

ritual preface. Most of the epic is sung; particularly dramatic passages may be reiterated in spoken prose for emphasis. The lead singer accompanies himself on the *hurka*, an adjustable tension hourglass drum. When he is improvising melodically, two male drone singers also join in.

Two aspects of the text itself are particularly interesting. First, the multiethnic character of life in Kumaon is central to the story. Malushahi is from a *khasa* family; his beloved is a *shauka*. Her parents wrongly betroth her to a Tibetan for economic and political gain. The playing out of notions of ethnic characteristics and practices is fascinating. The more striking feature, however, is the central and very active role which Rajula plays. She is an exceptionally intelligent and courageous heroine, a woman of considerable independence and initiative. Rajula is in fact much more competent than her lover. She stands in marked contrast to the human heroines of most plains Hindu epics, both sacred and secular, whose virtues are defined more by what they do not do than by their accomplishments. Potential relationships between such active notions of female heroism and the relatively less constrained roles of women in the Kumaon region would be well worth pursuing.

My principal criticisms of the volume are tied to the questions which it does not ask. The most significant gaps are in its descriptions of performers and the contexts in which they operate. How are singers trained? How do they decide to become performers? Are they paid? Do they perform only in their immediate neighborhood, or are they itinerant? Upreti notes that, despite the secular nature of the epic itself, members of the audience frequently go into trance. How do the Kumaonis interpret this? To what extent might it be a manifestation of regional beliefs—associated with the magical motifs of the story—in distinction to pan-Indian Hinduism? The photographs and drawings accompanying the text are interesting and often very attractive; nowhere, however, are captions provided.

On the whole *Malushahi: the Ballad of Kumaon* is a worthy book. It clearly meets the author's goal of helping to maintain and make available a central piece of Kumaoni oral tradition. Upreti never really strays very far from the narrative itself and does not reflect the broader range of concerns a more analytical folklorist would have. I would recommend the volume particularly to those interested in hill communities not only in Kumaon but in Garhwal and Nepal as well and to scholars concerned with questions of gender ideology in south Asia more generally; it is a provocative document.

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FUCHS, STEPHEN. *At the Bottom of Indian Society, The Harijan and Other Low Castes*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1981. viii+325 pp. Bibliography, indexes. Hardbound Rs 105.

There are nearly eighty million "Scheduled Caste" people and at least one hundred million "Untouchables" in India. Little attention, however, has been paid to them by anthropologists. The Rev. Stephen Fuchs has made a special study of the tribes, the Untouchables and the low castes since 1934, when he first came to India. He has published several important monographs concerning these groups based on his long-term field research. *The Children of Hari* (1951), on the Nimar Balahis of Madhya Pradesh, and *Rebellious Prophets* (1965), concerning the messianic (reform) movement, are the most important of these works.

At the Bottom of Indian Society, a companion volume to his earlier publication, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India* (1975), which was a short but comprehensive account of all the aboriginal tribes on the Indian-subcontinent, is based on library research of all "Harijan" communities in India (vii). These studies open a vast field of yet unstudied and neglected fields.

Fuchs first discusses the origin of untouchability from the diffusionist point of view in his Introduction, and concludes that untouchability is probably an ancient social trait from animal breeding culture which was brought to India by the Aryans and also the Dravidians (pp. 16-17, p. 21). Fuchs argues also that "there is sufficient evidence to prove that the Aryans as well as the Dravidians on their arrival in India still belonged to such an animal breeding culture" (p. 17).

The above concept of the nature of untouchability forms the keynote of Fuchs's description of Harijans and other low castes. He arranges the Harijan and other low castes occupationally both for a practical reason (vii), as well as to put emphasis on the occupational factor. He concludes (1) that the low castes and Harijans were in possession of a highly-developed complex farming culture, but (2) that they were on the whole the artisans and manual workers in this culture, then (3) that they lost more status because they depended for their livelihood on cultivators who retained a higher social status and greater economic independence (p. 21, pp. 305-309). He does not hold ritual purity and impurity as decisive factors for their untouchability, opposed to the thesis of Dumont (1980).

Fuchs gives a new and suggestive explanation for the origin of the Harijan and other low castes, but some fundamental problems in his analysis must be pointed out.

To begin with, he arranges the Harijan and other low castes occupationally, that is, as tribal peoples who also succumbed to Hindu influence (Chap. 1), the so-called criminal castes (Chap. 2), semi-nomadic castes (Chap. 3), artists and magicians (Chap. 4), low castes and untouchables in village service (Chap. 5), field laborers (Chap. 6) and castes only regionally regarded as polluting (Chap. 7), but it is difficult to understand the reason he thinks these are all in the same category. He also refers to these people in various ways, e.g. as Harijan castes, as the Harijan and other low castes, as untouchables and so on. We are therefore in the dark as to which term he uses to refer to the category in general. Oversimplifications of this sort are found here and there.

From the humanist point of view, Fuchs advocates the abolition of untouchability which has deprived Harijans of basic human rights. He presents two reasons the Harijans are depressed: (1) even if the Harijans could achieve their social advancement, they would have to pay a heavy price for it, and (2) there is no unity or solidarity among the Harijans as a class, and they are more caste-minded than the higher castes. Therefore, the abolition of untouchability is not a problem of the Harijans only, but rather a nationwide problem in India.

Thirty years ago, Fuchs stated that any revolutionary changes in India "must in some ways benefit a people whose religious, social, and economical position could not be much worse than it is at present" (Fuchs 1951: 438), and in the current volume he says, "there is little hope that in the near future a satisfactory solution will be found" (p. 311). Conditions seem to have been further complicated during these thirty years.

Untouchability, as Dumont has pointed out, is not only a socio-economic (political-economic) problem, but also a religious ideological problem (Dumont 1980). If it is to be desired to better the conditions for the Harijans, and for the humanists as well, cultural (religious) backgrounds also will have to be changed.

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AZOY, G. WHITNEY. *Buzkashi, Game and Power in Afghanistan*. Symbol and Culture Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982. xi+147 pp. Figures, photos, index. Hardbound US \$17.50, ISBN 0-8122-7821-6.

Buzkashi is an exciting game played on horseback in the northern steppes of Afghanistan. "Buz-Kashi" literally means "goat-pulling," but they now use a beheaded calf carcass, and two teams of energetic and proud riders from the great equestrian tradition perhaps derived from the Mongols try to catch hold of this and throw it into a particular spot.

This is what I saw several times in Quandūz and Kābul during the period between 1964-67, and since then have had much interest but little knowledge of its real significance or details. This welcome publication by G. W. Azoy not only gives us more complete details on both the traditional and modern forms of buzkashi, but clearly shows how the game is interlaced with power politics on both the local and national level.

Actually the type I saw played more or less as a sport is rather new in origin. Generally called the *garajai* type, contests are generally organized by local or national governmental bodies in order to give the people "fun" and thus to create a sort of sense of integration. Buzkashi games from the other, more traditional genre, called *tudabarai*, have been sponsored by local Khāns at occasions such as rites of passage, and also used to enhance their "names," or personal reputations over their *gaum* or their own social group by successfully controlling the disputed contests of the "unruly" Afghan *chapandāzan*, or the buzkashi horse-riders. In Chapter 4, "Buzkashi in Provincial Town and Capital City," Azoy also gives a vivid description of the troubles which took place in the Qundūz buzkashi in 1977, which was sponsored by the *wali* or the governor of the Province, and clearly shows us that such troubles are quite critical to the governor's authority, for the buzkashi inevitably involves a struggle for reputation and political leadership.

We may then simply think that this sort of game can be easily manipulated by officials for certain political purposes, but this is not the case; such manipulations have constituted an overall minority even during the recent communist regimes. Sponsors are generally unaware of their own ultimate motives, and their *mehmān*, or guests, also enjoy the venerable and spectacular game, bound together by their temporarily shared separation from mundane life.

This is one reason that buzkashi has been regularly and actively played even during the recent seasons of coups and counter-coups in Afghanistan, but we do see here the analogy of game and politics, which is the main theme of Azoy's work. As F. G. Bailey has noted, politics is a processual struggle with players, prizes, rules and referees (*Strategems and Spoils*, as quoted by Azoy, p. 17). In a similar context, Azoy quotes