

24: 293–301.

STEINMANN, Brigitte

1996 Review of *A Recitation of the Tamang Shaman in Nepal*. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 10: 37–56.

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MASKARINEC, GREGORY G. *The Rulings of the Night: An Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. xi + 276 pages. Illustrations figures, map, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth £58.50; ISBN 0-299-14490-9. Paper £20.50; ISBN 0-299-14494-1.

Maskarinec presents an excellent ethnography of oral texts preserved among fourteen Nepali shamans (*jhāngari*). These texts were collected during the fifteen-year period from 1977 to 1992 in Jajarkot and Rukum Districts of Nepal. His purpose is to “identify the knowledge required to be a shaman, how they negotiate the relations between language, action, and social realities and to show what it is that shamans say as they perform ceremonies and the ways that those words make their rituals significant” (10).

*Jhāngari* are Himalayan shamans, who accomplish their intermediation through diverse rituals that conspicuously incorporate both long, publicly chanted recitals and short, whispered incantations. Their performances take place mostly at night, as they are responsible for the rulings of the night. The shaman, dressed in a shaman’s costume, enters a physical frenzy, a frantic state perceived by his audience to demonstrate possession by spirits (*deutā lāgnu*). As he drums, dances, and engages in various ritual activities, he speaks, sings, chants, whispers, and shouts. His speech during ritual performances is generally considered incomprehensible to common men and women, or to have no real meaning. However, by analyzing the language of shamans’ speech lexically, semantically, and pragmatically, and by trying to answer the question, “What exactly is it that shamans are saying in these performances?”, Maskarinec has finally discovered that their public recitals and short *mantars* are well constructed, orally preserved, and accurately memorized texts. He reveals that the *jhāngari*, in diagnosing and treating afflictions that trouble their clients, rely on extensive training in oral texts that contain the core of every shaman’s knowledge.

First, Maskarinec precisely describes shaman texts that tell stories of the origin of men and of the mustard seeds thrown to the six directions at the beginning of every ceremony, as well as texts describing the creation of the universe and its elements, the origins of worldly disorder, and the histories of malevolent forces. He identifies the types of afflictions that clients regard shamans as effective in curing, e.g., witchcraft, malevolent spirit possession, and astrological imbalances. In describing rituals performed during treatment to manipulate particular afflictions, he finds that the sources of ailments and crises are explicitly postulated throughout the texts and that Nepali shamans learn to identify the diversities of causes by memorizing texts. Thus he shows that, as the shamans repeatedly recite their texts, patients and public also learn to recognize the relations of specific causes to specific conditions.

Then, by examining other specialists, including oracles (*dhāmi*), Brahman priests (*paṇḍit*), astrologers (*jaisī*), seers (*gyāni*, *herneharu*), counselors (*prakīl*), and pulse readers (*pārki*), Maskarinec finds that the copresence of multiple forms of ritual activity is only accidental, and that shamanic texts operate to connect the different ritual practitioners of western

Nepal and their cosmological context. Further, showing the similarities and differences between *dhāmi* and *jhāngari*, both of whom rely on systematic spirit possession as a core part of their practices, he concludes that the *jhāngari* is a shaman as originally defined by Shirokogoroff, while the *dhāmi* is a “medium.” He also reveals that *jhāngari* cannot be regarded as a simple derivative or a historic trace of “classical Asiatic shamanism.”

In chapter 4 Maskarinec uncovers the gap between the text and a shaman’s performances. He describes in detail one particular ceremony called “killing *siyo*,” a ritual performed when a family or individual is persistently troubled by a *siyo*, a fragile and detachable part of one’s life-force. Maskarinec thereby also shows that a performed text can diverge from the text as memorized by the shaman, and that the ways of performing a ritual contained in a text can be closely followed even when they are omitted from a particular ceremony. It is revealed that Nepali shamans endeavor to follow exactly a set of directions for creating order, even as they create the conditions for changing it (152).

Maskarinec further examines the private and secretive sides of their practice, analyzing various *mantars*. Showing that shamanic *mantars* are intelligible and sense-filled, he argues they fulfill the same purposes as the public texts: the reconstruction of orders in the present world. He suggests that *mantars* function to force the everyday world to suit the world as expressed in language. Thus he shows that private texts are not essentially different from the publicly recited texts.

Finally, examining the shaman initiation and the death ceremonies for a shaman, where the same texts are used, Maskarinec shows the parallels and inversions between these two events. The relevant texts and the rituals contribute to the continuity of shamanic practices. He also contrasts informal accounts that shamans offer of their early experiences with the polished formulations of the texts, and demonstrates ways that these texts themselves transform shaman “selves.” Thus he reveals that shaman texts create shamans.

In this way, Maskarinec succeeds in revealing what ritual speech and ritual action contribute to healing throughout the book. He finds that the ritual speech of the *jhāngari* vitalizes and permeates the particular form of life as well as a shaman’s “self.” In the studies of shamanism so far the shaman’s speech has been often considered unintelligible or meaningless, but through this study we can clearly learn how ritual language constructs a public universe. It is fully understood that language is not only the technical means by which we can inquire whether reality is intelligible, but also the surrounding vehicle in which we investigate the relations between thought, action, and reality.

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#### INDIA

ASHTON-SIKORA, MARTHA BUSH, and ROBERT P. SIKORA. *Krishnattam*. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1993. xiv + 185 pages. 15 color and 5 b/w plates, map, glossary, bibliography, index. N.p.

*Krishnattam* is a ritualistic theater form of Kerala, India. The textual basis for the drama form is the *Krishnagiti* [Songs of Krishna], composed in Sanskrit verse in 1652 by Manaveda, a member of the ruling family who in 1655 became Zamorin (as the ruler of the small kingdom of Calicut in northern Kerala was called). Legend has it that the *Krishnagiti* was composed under a particular tree in the Kutumbulam temple (home to another renowned theater form,