

their telling has also become a ritual in itself.

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NARAYAN, R. K. *Gods, Demons, and Others*. With decorations by R. K. Laxman. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993. iv+241 pages. Illustrations, glossary. Paper US price \$12.95; UK price £10.25; Export US\$12.95; ISBN 0-226-56825-3.

“He is part and parcel of the Indian village community” (1). So begins the introductory essay, “The World of the Storyteller,” in this new reprint of the author’s 1964 classic. These words ring true even today, when cable TV and a wide assortment of other electronic media have flooded the Indian entertainment market. The telling of tales remains a strong force in India, and R. K. Narayan, heavily steeped in the lore of a culture pervaded by oral tradition, is a storyteller *extraordinaire*.

In this book, the author presents “retellings” of some of the best-known stories of India culled from epic, mythological, and courtly literature. True, the fifteen tales he relates come from the written, Sanskrit tradition, but Narayan has this to say: “If he [the storyteller] keeps a copy of the Sanskrit text open before him, it is more to demonstrate to his public that his narration is backed with authority” (3). The text is thus an icon, and not necessarily a vehicle of communication and instruction. Narayan’s view is similar to the working hypothesis of many folklorists: a “report travels, like ripples expanding concentrically, until it reaches the storyteller in the village, by whom it is passed to the children at home, so that ninety percent of the stories are known and appreciated by every mortal in every home, whether literate or illiterate” (7). Such a romantic vision, while still plausible to a degree, might be challenged in the post-modern world we live in. A new and critical introduction addressing issues such as these would have been useful. Having stated this, I must add that the book is still a good read for anyone who likes a well-written story.

What makes this book unique, and still interesting to ponder thirty years after its initial publication, is the deftness of Narayan’s prose, for both the academic and the general reader will find him equally erudite. He communicates with a style that translates the verbal skill of the storyteller into writing. This is precisely how the author began his project. After listening to narrators tell the stories, he checked them against the Sanskrit versions and eventually transformed them into renderings of his own. In Narayan’s words: “My method has been to allow the original episodes to make their impact on my mind, as a writer, and rewrite them in my own terms, from recollection, just as I would write any of my other stories normally out of the impact of life and persons around me” (9–10). This technique allowed the author to add his distinctive trademark to the “timeless tales” presented, while conveying some of the contextual dimensions of Indian storytelling by allowing him occasional room for exegetical digression. As we read these stories, then, we are constantly reminded that a narrator’s voice lurks behind the written renderings.

The stories chosen for the volume provide a broad, representative sample of Hindu mythology, drawing on “the pressures exerted by . . . different types of beings on each other, and their complex relationships at different levels” (6–7). Aside from

conflict (the tension that maintains the narratives' progression), these stories offer a whole range of common Hindu themes: questions of time and space perception; oscillations between dream and reality; issues of morality, dream ethics, and gender; ontological transformations; passion and eroticism versus celibacy and meditation; and the relationship between kingship, sagehood, and proper rule.

As one reads the stories in *Gods, Demons, and Others*, all of these recognizable themes from the ocean of Hindu storytelling emerge with clarity, wit, and insight. That is why this book would be appropriate for use as an introductory text in classes on Hinduism or Indian folklore. But it is also well suited for general reading, either in private or out loud to an audience.

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MIDDLE EAST

BRAUER, ERICH. *The Jews of Kurdistan*. Completed and edited by Raphael Patai. Jewish Folklore and Anthropology Series. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993. 429 pages. Photos, glossary. US\$44.95; ISBN 0-8143-2392-8.

Erich BRAUER, the only trained ethnologist in what was the British mandate of Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s, produced his *Yahude Kurdistan. Mehqar ethnologi* [The Jews of Kurdistan. An ethnological study (1947)] as an "ethnography at a distance." Like his monograph on the Jews of Yemen (1934), this work was prepared on the basis of interviews with Jews who immigrated from Kurdistan after the beginning of the century, and not on the basis of direct fieldwork. Brauer died in 1942, leaving the manuscript unfinished. Now Raphael Patai's publication of a partial English translation opens to a wider audience a work that was heretofore accessible to the Hebrew reader only.

Patai's publication of these materials, however laudable it may be as a rescue of another man's work, requires some comment, though only preliminary remarks can be given here. Brauer's work needs complete revision, based on the original manuscripts. This could be done with the help of Brauer's materials (located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem), which contain his complete field notes; negatives and positives of all his photographs; his collection of ethnographic objects;¹ the unfinished handwritten text of the present text in German; and a partial English translation of the German original. The name of the translator of this latter document is not mentioned in the papers, but it was not Brauer's work. After Brauer's death the translation was given to Patai to help him complete Brauer's work from the latter's papers, translate it into Hebrew, and publish it (the result being BRAUER 1947). The present English translation is the one done by the unknown translator, with some editing of style.

Patai wrote a new preface for the present publication, updated the scholarship about the Jews of Kurdistan somewhat, and added an English translation of his preface to the Hebrew edition. Patai changes the text of this last piece, both adding and dropping passages (e.g., page 14 of the Hebrew text has been dropped; "as a first-rate source of livelihood" in the Hebrew (2) has been changed to "and has a by-no-means negligible importance as a source of livelihood" in the English (27) [I couldn't help