

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.

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ROGHAIR, GENE H. *The Epic of Palnāḍu: A Study and Translation of Palnāṭi 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 *Palnāṭi 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

widely printed and distributed. The same twentieth-century technology which gives folklorists access to a local oral epic also makes it possible for more powerful groups in the same area to take note of the epic tradition and intervene in it—with results that will no doubt differ from case to case. All of us who are interested in folk culture must realize the extent to which new technologies are changing, both for better and for worse, the traditional rules of the game.

But as Roghair makes clear, the *Palnāṭi Virula Katha* lives its real life in its local setting: almost all its major events take place in the Palnāṭu region of Andhra Pradesh. Roghair describes the epic geography of Palnāṭu, the annual hero festival associated with the epic, and the lives of the hereditary epic singers, who are mostly members of the Māla caste. He also provides photographs, and a detailed musical transcription to show how the epic is sung. Analyzing the cosmology of the epic, Roghair finds it to be “concentric”: the Velama caste is “at the centre of society,” and the epic heroes drawn from this caste “occupy the centre of the whole range of beings.” Such a center “is not just a mid-point in a hierarchy: it is the focal point which orders the entire picture” (p. 99). The town of Kārempūḍi is the epic’s “geographical focal point,” while a crucial battle near the end of the twelfth century is its “temporal centre” (p. 100). And the epic is itself a sort of focal point for its listeners: it contains “the events which both explain and guide the course of today’s world” (p. 113).

Roghair devotes the final chapter of his study to the epic as a “local integrative process” performing an indispensable psychological service: “Experience, whether positive or negative, must be fully incorporated into a coherent, holistic, internalized world-view before it is of optimum benefit” (p. 118). Most of his comments on how the epic actually performs such an integrative function are speculative, since he recognizes that “it is not easy to discover or assess what *The Epic of Palnāṭu* means to individuals” (p. 129). Moreover, except for the hereditary epic singers, many local people increasingly rely on alien integrative processes (such as Christianity or pan-Indian pilgrimage journeys) to supplant or supplement the epic, which is thus in some danger of gradually becoming “just another interesting story” (p. 129). The notion of a “local integrative process” may be suggestive, but it needs to be developed in more detail, and supported by more kinds of evidence (psychoanalytical? anthropological?) than Roghair has here been able to marshal.

These introductory chapters are followed by the translation itself, which takes up almost two-thirds of the book. By offering us more of the text itself, and less of his own mediating presence, Roghair shows his respect both for the epic in its own right, and for us as readers who seek to encounter it. By offering detailed summary translations of the stories he finds less significant, he is able to present the more important episodes almost word for word—though the Telugu prose and verse mixture becomes entirely prose in English. The quest for literalness is rigorously pursued: the text even contains dots where the tape was unintelligible, and the singer was not later asked to fill in the gaps. Delightful sound effects are retained: an elephant squeals ‘Geeeeeee! Geeeeeeeeee!’ while doves coo ‘Gubagubagubaguba’ and war drums roar ‘Gubul! Gubul! Gubul!’ (pp. 180, 329). The grandiloquent names of all forty-one bulls in the hero’s herd are faithfully reported (p. 253). Only rarely does the translator’s tact desert him: “O.K.” is simply not a persuasive word to put into the mouths of the “thirty-three crores of Gods” (p. 182). Detailed explanatory notes are provided at the end of each of the fourteen stories, and diacritical marks are given for all proper names. (These follow local rather than standard pronunciation, even for Sanskrit-derived words, and thus often look strange to the non-Telugu-knower.) Along with a glossary and a list of principal characters, Roghair provides

a detailed index and a scholarly bibliography; both the general reader and the specialist will find that their needs have been met.

As for the epic itself, students of South Asian folklore will of course recognize in it local reworkings of pan-Indian stories and motifs. But it has sharp and distinctive values of its own. A group of its younger heroes are "brothers" drawn from a variety of castes, and as they prepare for their final battle, they deliberately eat a caste-breaking meal together—even though the chief hero's mother is horrified by such behavior (p. 309). The oldest and most central hero, Brahma Nāyūḍu, is an incarnation of Vishnu, yet his treatment of Cennakēśvara, a local form of Vishnu, is cavalier indeed:

When Brahma Nāyūḍu lost his land to Nāyakurālu at the cock fight, he had gone to the Cennakēśvara Temple and said, 'Lord, you are my patron God. I have lost my land to Nāyakurālu at the cock fight, and I am going. Come with me.'

Cennakēśvara said, 'Wherever there is a battle, there you will fight. Who will support me? I shall not come.'

'My Lord, you are Hari, you are guru, you are life breath itself. Come with me,' he said.

When Cennakēśvara refused to come, Brahma Nāyūḍu cursed him, saying, 'So long as we mighty men of Palnāḍu are not here, here you must remain.' Then he locked the door, and taking the opening rod and key, he crossed at Shining Ford. From that day onward, the condition of the temple was this: fragrant grass, burr grass, fenugreek, amaranthus, and goose grass grew there. (pp. 281–282) Both Cennakēśvara and Shiva are later cursed even more severely by others, and respond only by trembling helplessly (pp. 282, 352). Obviously in Palnāḍu familiarity with the Great Tradition has bred a measure of contempt.

The real power in the epic is Palnāḍu itself, with its own gods, its own heroes, its own history. An immense amount of fine, careful, scholarly work has gone into *The Epic of Palnāḍu*, and it is a pleasure to read. Gene Roghair has given us an invaluable window into the world of Palnāḍu; we are very much in his debt.

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KURDISTAN

SABAR, YONA, translation, editing, introduction. *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology*. (Yale Judaica Series, volume XXIII) New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982. Xli+250 pp. Illustrations, glossary, selected bibliography and indexes. Hardbound US \$30.00. ISBN 0-300-02698-6

This anthology is to be both welcomed and criticized. *Welcomed*—as the first *English* collection revealing some of the cultural spirit of that ancient ethnic group, the Kurdistan Jews. The need for such a collection has long been felt for students of social sciences such as ethnic studies, socio-psychology, behaviorism and, especially, some of their applied branches (psycho-therapy and even more so for the student of social work in Israel). *Criticized*—as a collection of several folk-traditions, because the anthology is merely culled from previous publications, and lacks any attempt to in-