

“Folklore and Folklife in Thailand,” this collection of research on Thai folklore in English is to be applauded. The articles vary in length, strength, and scope of study. More rigorous studies of Thai folklore and the nonverbal genres of folklife covering more cultural groups, particularly groups that have been neglected, need to be produced to shed more light on the wide range and richness of the folk tradition in Thailand.

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INDIA

TIEKEN, HERMAN. *Kāvya in South India: Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry*. Gonda Indological Studies, Volume X. Groningen, The Netherlands: Egbert Forsten Publishing, 2001. 270 pages. Appendices, index of places, bibliography. Paper Dfl 120; ISBN 90-6980-1345.

The Sanskrit word “*kāvya*” applied to *Caṅkam* poetry in the title of the book immediately reveals the author’s intention. With the help of his excellent knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil, he wants to demonstrate that old Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry is indebted to Sanskrit literature and not an autonomous creation, as usually assumed. In order to uphold this claim he shifts the date of *Caṅkam* poetry to the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, while Tamil and Western experts date it between the first and the seventh centuries. Since he admits that the poetic convention of the five *tināis* (landscapes) of *Caṅkam* poetry has no Sanskrit counterpart, he has to play down its importance and show that the heroes of the love poems are not well-matched couples and that there are no truly happy unions. According to him, the village in the poems is a dull place inhabited by poor and foolish people. His personal opinion that “the best in ancient Tamil love poetry is sadness” might be accepted, but this does not mean that the heroes are not well-matched. In real life we desire unperturbed happiness, but in literature we enjoy dramatic events. The great lovers of world literature like Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, or Leyla and Mecnun would not have become famous if they had lived happily ever after. Compared to their tragedies, the *Caṅkam* lovers’ longing and temporary separation are negligible woes. The husband’s infidelity in the poems also does not prove that the couple was not well-matched when they married, nor that the woman was foolish in marrying such a man. Since society permitted the husband to have concubines, she had no other choice than to forgive him over and over again after a little sulking.

As proof of the villagers’ poverty, Tieken cites the fact that the husband had to travel to acquire wealth, leaving his wife. However, there is no sign that she went begging during his absence, and the acquired wealth was meant to raise his prestige. Other evidence of the villagers’ poverty is that they have to work (e.g., they have to cook for themselves), rather than rely on servants, though servants also are mentioned in the poems. In *Kuṟuntokai* 167 the wife smiles when her husband tells her he likes the dish she prepared with great difficulty, since in her native home she never cooked. This poem is certainly no example of true poverty, but seems to depict a happily married couple.

In order to support his new chronology, Tieken has to solve the problem of the archaic language in the poems normally held to be the oldest of the *Caṅkam* corpus. He proposes that orally composing bards in these works are only personae. The poets who actually wrote the poems and simultaneously compiled the anthologies did so in accordance with the ninth-

century Pāṇṭiyan rulers' wish "to present themselves as inheritors of a great Tamil culture." They therefore ousted Sanskrit words (in this way they strangely resemble modern nationalists trying to do the same thing) and modern forms of the language. Perhaps foreseeing a question about how they could have known what Tamil was like hundreds of years earlier, the author suggests that they "fabricated forms which to them sounded archaic." He does not answer the next logically apt question as to how it was possible that they all chose to eliminate the same grammatical forms.

One of the reasons why the author cannot believe that old *Caṅkam* poetry is oral poetry is that it contains very long sentences like Sanskrit poetry, which nobody considers oral. Two objections may be raised against this admittedly strong argument. Firstly, if a stylistic feature, such as long sentences or double meanings is known to be appreciated, it can be cultivated even in spoken language. Secondly, the bards walking for days to see a generous patron had ample time to think about what they would recite before him in the most pleasing way.

If *Caṅkam* poetry was composed around the eighth or ninth century, the culmination of bhakti poetry cannot have been in the seventh or eighth century, as usually held. Therefore, Tiekens shifts the latter to the ninth century. He probably decided on this slight shift to make it coincide with his *Caṅkam* date because he thinks it conceivable that the *Caṅkam* "corpus we now have is the work of the same poets who composed Bhakti poetry." One wonders at the versatility of these poets, given the enormous difference of mentality exhibited in the two types of poetry. Like the *Caṅkam* bards are said to be personae whose archaic language is an invention, so the saints of bhakti poetry are said to be personae whose simple language is "artful unpretentiousness." Since the saints call themselves madmen intoxicated by the love of a god who takes possession of them, the author thinks that they cannot have composed metric poems themselves. However, possession and ecstasy are intermittent states and the saints might well have composed their songs during relatively sober periods.

The author also discusses the problem of why works like the *Pattuppāṭṭu* and the *Cilappatikāram* are not called *Caṅkam* even though they date from its time. His answer is that they are modeled not after the *kāvya* like the anthologies but after the *mahākāvya*. Since the length of a composition is an important criterion for the classification of ancient Tamil poetry, as he well knows, why not simply assume that every work exceeding a determined length was not called *Caṅkam*? This would also apply to the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* dated around the fifth century but not considered *Caṅkam*. This most famous work of ancient Tamil literature is omitted from the discussion, probably because it cannot be pressed into a *kāvya* or *mahākāvya* scheme.

Tiekens's book obliges the experts on ancient Tamil literature to check whether their convictions resist his attack. This is a good thing, but I doubt that he will emerge as the winner in the debate that is bound to arise.

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AFGHANISTAN

FREMBGEN, JÜRGEN WASIM and HANS WERNER MOHM. *Lebensbaum und Kalaschnikow. Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel afghanischer Bildteppiche*. Blieskastel, Germany: Gollenstein Verlag, 2000. 151 pages. Color plates, b/w photos, map, English summary, bibliography. Hardcover, DM 38.00; ISBN 3-933389-31-3.

This small, but beautiful book presents a collection of forty-four so-called Afghan war carpets, brought together by Hans Werner Mohm. The carpets were shown for the first time at