the epic, the "remove it from the hands of low caste, outcaste, and beggar" by claiming it as a Telugu national epic. Roghair quotes one such writer, who regrets that "this excellent story was accessible only to the people of low caste. It is saddening to think about it" (p. 16). Low-caste singers of the epic claim to have been harassed by police and government officials, and pressured to forego the animal sacrifices carried out during the epic festival for rituals performed by Brahmins (p. 30). This pressure toward Sanskritization and "gentrification" seems to exist in the case of other oral epics too, though it often takes the more seductive form of chances for certain singers to perform on the radio, or for certain texts to be