

It is also true that the world view of ancient Tamils, particularly their mythology and religious cults, were largely determined by this “energy concept” as exemplified in *Ananku*, *Korravai*, *Valli*, *pey*, and so on.

The author discusses the key role played by the bards Panars, Viralis, and other performers in the continuity and transmission of folk traditions to the literary vaults, and the transfiguration of those traditions to a more perfected and finished form at the hands of the courtly Pulavars who wielded immense sway over the kings and chieftains. Furthermore, the interaction of the poetic tradition with the mythopoetical layer of Tamil culture is well addressed.

One of the author’s objectives is to establish the earliest known mythico-religious sources of ancient Tamil love lyrics. A careful reader of the work will not fail to notice his efforts to do justice to the task at hand. He has made a brilliant attempt at categorizing the activities of the ancient Tamil bards into three major spheres, which are the community sphere, the household sphere, and the courtly sphere.

The fivefold divisions of land as *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Marudham*, *Neydal*, and *Palai*, otherwise called *aintinai*, serve as the bedrock upon which the pillars of ritual and mythological sources rest. That Tamil poetry is associated with the landscape and its affinity with the ritual behavior and the seasonal cycle is something like “Caesar’s wife” is beyond doubt. But the problem of the genesis of ancient Tamil poetry still remains as inscrutable as the “Smile of Mona Lisa,” although the erudite author has expended much effort in unraveling its mystery.

It is heartening to note that the author has laid due emphasis on the *historical poetics* which studies literary forms as being linked with the historical and cultural conditions in which they have taken shape. The main situations and the techniques employed in the delineation of characters regarding *Agam* poetry are analyzed well, and the underlying principles in the formation of poetry characters are defined reasonably.

The most revealing part of the book is the author’s establishment and elucidation of folklore sources, namely those of women’s songs of separation and the lore of rites and rituals. This leads him to the conclusion that ancient *Akam* poetry sprang from the folksongs intimately connected with various kinds of rituals then in vogue in Tamil Nadu in the ancient past. The *Akam* genre owes heavily to them for its growth. At the same time there was a close link between the two groups of performers—the low-caste bards, and the poets of higher social status. This connection between these groups is treated as the cornerstone for the establishment and growth of the poetic tradition.

Mythological syncretism, an ideology characteristic of ancient Indian culture in general, has been identified with the early Tamil verses. This quality endows them with the solemn tenor inherited from myth, and we see it continued and illustrated in the verses of the Bhakti movement later on.

The book design and overall layout is good. In addition to the bibliography and the indexes, the glossary of plant names found in the poetry is an added feature that makes it conducive to a better understanding of the work.

Aru. RAMANATHAN and Ezhilavan
Tamil University
Thanjavur, India

EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI, GABRIELLA. *The Maze of Fantasy in Tamil Folktales*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002. x + 190 pages. Paper €51.00; Sfr. 88.00; ISBN 3-447-04568-X.

Generations of folklorists and literary scholars have worked on folktales, turning them into a relatively well-studied realm of oral tradition when compared with many other fields. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's monograph is a contribution to international folktale research with a special focus on Tamil folklore in the Pan-Indian context. In the introduction the author formulates the two purposes of her study: "Firstly, I want to point out the cultural content of Tamil folktales by examining how far they reflect Tamil and, more generally, Indian culture. My second purpose is to uphold the usefulness of the concept of motif and stress the inter-connection of tales, while casting doubt on typology and other current theoretical approaches to folklore" (1). The monograph is based on nearly fifty collections of folktales published in Tamil and edited by dozens of collectors who have picked up their tales from both written and oral sources. The list of references in Tamil includes childrens books and anthologies, meant for adult readers only, such as the publications of scatological and pornographic tales, prepared by K. Rajanarayanan and his collaborators. The corpus of tales is rich in different genres: tales of magic, novellas, traditional and contemporary jokes (such as the one about a running contest among office employees), legends, and so on. Unfortunately, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi does not pay much attention to source criticism and the reader learns relatively little about the nature of these publications, the intentions of the authors, the scope of editing and elaborations, and the relationship between written and oral tradition.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi offers a carefully arranged presentation of different topics and plots in Tamil folklore and literature. The detailed table of contents turns the monograph into a useful manual for orientation and for finding thematic tracks in the maze of tales. The author starts with stories about social life: courtship, marriage, married couples, and relations between parents and children, siblings, in-laws, and various castes. Later she discusses stories about the supernatural (demons and gods), ones with philosophical content, others that are centered on language (speech, meaning, and names) and foolish or clever characters. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has decided not to translate the stories but to retell the basic contents so that the reader can get the plot outlines. She is always careful about providing the exact references to the original publications. Although the author does not care much about typologies, paradoxically enough her study will probably serve as a useful tool for the future classification of Indian tales, started by Stith Thompson, Jonas Balys, Warren E. Roberts, and Heda Jason. Although Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi does not mention JASON's index of Indic oral tales at all and she only seldom refers to the Aarne-Thompson index (AARNE, THOMPSON 1961), folklorists can easily recognize international tale types in her book. Thus, the story about the old wood-cutter and Yama on page 90, corresponds to AT 845 ("The Old Man and Death"), the joke about the impostor and the credulous wife on page 117 can easily be identified as AT 1540 ("The Student from Paradise"), and the cumulative tale about the death of an ant and what follows it on page 119 reminds of type AT 2022 ("The Death of the Little Hen").

The author's focus is usually on the contents of tales; the context in everyday life, the social and historical settings, and the living folklore of the Tamil people remain in the background. In addition to the thematic arrangement of rich material, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has provided the reader with several valuable observations on the following: the dyadic patterns in Tamil folktales, their didactic function and inter-generic connections with songs and proverbs, and conceptualization of the corpus of tales as a polythetic network. She prefers textual analysis on the level of motifs, which takes into consideration the narrator's creativity.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's criticism of the typological approach to folktales may be more illuminating to literary scholars and less revealing to the folklorists who have long understood the limits of type as a theoretical concept. (On the other hand, it is hard to deny its value in international comparative research and as a classification tool of vast materials.) In the second part of her book Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi also discusses some theories of folktale research,

represented by articles and a few monographs. Her criticism of current theories remains relatively thin, if compared with the analytical works of Bengt Holbek, Max Lüthi, and some other twentieth-century classics that she does not mention in her bibliography. On the other hand, her ideas about the narrator's freedom in devising plots and multiple arrangement of connected tales that lack clear boundaries deserve serious attention (162, and elsewhere). The main value of the book to an international audience lies in providing a broad survey of scattered publications of Tamil tales. It is a vast treasury of carefully arranged plots and topics, a landmark in introducing Tamil folklore to the rest of the world.

REFERENCES CITED

AARNE, Antti and Stith THOMPSON

1961 *The Types of the Folktale. A Classification and Bibliography*. FF Communications 184. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

JASON, Heda

1989 *Types of Indic Oral Tales*. Supplement. FF Communications 242. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Ülo VALK

University of Tartu, Estonia

WOERKENS, MARTINE VAN. *The Strangled Traveler: Colonial Imaginings and the Thugs of India*. Translated by Catherine Tihanyi. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002. xvi + 360 pages. Map, illustrations, thug lexicon, references, index. Paper US\$24.00; £17.00; ISBN 0-226-85086-2.

The Strangled Traveler is the latest addition in the scholarship on the Thugs of India. As the author mentions, the word "Thug" has found place in the English dictionary and in common international parlance signifies criminal acts executed by deception (116-7). The Thugs of India were brought to the notice of the world in the early nineteenth century by the British colonizers, specifically by Colonel Sleeman who headed a decade-long campaign to exterminate the Thugs and the practice of *Thuggee*. Since then it has been revealed that Thugs were a sect who practiced strangulation of highway travelers as part of their devotional sacrifice to the Goddess Kali. The unique features were the art of deception, the style of murder by a *roomal* (scarf/handkerchief), and the religious association with the crime.

The author of *The Strangled Traveler* tells us how Sleeman not only headed but engineered the campaign and the information about the Thugs for posterity. At the end of a ten-year-long campaign, he declared "India's roads are finally safe" (99) and the claim implied that the British had rid India of one of its many evils. Sleeman also claimed to be the first knowledgeable person about the secrets of the Thugs. And the secrets of the Thugs were many, as *Thuggee* was practiced most secretly, often without the knowledge of family members, and the traces of crime were almost perfectly removed. Sleeman gained informers, recorded depositions of the Thugs, and also wrote the "Conversations" he had with many arrested/jailed Thugs. Sleeman's official records and published writings became the first expansive source on the organizational and criminal aspects of *Thuggee*, and have remained the only "authentic" source about the Thugs since 1830s. Sleeman's writings horrified as they fascinated their readers.

Martine Van Woerkens' work, first published in French in 1995, is a reevaluation of the Thugs post the ideas of Michel Foucault and Edward Said. It proposes to study the Thugs in