

often taken for granted.

Let us congratulate the scholarly team for their excellent work.

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Heda JASON
Jerusalem

RAMANUJAN, A. K. *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. xv + 270 pages. Glossary, bibliography, list of tellers and collectors, list of tales. Cloth US\$48.00; ISBN 0-520-20398-4. Paper US\$17.95; ISBN 0-520-20399-2.

This book, published posthumously and edited by Stuart Blackburn and Alan Dundes, is a collection of Kannada folktales, collected by A. K. Ramanujan and some other scholars from both published and oral sources. Kannada is one of the four major Dravidian languages spoken in Karnataka in South India. During the past two decades folktales from Karnataka have been extensively collected and published in the Kannada language. There are very few collections, if any, in English. Ramanujan's nice collection is, therefore, timely and welcome.

Although some of the tales in the present work have parallels in other Indian languages and even other countries, all of the seventy-seven tales listed in this work have been collected in Karnataka. Therefore, the title of the book is somewhat of a misnomer because it includes no tales from any other region of India. The tales in this book were mainly collected in northern and southern parts of Karnataka from Kannada sources, either directly collected from Kannada speaking narrators or from already published texts. No folktales from other communities who speak Konkani, Tulu, Kodagu etc. are included. So strictly speaking, this volume is neither a representative collection of folktales of India, nor of Karnataka. But it still is a good collection of folktales.

Most of the tales Ramanujan did not collect himself but took from earlier published works on Kannada folktales in the Kannada language. However, he seems to have translated all these into English himself. Being a skilled translator, he has excelled in this task. Some of the published works he used are as follows: J. S. Paramasiviah, *Dakshina Karnataka Janapada Kathegalu* (Folktales of South Karnataka; 1977), Simpi Ninganna, *Uttara Karnataka Janapada Kathegalu* (Folktales of Northern Karnataka; 1988), H. J. Lakkappa Gowda, *Janapada Kathavali* (Folk Narrative; 1971), Ragau, *Karnataka Janapada Kathegalu* (Folktales of Karnataka; 1969), Dhavalasri, *Janapada Kathamsta* (Folk Narrative; 1968), Dr. Lingayya, *Padinellalu* (Shadow; 1971). Interestingly, some of the tales included in this volume have also appeared in an earlier collection of the author—namely, the *Folktales from India* (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

The arrangement of these folktales is not guided by any definite scheme of classification. Maybe Ramanujan intended to classify these tales according to themes or some other means, but the editors preferred to leave them as they were arranged by the collector. That Ramanujan had some kind of classification in mind is evidenced by his choice of opening this collection with the interesting tale "A Story and a Song"—a story about why stories should be told. This way Ramanujan achieves two objectives besides presenting an interesting folktale: he emphasizes the importance of storytelling and also makes his point about the role meta-folklore plays in storytelling. Narration of folktales, besides providing entertainment, is a need guided by the context, the purpose, and the message it communicates. In the absence of a purpose and message, tale narration becomes a mechanical and wasteful exercise. This is the message of the last tale, "A Story to End all Stories" (AT 2301 A), with which Ramanujan chose to conclude this volume.

At the end, a partial "List of Tellers and Collectors" is given, which includes for at least some tales the sex, age, and caste of the narrators, the region where a tale was found, and the year it was collected. A large number of tales have been left out of this scheme. There are, however, some tales which are shown as collected by "AKR" (i.e., A. K. Ramanujan) with or without a question mark (?). This question mark not only indicates uncertainty but also creates it when information is presented in the following manner:

"AKR: Kambar MS" or "AKR (?) Kurbetii MS"

This kind of information is very confusing. One wonders if the real collector is Ramanujan or if he has borrowed it from Kambar or whether both he and Kambar collected it together. Some introductory details of these manuscripts even in the form of brief annotations could have helped to reduce this uncertainty, which seems to be a common trait of almost all books published posthumously.

Furthermore, this "List of Tellers and Collectors," however incomplete it might look, reveals that almost all these tales have been collected from Brahmin and upper caste Hindu informants. Ramanujan himself belonged to a Brahmin family. This elite affiliation wittingly or unwittingly has, it seems, overshadowed this collection, which even the editors acknowledge (xiv). It would have been interesting and academically highly rewarding if Ramanujan had collected some tales from other nonprestigious castes or included some versions of tales from those castes.

We learn that Ramanujan wanted to add folkloristic notes to these tales so that this collection could become more scholarly and also pedagogically useful. Unfortunately, however, due to his sad and untimely demise, he could not complete these notes for many tales in this collection. In the notes he was able to make for thirty-six tales of the collection, Ramanujan attempts to identify motifs and tale types, often comparing them with European tales; in the notes he also gives reasons for the validity of his comparisons. The editors have done an excellent job by adding tale type and motif identification "wherever AKR had not provided them" or where they believed "another identification is possible." (227). Rarely does Ramanujan compare the important characteristics found in this collection with the narrative repertoire from other regions of India. And when he does compare his data with other Indian narratives, he confines his comparisons to "written" epics and narrative traditions such as *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Pañcatantra*, *Kathasaritsagara*, and *Jataka*. Despite these small weaknesses in this volume, I find these notes and comparisons scholarly and enlightening, and they certainly reveal the scholarly interests of Ramanujan.

Stuart Blackburn and Alan Dundes wrote a preface to the book and made a bibliography, glossary, and a list of tale types for the book based on the Aarne-Thompson Index for easy

reference and comparisons. The bibliography has a few inconsistencies. The editors have ignored the Kannada publications referred to by Ramanujan, most likely because these collections (published and unpublished) were not available to them and because of their lack of knowledge of the Kannada language. The bibliography also lacks uniformity in listing publications with more than one editor. In some cases the names of all the editors are listed and in many other cases the editors chose to give only one name and then add *et al.*

The preface, although not without merit, does not fulfill the need of a good introduction to this interesting collection. At most, it is a kind of tribute—academic tribute—to a scholar-friend. Both Alan Dundes and Stuart Blackburn have researched Indian folklore and published books on the subject. They thus may have been able to write a good introduction to this volume that would have made the book academically more rewarding both for scholars and students of folkloristics; a good introduction would have also been a much better tribute to A. K. Ramanujan than the preface. It is interesting to compare Richard Dorson's and Ramanujan's situations: when Richard Dorson died (incidentally, under circumstances similar to Ramanujan's death), leaving incomplete the last volume of Chicago University's Series on "Folktales of the World" (*Folktales of India* by Beck, Claus, Goswami, Handoo, 1986) Ramanujan did write an introduction to the book. In short, it is sad that Ramanujan's book has no introduction as it surely deserves one.

In conclusion, then, this collection of Kannada folktales is an important collection in the sense that it is perhaps the last book written by this important scholar. That this volume in its present form will serve the needs of folktale research in Karnataka or elsewhere in India is highly doubtful. However, it is almost certain that lovers of folktales will enjoy reading this interesting collection as they once enjoyed reading Grimm's fairy tale collections.

Lalita HANDOO
Central Institute of Indian Languages
Mysore, India

IRAN

PANĀHĪ SEMNĀNĪ, MUHAMMAD AHMAD. *Tarāne wa tarānesarāyi dar Iran* (Songs and Song Writing in Iran). Tehran: Soroush Press, 1998. 572 pages. Glossary, index, bibliography, music notations. Paper Rial 19,000; ISBN 964-435-101. (In Persian)

This book is a voluminous and multi-layered survey on folksongs (*tarāne*) in Iran that includes lengthy selections of texts in various locally spoken tongues (Persian, Turkish, Dari), as well as their translations into the standard modern Persian language.

The author at first tries to explore such fascinating subjects as the relation of folksongs to the earliest layers of Iranian poetry, the influence of folk poetry on high literature, and the various regional forms of folk poetry and rhyming and rhythmical patterns. The consequent chapters are devoted to the various genres of Iranian folk poetry, such as children's games, riddles (*cīstān*), lullabies (*lālāyi*), and laments for individual and communal occasions (*sūgvāri*, *'azādāri*). The latter topic includes textual samples of the important Shi'a mourning ritual performance, the Tā'ziye. Further on is a discussion of songs of merrymaking for the various seasonal festivals, wedding, and birthing celebrations. Also discussed are work songs for various agricultural activities, chants of tradesmen and street performers, songs with sociopolitical and historical content, and satirical ditties and love songs (*'āsheqānehā*) from various regions of the country (e.g., Azerbaijan, the South, Khurasan, Balujistan, and Mazanderan).