

question of whether other areas of Thailand had a similar pluralistic discourse is one that begs further research. Finally, I would imagine that the monasteries and associated communities that kept the manuscripts were centers of pilgrimage. James PRUESS points out that in the Ayutthaya period taxes were not levied on the members of communities who supported monastic pilgrimage centers (1974, 65–66). The communities analyzed by Gesick show a very similar character, I believe.

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RAHEJA, GLORIA GOODWIN and ANN GRODZINS GOLD. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. xxxvii + 234 pages. Illustrations, appendix, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$45.00; ISBN 0-520-08370-9. Paper US\$17.00; ISBN 0-520-08371-7.

*Listen to the Heron's Words* not only offers elegant ethnographic descriptions and comprehensive analyses of women's speech genres in North India but also illustrates how South Asian oral tradition transcends cultural authority and transforms into a medium of resistance. Motivated by a feminist desire to counter colonial and ethnographic representations of female submissiveness and passivity in the face of male dominance, the authors uncover subversive and critical messages in North Indian women's performances. Drawing on research conducted in rural Rajasthan (Gold) and Uttar Pradesh (Raheja), the authors stress the agency of North Indian women while addressing questions of representation, gender, sexuality, and kinship. In their endeavor, Raheja and Gold draw on a wide variety of women's expressive genres: songs sung at marriage and birth ceremonies, dancing songs, ritual stories, and informal personal narratives. The poetic forms that Raheja and Gold translate show how women compose poignant responses to North Indian gender and kinship ideology through explicit references to female sexuality valorized in lewd humor and the blurring of social roles in lyrical performances of multiply positioned voices.

The book opens with a theoretical introduction by Raheja, in which she situates an analysis of women's speech genres within broader issues concerning the relationships between language, gender, and power. She locates the account within current anthropological attempts to rethink the idea of culture, elucidating a conception of culture as competing discourses that attend to the experiences of positioned subjects. In this chapter she also makes a provocative attempt to align herself and Gold (who seek out the "hidden transcripts" implicit in women's speech and song) with the subaltern historian, who attempts to recover the voices of those whose agency has been denied.

Gold's first chapter provides an examination of Rajasthani women's wedding and birth songs, proposing that the lyrics offer an alternative perspective on women's sexuality and

form important sites where women recreate their own gender and sexual identities. She argues that scholarship on South Asian society, mythology, and psychology frequently represents the cultural image of Hindu women in terms of an inherent split between dangerous sexuality and nurturing motherhood. In contrast, Gold's investigation of blatantly bawdy songs performed by women reveals the celebration of a simultaneously erotic *and* procreative female sexuality. In her final two chapters (chapters 5 and 6), Gold directly addresses the fluid relationships and permeable boundaries between speech genres, such as folk song and folk-tale, and the lives of village women. She relates a tale about the *jungli rani* who triumphs over adversity in her marital home even while she maintains her religious devotion and the feminine roles she is required to perform in her family: daughter, sister, wife. Gold then turns to look at the life of the woman who narrated the story, raising thought-provoking questions about narrative realities and the relationship between tale and teller.

One of the most compelling aspects of the book develops in chapters 3 and 4, where Raheja reconsiders South Asian kinship networks from the perspective of rural women in Uttar Pradesh. Through her analysis of their songs and stories we gain an understanding of how women reimagine ideal patrilineal kinship ideologies. For these women kinship is not a code or structure to which they must conform; rather it represents a powerful set of political negotiations between conjugal and natal bonds. By taking on multiple voices in folk songs, sometimes speaking as sister and sometimes as wife, women place strategic emphasis on different roles and reveal the contradictions and ambiguity apparent within the patrilineal kinship system. Women actively resist the expectation for a wife to subordinate her own desire for intimacy with her husband to his natal kin as well as the expectation that a woman after marriage must redirect affection and fidelity for her natal kin to her conjugal kin.

*Listen to the Heron's Words* makes an important contribution to literature on women's speech genres and kinship in South Asia. The beautiful translations by the authors (a definite highlight of this book) add opulent layers to an already rich and detailed account. The poetic texts, however, never overshadow powerful analysis, owing to the authors' consistent focus on the situatedness of women's performances within a specific cultural climate. Scholars of South Asian folklore will appreciate abundant translations of songs and stories that preserve the original poetry and artistry of the North Indian women who created them. Those readers who possess a combined interest in gender studies and sociolinguistics will find this book an engaging investigation of women's speech genres situated within the specific sociopolitical context out of which these performances emerge.

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#### CENTRAL ASIA

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