The author's interest in various aspects of this drama testify to her own involvement with, and love of, theater, and to her experienced appreciation of technique, dance steps, music, costuming, and all that goes into performance. She, as much as anyone involved in the history of Krishnattam, knows well the deep frustration of theater politics and the various forms of self-interested interference created by those who have not acquired an inner knowledge of the art. She covers it all as only an insider might—the training (chapter 6), the traditional performance from setup and preliminary rituals (chapter 7) through the main attraction (chapter 8) to the concluding rituals. She even includes, as a performer also might, the hard work that goes into a life devoted to an art and the hardships that it can bring, and has a full chapter entitled "The Future of Krishnattam: Artists' Opinions and Suggestions."

Ashton-Sikora writes in a fine, simple, unpretentious style, remarkable for its descriptive clarity. All of the chapters are enriched by her own academic training in theater as well as by her familiarity with Indian dance-drama traditions gained as a student of Yakshagana, another regional drama style found along the western coast to the north of Kerala, which shares many features with Krishnattam. Appendices (ten in all) provide synopses of the eight plays, some transcribed dialogue, historical and biographical notes on the prominent persons and places in Krishnattam history, and ethnographic notes on the traditional locations of the performance.

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BRÜCKNER, HEIDRUN, LOTHAR LUTZE, AND ADITYA MALIK, Editors. *Flags of Fame: Studies in South Asian Folk Culture*. South Asian Studies 27. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1993. xiii + 503 pages. Plates, general index, index of South Asian terms. Cloth DM/sFr 176.—; ISBN 3-515-06683-7.

Fame is what people compete for at the Chinakkattur Puram and other similar festivals in Kerala. "Fame is the only prize the participants may obtain," argues Tarabout (90). Participants in the Himalayan ball games described by Zoller strive for the ball, or "head," which serves as a metaphor for prestige. What the title of *Flags of Fame* implicitly signifies are thematically related oppositions of folk/text, king/ascetic, and fame/liberation, with a stress on the former. The papers by Tarabout and Zoller resonate with the image of *flags* of fame,[1] as do, to a lesser extent, Sontheimer and Malik's papers on god as king; Burghart's paper on the use of praise by genealogists; and Dasgupta's paper on subversive minority discourse. Nevertheless, the cultural image of *flags* suggested by the title is somewhat misleading in a double sense. First, it is only Tarabout and Zoller who explicitly deal with the theme of people striving for fame or *flag*. Second, and more importantly, understanding *flag* as a metaphor for fame misses the point: it hinders rather than helps efforts to develop theories on the folk representations and understandings of *flag* in South Asia. In South India, for example, *flag* is a fetish that embodies superhuman power (*shakti*). Hence when people strive for *flag* they strive for fame *and* power.

Flags of Fame is the product of several seminars and a conference held at Heidelberg University in 1988 and 1989 on the theme "South Asian Folklore: Regional Varieties, Modes of Transmission and Performance." Indeed, what characterizes this volume is its Heidelberg connections: eight out of the fifteen contributors have either studied or taught at Heidelberg

at one time or another during their careers (another two studied in Hamburg). The papers in the volume are grouped into two sections by the editors: part 1, "Divine Performances," and part 2, "Textual Networks." In part 1 Sontheimer focuses on the theme of god as king, Tarabout and Zoller on ritual rivalry, Freeman, Nambiar, and Schoembucher on ritual possession, and Michael on the ambiguous identity of Śiva. Collectively, the papers in part 1, except Nambiar's, provide rich descriptions and analyses of loosely related issues of kingship, ritual rivalry, possession, and identity.

The papers in part 2 are much more uneven in terms of quality, and are less integrated thematically. Rai, Brückner, and Claus focus on Tulu oral-tradition *paddanas*, Singh on episodes of a golden Śiva image, Skyhawk on Hindu-Muslim syncretism, Burghart on itinerant genealogists, and Dasgupta on subversive minority discourse.

The notions of "folk level" and "variations" employed in the introduction are symptomatic of the use of a specific analytical grid by the editors. The notion of "folk level" implicitly presumes a "geological" upper"text level"; and the term "variations" presupposes a diffusionist "origin" as well as transmission and change. Not a single paper in this volume attempts to historicize the very condition of the formation and emergence of particular oral "texts" and ritual performances. Upon reading the volume, one may notice that the dominant mode of analysis employed is closer to biblical hermeneutics rather than to the processual, deconstructive, and reflexive approaches to literature and language that have become popular in literary criticism, cultural studies, and anthropology since the mid-1980s.

Five contributions (Tarabout, Freeman, Zoller, Schoembucher, Burghart) present reasonably contextualized and situated cultural/social analyses of ritual performances and oral traditions. Freeman, for instance, consciously avoids applying the dominant modes of analyzing ritual possession viz. sociological and psychological explanations that involve the (mis)application of Western models (110, 134). Freeman is concerned with "how possession as a system of belief and practice is culturally constituted in Teyyam" (111). That is, he attempts to explain the constitution of Teyyam in terms of the wider cultural context that finds expression in the possession ritual (117). Burghart too is unconcerned with presenting a hermeneutic exegesis of oral "texts." His question is why itinerant, outsider Bhura Bhatt Brahman genealogists need to praise their clients. The answer does not lie within the oral "texts" or performances themselves. It is the social norm, according to which praise has to come from outsiders rather than from the self (441), that determines the role of the itinerant genealogists. Thus both Freeman and Burghart are sensitive to the cultural and social contexts that constitute particular religious practices and folk cultural forms. Although this approach marks a departure from the model of oral-text intertextuality proposed by RAMANUJAN and BLACKBURN (1986), I think it is still not enough. As DIRKS argues, contexts have to be read as (pre)texts, and texts as contexts (1996). Nevertheless, because of its rich description of various folk genres, *Flags of Fame* is undoubtedly an important contribution to the study of South Asian folk cultures.

NOTE

1. *Flag* is an important fetish that is widely used in religious contexts in South Asia. *Flag* as a fetish that embodies superhuman power (*shakti*) is a theme that emerges from Zoller's paper. In Kerala, where I conducted fieldwork in 1992–93 and 1996, red *flags* were used by both the Hindus and indigenous Christians as a metonym for *shakti* rather than as symbols for fame.

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SRINIVASAN, R. *Aiyanar's Domain: Political and Social Conditions and Attitudes in Tamil Folk Literature*. Bombay: Research Book Centre, 1993. iii + 72 pages. References. Paper n.p.; ISBN 81-7287-000-0.

Aiyanar's Domain is an important addition in the storehouse of Indian folk literature, dealing with the social as well as philosophical aspects of a farmer's life. Its insights apply not only to Tamilnadu; the situations and circumstances are almost the same in the agrarian societies of Southeast Asia. The struggle faced by the simple folk in daily life is beautifully mirrored in this slim volume. A spirit of wonder and romance is hidden in Tamil folk songs, sayings, and stories. The amount of wisdom, knowledge, and information (ethnic, historical, economic, political, natural, meteorological, etc.) to be found in oral tradition is amazingly vast. For the nonliterate masses of the countryside these traditions provide education and entertainment.

Srinivasan gracefully presents here the eminent Tamil folklorist, the late S. M. Natesa Sastri, and his collection. Along with stories of kings and commoners there is a description of the political messages, wit, and wisdom of Tenali Raman, the court jester of South India. His stories show that the general public is endowed with an intelligence and native wit that acts as a cushion against the trials of a hard life. Rayar Appaji was a hero-minister in South India in ancient times who had the highest concern for the dharma and for protecting the interests of both the community and the king; his intelligence and kindness are depicted in many popular folktales. The author has classified folktales into *marga* and *desi* varieties. *Marga* stories are formalized, sanscritic, and centered on the royalty. The *desi* stories are less formal native traditions registering the protests of the commoners against kings and their court officials.

Like folktales, the Tamil folk songs are of two types. The shorter ones, called *mangu*, are brief and to the point and deal with everyday life. The longer ones, called *kummi* and *ammanai*, are composed around the themes of kings, chieftains, poligars, and local heroes. In addition, the lifestyle and mannerisms of the British are also popular subjects of political ballads. The physical power of the British, French, Dutch and others is not questioned, but their cruelty and manipulativeness are well described.

According to Srinivasan, proverbs help us to better understand ourselves and our prevalent social and political attitudes. In Africa, China, and Persia proverbs are profusely used even in high-class speaking. The same was true of Tamilnadu in olden times.

Again the proverbs are divided into two types, broadly following the classification of stories into *marga* and *desi*. The author says that about forty percent of the proverbs are related to matters of social concern: attitude towards inequality, altruism, family relations, women, age, and hierarchy, as can be seen in such examples as "No sparrow can aspire to be an eagle" or "A lion cub can become porcine by associating with piglets." Such sayings teach us lessons drawn from the vegetable, animal, and natural world.

To demonstrate the universality of the themes, Marathi proverbs are also given in