PARTHASARATHY, R., Translator. *The Cilappatrikāram of Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ: An Epic of South India*. Translations from the Asian Classics. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. xix + 419 pages. Frontispiece, map, figures, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US$17.50; ISBN 0-231-07848-X.

Cilappatrikāram, or the story of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki, is the most important literary work of the Tamils of South India. Furthermore, this ancient story, in many forms, is well known among many other Dravidian cultures of South India and some parts of Southeast Asia. Sometimes it is surprising to know that this small story could have been so influential in dominating the literary trends of the ancient Tamils.

It is unfortunate that the rich and ancient epic traditions of India have been recognized only through the Sanskrit epic traditions of the subcontinent. This could be due to the highly influential classical literary paradigm of Indian society, and to the ideologies it projected. However, in the present literary context the perpetuation of such paradigms can be attributed to backwardness and ignorance. This kind of rigid acceptance of the classical paradigm also misled scholars who completely ignored the cultural diversity of India and did not care to recognize or study the less-known epic traditions of this vast country. Therefore the Sanskrit epics such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* naturally became the epitome of the mighty ancient epic traditions of India. The less-known epic traditions, including literary and semi-literary epics such as the *Cilappatrikāram* of the Tamil regions, the famous "Khamba-Thoibi" of the Tibeto-Burman speaking Meitheis of Manipur in the remote northeastern parts of India, the "Guru Guggā" of Rajasthan and the surrounding areas, the "Ḍhōlā-Māru" of the Bundel country, and many others, were completely ignored. Oral epics suffered a similar neglect. This neglect has made the subject of Indian epic discourse—both oral and written—highly blurred, and this blurriness to some extent continues even now. Scholarly attention to these and other neglected genres is a recent development, and, in my opinion, forms a kind of paradigm shift in Indian literary studies.

Only recently have some scholars tried to fill the gap caused by this utter neglect. In that sense, then, R. Parthasarathy's very scholarly translation of the *Cilappatrikāram* is timely and a befitting tribute to the non-Sanskritic epic tradition of India. Without this scholarly translation the *Cilappatrikāram* would have remained unknown to the English-speaking world.

The story of the *Cilappatrikāram*, as the translator of this nice volume rightly points out, existed in oral tradition before it was shaped first, presumably, into a ballad and then into its present epic form. It is also true that this epic does not seem to share many characteristics of the famous classical epics of India. Instead it seems embedded in folk tradition and yet fulfills the general conditions that eventually make a long song an epic. I find this phenomenon highly interesting, and as such this aspect of the *Cilappatrikāram* needs more attention than it has been given by epic specialists. The simple story of this epic reads just like any folktale. Consider the following summary.

> Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki, who belong to two prominent business families of Pukar in Tamil country, are married. They live together happily for some years. Mātavi, a courtesan, is honored by the king in recognition of her talents as a great dancer. He presents her with a garland and plenty of gold. She puts the garland up for sale and announces that the buyer will be her husband. Kōvalaṉ buys the garland, abandons Kaṇṇaki, and moves to live with Mātavi. During the celebrations of the spring festival there is a misunderstanding between Mātavi and Kōvalaṉ, who both suspect each other of infidelity.

Kōvalaṉ leaves Mātavi and returns to Kaṇṇaki. By now he has lost all his wealth and become a pauper. Meanwhile Kaṇṇaki has had a terrible dream in which she sees a misfortune striking Kōvalaṉ. Together they decide to leave Pukar and move to Maturai, where they believe they might recoup their lost fortune. A pair of anklets belonging to Kaṇṇaki is the only asset they possess now. They sell one to the royal goldsmith, who examines the anklet and tells Kōvalaṉ to wait near his shop. The cunning goldsmith, who had stolen the queen's anklet and was looking for a way to cover up, hurries to the palace and report to the king that he has caught the thief who stole the queen's anklet. The king, without thorough investigation, orders the execution of the thief and the recovery of the anklet. Kōvalaṉ is executed and the news reaches Kaṇṇaki. A highly grieved Kaṇṇaki rushes to the scene of the murder and finds her husband lying in a pool of blood. She denounces the unjust king. The people of Maturai also condemn the king for his injustice. Kaṇṇaki rushes to the palace and charges the king with the murder of her husband. The king tries to defend his action. In order to prove her charge Kaṇṇaki breaks open her other anklet, out of which fall gems, thus proving the innocence of her husband since the queen's anklet contained pearls, not gems. The king is shocked, and, acknowledging his mistake, he dies. The queen follows him in death. Kaṇṇaki walks out of the palace, curses the city of Maturai, then wrenches the left breast off her body and hurls it over the city. The city goes up in flames. Kaṇṇaki travels west until she arrives at Neṭuvēl Hill in Cēral country, whence she proceeds to heaven in Indra's chariot. Kaṇṇaki is deified and worshipped as a goddess.

Iḷaṅkō, the author of this great epic, seems to have renounced temporal authority in favor of the spiritual, and followed the Jain path, yet he composed this great secular poem. Parthasarathy has been very careful in his translation to avoid distortion or loss of the original meaning. One of the things that I like in the style of this translation is the use of simple language and idiom devoid of the jargon of the classical metaphor. He does not even alter the form of this epic: the three books—the erotic, the mythic, and the heroic, which are very close to the categories of traditional Tamil discourse (*aham*, *puram*, and *purāṇam*), have been translated as honestly and accurately as possible.

The *Cilappatrikāram* in the original Tamil consists of 5,730 lines. The poem is divided into three books (*kantams*), and each book is, in turn, divided into cantos (*katais*). It is widely believed by scholars that Iḷaṅkō "took the story of Kōvalaṉ and Kaṇṇaki from the oral tradition and put it into writing" (318). Parthasarathy acknowledges that not only has oral tradition generated this epic, but many folktales have also been directly used in various chapters of this work. He also attempts to discuss certain motifs of this popular epic from a folkloristic point of view, but does not succeed because of a lack of knowledge of the tools (type, motif, and index, for example) used by folklorists to identify the elements, diffusion, and geographical distribution of tales.

Parthasarathy, in his well-written introduction and postscript, sometimes seems to be getting repeatedly involved in the debate about what is and what is not non-Aryan (Dravidian), yet he fails to outline systematically the basic characteristics of this epic that could establish it as purely Dravidian. For instance, he finds the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* full of violence and religion, then says that the *Cilappatrikāram* is highly representative of nonviolence because the "Indo-Europeans were nomadic herds people, whereas the Dravidians were tillers and settled in their way of life" (8). In the first place there is no diachronic or synchronic evidence available upon which to prove that nomadic peoples' expressive systems are always full of violence and the works of settled tillers expressive of nonviolence. In fact, war, sacrifice, violence, etc., become attributes of ballads and folk epics in

times of cultural or national crises everywhere. Maybe the *Cilappatrikāram* did not achieve status in the overall worldview of Tamil nationalism because it could serve the purpose of defusing national or cultural crises.

There is another way of looking at this issue. If the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or the *Iliad* are seen as full of war, bloodshed, sibling rivalry, the abduction of women, disputes over land and property, etc., and that such things establish these epics as epics of violence, then the *Cilappatrikāram*, too, is full of extramarital relations, prostitution, theft, disputes, murder, death, suicide, fire, destruction, etc. Thus by and large it seems to share the basic characteristics of the Indo-European epic repertoire. The point is not to compare the imagined characteristics of the Aryan, Greek, or Hebrew (see pages 282–83) epics, but to define violence in the context of an epic and also realize its relationship with the culture that created that epic. Murder/death in war and murder/death in the palace are by definition violent acts and equally share the semantics of violence.

The truth is that it is hard to decide these issues on the basis of stereotypes and diachronic interpretations. Peter Edwin HOOK (1979) found literary and cultural areas in Asia (including India, China, South Asia, the Middle East, and many other countries) in which the epics—particularly in the action patterns of their heroes and heroines—exhibited amazing structural similarities. Then, in a courageous effort, he attempted to correlate this behavior with the sentence structures of the languages of these culture areas. Thus one needs to be cautious about drawing hasty conclusions regarding the racial origin of epics, particularly oral epics, without examining both the diachronic and the synchronic aspects of these complex genres.

A cursory examination of the motifs of the *Cilappatrikāram* and their distribution and diffusion, as Hook perhaps undertook to formalize his hypothesis, would have been highly useful to partially answer the questions Parthasarathy has raised. For example, fire and the relationship between fire and women seem as central to this epic as they are in other Indian epics, both oral and written. I have noticed that the position of women and their relationship with fire are themes that remain significant even in the present context of male-dominant Indian society, with its attitudes towards women's participation in the country's political and social management. The selection of fire by the Indian woman (who, more than the man, works with fire her whole life in her roles as housekeeper, food-creator, and food-giver) as the instrument of survival, power, purification, and [self-]destruction (*agni parīkshā*, *sati*, and dowry death [i.e., bride burning]), seems even in the present age to reestablish the strength of this epic and folk metaphor and its relevance in modern Indian society.

The problem is that more often than not we tend to follow the story of an epic or its linear order even for the purpose of analysis. Epics are, indeed, fine stories, and their enjoyment necessitates following their linear development. When one's purpose is to understand them on a deeper level, however, I believe that one has to go beyond the linearity into the realm of deconstruction and paradigm-reconstruction. It is then that we may perhaps discover the collective worldview that epics try to present, and also find clues as to why epics are constructed in the first place. Obviously this cannot be the purpose of a translation. But translations of epics can certainly facilitate this kind of analysis.

The translation of this very popular epic is a scholarly gift to epic lovers and epic specialists, and as such should be, and will be, welcomed by both the literary scholar and the folklorist.

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SIDKY, H. *Irrigation and State Formation in Hunza: The Anthropology of a Hydraulic Kingdom*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996. xvi + 181 pages. Maps, tables, b/w plates, bibliography, index. Hardcover US$34.00; ISBN 0-7618-0204-5.

The book under review deals with the alleged direct linkage between a complex irrigation system in a high-mountain region of the Northwest Karakorum and the process of state formation. The author attempts to prove that the "centrally-controlled hydraulic system" is a "decisive factor in the evolution of the state in Hunza" (66, 74). Following Karl Wittfogel's famous "hydraulic hypothesis," he emphasizes that "command over the hydraulic apparatus gave the Mir...political power" (75). The crucial questions are, however, if the kingdom of Hunza (as well as other neighboring political units) has ever really been a centralized state with a king who can be called a "hydraulic ruler" (82), and if, consequently, we can speak of a "state's hydraulic economy" (66), as Sidky wants to have it. According to him, the large-scale irrigation works could only have been accomplished through the energetic efforts of Tham Silum Khan III (1790–1824). Silum Khan is depicted as a supreme autocratic ruler who radically transformed the political structure of Hunza. The author concedes that before this king "the actual political power in Hunza rested with clan elders and lineage heads" (50). He further declares that "with Silim's rule, a new ideology of legitimacy emerged in Hunza, as the Mir's divine mandate from the mountain spirits was subordinated to his earthly control over the hydraulic works and, through them, land and water, the principal productive sources of the state" (73). In combination with a materialist research strategy the author outlines a purely functional model of state formation: "By levying taxes the ruler intensified the economic output of his subjects and accumulated greater wealth, which finally enabled him to invest in further canal-building projects" (62).

The main problem with Sidky's thesis is that it cannot be proved that Tham Silum Khan III was an autocratic ruler; as with every king in Hunza, Nager, Yasin, or elsewhere in Northern Pakistan, he would have feared for his life if he had dared to be despotic in Wittfogel's terms. Despite the gradual establishing of hierarchical structures and the strengthening of central authority under his reign, he was not the "chief controller of the irrigation works," and there was no "rigorous state water control" (63). Sidky underestimates the political role of noble and influential and/or numerically strong kinship groups, which virtually controlled the king and could put him in his place. If he had studied the ethnographical literature it would have become clear that Hunza represents an intermediate form of a segmentary and unitary state, at least until British rule. Thus the king dared not cut off the distribution of water to any given clan; he possessed preferential rights to water his own fields, but he had no total command over the irrigation system, unless he was prepared to risk rebellion. In addition, the ruler had to respect the landed property of kin groups according to customary and hereditary principles deriving from the segmentary kinship system. Similarly, it is not true that, for example, the construction of mosques was "the sole prerogative of the Mir" (66).