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Nicholas TAPP

The Australian National University  
Canberra

## INDIA

KAUSHAL, Molly, ed. *Chanted Narratives: The Living 'Katha-Vachana' Tradition*.

New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts, 2001. vii + 290 pages. Tables, illustrations, plates. Hardcover Rs. 900; ISBN 81-246-0182-8. (Distributed by D. K. Printworld [P] Ltd. 'Sri Kunj', F-52, Bali Nagar, New Delhi – 110 015, India).

Mrs. Kaushal has to be congratulated for organizing the very interesting meeting on India's oral literature, "Katha Vachana aur Katha Vachak: Exploring India's Chanted Narratives" (held at IGNC in New Delhi, February 3–7, 1997, and sponsored by UNESCO). Her Introduction to the proceedings of the conference gives a welcome "bird's eye view" of the meeting's concerns.

The volume opens with B. Saraswati's philosophical treatise on orality. The other papers concern themselves primarily with various forms of orality in performance and the social context of ethnopoetic work. Although every contribution can not be evaluated in a short review, the reviewer will try to offer here a guide to the bewildering quantity of information contained in the papers.

In terms of cultural geography, narratives in Indo-Arian languages are discussed in chapters 4 (C. Servan-Schreiber—Transfer of chapbooks between Bhojpur and Nepal), 14 (A. Malik—Devnarayan, Rajasthan; see also BLACKBURN et al. 1989: 216–18), and 17 (S. M. Pandey—The Ahir epic Loriki and Chanaini; Hindi heartland; four published versions by Pandey are listed). Works and performances in Dravidian languages are discussed in chapters

9 (Sh. Asirvatham—Mathurai Veeraswami Kathai, Tamil), 11 (B. Venkateswarlu—Scrolls in Andhra Pradesh), 12 (D. Negers—Telugu theatrical tradition), 13 (A. Dandekar—A Deccan tribal conflict story), and 21 (T. N. Shankaranarayana—A local clan story of Junjappa; Kannada, Karnataka State; see SHANKARANARAYANA 1994). The cultural periphery to the North, in the foothills of the Himalayas, is represented by several tribal cultures and is featured in chapters 3 (M. Kaushal—Saveen/Shiv Puran; Gaddi, Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh), 15 (W. S. Sax), 16 (R. Negi—Folk Mahābhāratas; Rajput, Garhwal, Western Himalaya, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh), 18 (M. Upreti—Rajula-Malushahi; Khasa, Bhotiya, Kumaon Hills, north-west Uttar Pradesh), and 23 (C. M. Bandhu—Folk Rāmāyanas; Nepal). The north-eastern periphery, beyond Bengal, is represented in chapters 5 (S. Sanatombi), 22 (M. Mani Meitei—Khama-Thoibi; Manipur), 6 (A. K. Das—Mopin myth; Gallong tribe of the Adis group; upper Brahmaputra, central Arunachal Pradesh), 7 (D. L. Kharmawphlang—Creation myth; Bhoi area, Khasi Hills, Meghalaya), and 20 (N. Ch. Sarma—Padma Purana/“Belua,” the snake goddess Manasa; from Bihar to Assam). The western periphery is represented in chapter 10 with a discussion on tribal cultures in Orissa (M. K. Mishra—District of Kalahandi, Orissa). To the south, chapter 24 (H.M.D.R. Herath) discusses Sri Lankan local legends.

There are three contributions about areas that lie outside India but are more or less influenced by its culture. In chapter 2 N. Revel discusses the sound patterns of the Palawan myth (Philippines) “The Quest for a Wife: Māminbin,” which is sung in a kind of rhythmic prose (REVEL and INTARĀY 2000; see *Asian Folklore Studies* LX, 2001: 175–76). This culture displays only minor influences of Indian culture. In chapter 19 S. Badalkhan informs us of the role of the *sher* singer’s audience and its interplay with the singer among the Balochi. The *sher* tradition is part of the Muslim culture of the area that is politically Afghanistan and Pakistan today. The context and ways of performance of a creation myth of Hindu Dayaks (Borneo, Indonesia) are described by KMA M. Usup in chapter 8. The work is chanted as part of the burial ritual and does not seem to stem from Indian high culture.

Most interesting is the information about the unprecedented wealth of long oral works in India, performed in chanting, singing, dancing, and whole theatrical performances. Some of the works can be assigned to the ethnopoetic genre of “martial epic” (see JASON, n.d.); these are discussed in chapters 9, 13 to 17, and, possibly, 18 and 22 (the summary is too short to decide). Other “chanted narratives” are legends and myths of various sorts which form the plot of rituals (chapters 2, 3, 5 to 7, 20, 21, and perhaps 23, which describes various versions of parts of the Rāmāyana). Chapter 12 describes a tradition of theatrical performance with plots of various genres. Finally, chapter 24 describes holy pilgrimage sites based on “local legends” connected with the presence of Sita, Hanuman, Rama, and Ravana, in this order of popularity, in various localities in Sri Lanka.

As the papers are necessarily short, not much detail is offered. Nonetheless, several authors managed to “squeeze in” brief summaries of the works. The reader learns about the “Mopin myth” (chapter 6), a creation myth “The Golden Vine” (chapter 7), “Mathurai Veeraswami Kathai” (chapter 9), the story of the struggle between Kaba and Baji (chapter 13), the “Devnarayan epic” (chapter 14), Loriki’s love story (chapter 17), the love story of Rajula and Malushahi (chapter 18), the legend “Padma Purana” (chapter 20), the story of the murder of Junjappa (chapter 21), the love story of Khamba and Thoibi (chapter 22), and local legends about Sita, Hanuman, Rama, and Ravana in Sri Lanka (chapter 24).

In conclusion, the work is a good introduction to Indian epic and other “chanted narratives.” The papers in this collection will form an important point of reference for future research. The reviewer missed information about the exact language and dialect in which

each of the mentioned works is performed and would have appreciated a glossary of the many Indian terms; nobody can command so many diverse languages.

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Heda JASON  
 Jerusalem

RAJ, SELVA J., and CORINNE G. DEMPSEY. *Popular Christianity in India: Riting Between the Lines*. SUNY Series in Hindu Studies. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002. xix + 284 pages. Figures, index. Hardcover US\$75.50; ISBN 0-7914-5519-x. Paper US\$25.95; ISBN 0-7914-5520-3.

In her foreword to this collection of ten articles examining different aspects of the practice of Christianity in India, Wendy Doniger describes the individual contributions as forming “a postpostcolonial historiography, one that views the Indians who were subject to Christian missions neither simply as victims nor simply as resisters (against Hinduism or Islam [...]), but rather as active agents [...]. This is the converts’-eye-view, the view from (in terms of political power) the bottom up” (xii–xiii). Further positioning the volume vis-à-vis an older tradition of writings on Christianity in India, in their own introduction to the collection the editors Selva Raj and Corinne Dempsey describe the territory which the contributors survey as the “‘messy’ terrain in which religious identities, borders, and authority are not concrete and absolute, but often fluid and subject to negotiation” (2). This central problematic of the shifting and merging nuances of religious affiliation and identity will be one that is familiar to anyone interested in popular religion in India. The chief value of the essays contained in this volume is therefore their ability to re-frame an old problem from an unfamiliar perspective: the position of India’s twenty million Christians. By examining aspects of Indian Christian ritual life, saint cults, and constructions of religious authority, the contributors help bring the study of Christianity in India out of the missionary archive and into the more multivocal realm of what the editors describe as a “dialogue on the streets” (3).

Like other works on the subject in recent years (DEMPSEY 2001, VISVANATHAN 1993), *Popular Christianity in India* claims a position for the study of Indian Christianity within the