

Anne Feldhaus with Ramdas Aktar and Rajaram Zagade, eds. and trans., *Say to the Sun, "Don't Rise," and to the Moon, "Don't Set": Two Oral Narratives from the Countryside of Maharashtra*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xii + 613 pages. 3 maps, list of maps, preface, abbreviations, bibliographical references, index. Hardcover, \$99.00; ebook, \$114.99. ISBN-13: 978-0199357642 (hardcover).

In this volume of Oxford University Press' South Asia Research series, Anne Feldhaus, Ramdas Aktar, and Rajaram Zagade offer well introduced, clearly contextualized, and highly readable translations of two Marathi oral narrative performances recorded decades ago under the direction of the late Günther Sontheimer. In 2006, these scholars had published in Marathi a larger selection of texts from the Sontheimer collection, and from that material they present in English those items entitled "The Story of Birobā" and "The Story of Dhuḷobā," what Feldhaus describes as that volume's "two longest, richest texts" (xi). Those performances about regional deities fill approximately seven and a half hours and twelve and a half hours of tape, respectively, and they are presented, with some excision of formulaic repetition, over roughly 170 and 280 pages. While they acknowledge the inherent impossibility to capture completely the liveliness of performance from audiotape and to present it fully on the page, this team has crafted approachable English renderings which present well both the underlying narratives and their performative richness. The volume then very much lives up to the phrase which has been borrowed for its title, "Say to the Sun, 'Don't Rise,' and to the Moon, 'Don't Set,'" a plea for extending the night, the very time appropriate for such performances. In addition to being of interest to scholars of Hinduism, this work will also be of interest to all who study oral traditions and grapple with how to present them.

The text has three parts. Its first part includes five chapters that introduce, contextualize, and provide initial lines of analysis for the two transcribed performances which respectively constitute the second and third parts of the book. While the last three of the introductory chapters are slightly more analytic in nature, the introduction does not attempt to analyze the material exhaustively. Instead it strikes a good balance between giving enough information to effectively orient readers to the texts and not so much as to overwhelm them, and in it Feldhaus (58) informs us that she has begun another book "to draw out and make explicit all the vast store of information about traditional rural life that these *ovīs* hold."

"*Ovīs* and Dhangars," the first chapter, provides a strong foundation for approaching the performance texts. Building upon the preface, which very touchingly discusses Sontheimer and his work, this chapter thoroughly describes the work of recording, transcribing, editing, and translating the performances. It also very clearly introduces the Dhangar community and their social position; the historical moment of the recordings, the early-1970s; and the characteristics of the *Ovī* genre. This chapter also concretely introduces each of the performances, provides brief summaries, and places them, albeit with thoughtful reservations, within the study both of South Asian oral

performance and of epics in particular.

The second chapter, entitled “The Art of the *Oṅīs*,” expands upon the previous chapter’s initial discussion of the genre. It begins by addressing issues of literary form, such as introductory remembrances and alternating portions of verse and prose, and it goes on to discuss broader aspects of the nature of the performances, such as the use of humor. This chapter effectively enables the reader to better appreciate the two performance texts, and this is in large part as Feldhaus both uses clear language and incorporates many well-chosen excerpts.

“The World of the *Oṅīs*” is the pivot from the previous chapters’ more introductory nature to the later chapters’ more analytical orientation. Feldhaus here explores the conceptions of space and time which underlie these performances. This discussion has been written with the needs of a more general audience in mind, and it clearly lays out a range of senses of space, from a particular conception of a vast Hindu cosmos encompassing the earthly realm, through understandings of the relations of forest and settlement, to the very geography of towns figure in the texts. Not only providing maps, both figurative and literal, of these spaces, Feldhaus also addresses the region’s ecology, the depiction of spaces through invocations of everyday life, and the significance of routes and movement. Feldhaus also considers the temporality with the performances and addresses the reader’s potential difficulty in encountering it.

In “Pastoral Life and Identity,” Feldhaus continues her analytic contextualization by examining the social complexity addressed within the performances and the particular perspective from which society is perceived. In a way accessible to non-specialists, Feldhaus addresses those regional caste-based distinctions that are significant to the texts. From this broader regional orientation, she introduces in greater detail the Dhangar community, their sense of community, their ideals, and the at times complex and contradictory senses of Dhangar identity articulated through the performances.

“Gender and Women in the *Oṅīs*,” the final introductory chapter, is by far the most analytically-oriented chapter, and here Feldhaus highlights the significance of gender within the performances, and even contrasts their engagement with gender. Writing for a broader audience and drawing details from the performances, Feldhaus explains both the gender-based division of labor and the region’s gender ideologies more broadly. From that foundation, Feldhaus reflects both upon the performances’ engagement with gender as well as significant gender-related themes, such as chastity and fertility, that run through the performances. While perhaps giving an indication of the book that Feldhaus has begun to write, even this more interpretative chapter sticks close to the performances and leaves a fuller engagement with these topics and the related scholarship to another venue, thereby allowing the reader, with some guidance, to move quickly on to the performances themselves.

The second and third parts are, respectively, the edited, annotated, and translated transcripts of the performances of “The Story of Birobā” and “The Story of Dhuḷobā.” Without summarizing these performance texts’ contents in great detail, they relate the miraculous stories of two regional deities, Birobā and Dhuḷobā, who are particularly significant to members of the Dhangar community. The two performances are similar in that they were recorded without the usually accompanying musical accompaniment and outside of traditional performance contexts. They also differ from one another as “The Story of Birobā” was performed by men singing in responsive pairs, and “The Story of Dhuḷobā” was performed by a single man.

Turning to the concretization of the performances on the page, it has been done carefully and meticulously. First of all, the translations both read very smoothly and yet seem to sacrifice little detail or nuance. Second, the thoughtful formatting of the texts gives a clear a sense of the performances' textures. The distinction of verse and prose is clear on the page, but the flow across these transitions nevertheless feels natural and lively. Furthermore, the more complicated presentational style of "The Story of Birobā," which features two complementary pairs of performers, is even presented rather intuitively. Third, the performance texts have been very effectively annotated with footnotes. Without ever overwhelming the main text, the footnotes provide information on important aspects of the performance, such as melody shifts or minor self-corrections; clearly explain the text's formatting, such as the use of small caps; and provide essential clarifications and explanations. Footnotes are even carefully used to address difficulties in and strategies for translation, thus allowing readers to effectively read through particular editorial choices, such as rendering an expletive less than literally. Finally, it must also be noted that the texts have also been enriched with a lengthy and very thorough index.

Say to the Sun, "Don't Rise," and to the Moon, "Don't Set" is a wonderful work. Most broadly, it sets a high standard for the publishing of oral performances. For those interested in South Asia, this is a great addition to South Asian literature available in English, a body of literature that still has too little representation of regional oral traditions. Finally, this book is a touching tribute to the scholarly labors both of the late Günther Sontheimer and of those who worked with him in the field. It is amazing how those performances recorded years ago can now, through print, reach new audiences, first in Marathi and now in English.

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