

at home in that culture by birth. The various categories of folklore are like the leaves on a tree. There can hardly be a science that specializes on tree leaves. These leaves are an organic part of the tree. So is folklore an organic part of culture, of the particular culture with which the carrier or maker of folklore identifies himself. From this follows that the best folklore research on peoples of the third world should be expected from students from among these peoples themselves. From this ideal we are still far away. Underdeveloped and developing peoples have other priorities. The hopeful anticipation that after its IXth Congress in Chicago anthropology will no longer be the same seems to be premature. Let us take the case of India, about a dozen or so languages spoken by over thirty millions; or the other countries in South and Southeast Asia. Folklore research is there going on everywhere with good results, but everywhere only the first beginning, namely gathering of material.

These are only some musings of an "interested reader" of "Folklore in the Modern World". It seems to be certain that the Folklore Conference at Indiana University in Bloomington and the IXth Anthropological Congress in Chicago were marking stones in the history of the related sciences and the book under review radiates a fresh impetus in many directions and it tells us what folklore in its various categories is and where it is to be found. All papers have bibliographical references and the book is complete with Biographical Notes and an Index of Names and an Index of Subjects. We are grateful to all those who have helped in its production.

M. E.

### ORAL TRADITIONS OF ORISSA

*Sitikant Mahapatra*, born 1937, is not only a very capable administrator but also a distinguished scholar and a wellknown poet and critic who is the foremost interpreter of tribal poetry from India. (During 1975-77, for example, while studying the confrontation of technology and ritual in developing societies, he was a Homi Bhaba Fellow). To date, he has already critically introduced and edited five anthologies of tribal oral poetry and ritual invocation songs: (1) *The Empty Distance Carries: Oral Poetry of the Mundas and Oraons*; (2) *The Wooden Sword, Hundred Munda Songs*; (3) *Staying is Nowhere: Kondh and Paraja Poetry*; (4) *Forgive the Words: More Kondh Poetry*; and (5) *Bakhen: Ritual Invocation Songs in a Primitive Community*.

*Bakhen: Ritual Invocation Songs of a Primitive Community* by Shri Sitakant Mahapatra. New Delhi, India 110 024: Prachi Prakashan, L-3 Lajpat Nagar-III, 1979. Clothbound. 40 pp, xxviii. Rs. 30.

This book is a specialized study of the ritual invocation songs of the Santals of Mayurbhanj District in Orissa. In the introduction Mahapatra explains how the religious-cultural is perhaps the most important element in the assertion of group identity. The songs are preserved because the Santal have faith in their intrinsic sacredness and because the Santal believe that a rite has the ability to make available definite blessings or ward off definite punishments or disasters. Evidently, psychological, sociological and religious-cultural elements meet in the ritual system.

The Santal invocation songs presented in this book are sung either during agricultural or during life-cycle rites. The appendices contain descriptions of how to bring up the *bongas* in the sacred grove; of Baha, the flower festival; of possession; and of the final funeral ceremonies.

*Staying is Nowhere, Anthology of Kondh and Praja Poetry*, transl. and introd. by Sitakant Mahapatra, with a preface by Norman H. Zide. Calcutta Writers Workshop Publication. Calcutta, India 700012: K.L. Ukhopadhyay, 257 B. B. B. Ganguly St., 1975; in U. S. and Canada: Inter Culture Assoc., Box 277, Conn. 06277. Hardbound. 41 pp, xxi. Rs. 35.

Oral traditions have been collected by anthropologists and buried in ethnographic monographs or they have been transcribed and analysed as if they were Sanskrit derived traditions and they have been offered as dissertations to Oriyan, Bengali, and Hindi Departments. Never before they have been analysed on their own grounds.

Mahapatra is a native speaker of Oriya. He knows the classical as well as the rich folk literature of Oriya and can naturally distinguish and appreciate topics and techniques. He is also aware of the fact that these poems are not recited but sung and danced.

The ritualistic songs are taboo at non-ceremonial occasions. They are sung to thank Mother Earth or to pray for good crops and prosperity. In this book Mahapatra attempts to shed light on the background of the *meriah*, the human sacrifice of the Kondh. In the appendices he adds excerpts of "A Personal Narrative of 13 years service amongst the wild tribes of Khondistan for the suppression of human sacrifices" by Major-General John Campbell and of General Macpherson's Report on Khonds in Orissa (in the 19th century).

*The Wooden Sword* by Sitakant Mahapatra, foreword by Edmund Leach. Cuttack, Orissa, India 753001: Utkal Sahitya Bikash, 1973. Handbound. 48 pp, xxxii. Rs. 20.

In the foreword Leach talks about the seemingly impossible task of translating into written English a corpus of traditional poetry of the Munda, an Orissan tribe, whose language and culture will be wholly unfamiliar to virtually all readers of this book. Where can we get clues for the non-verbal culture, the gestural and rhythmic environment. Every culture develops conventional metaphors and "meaning" which is dependent upon an intimate understanding of the original cultural context. The reviewer shares Leach's opinion that Mahapatra may not have achieved the impossible but that he has come quite close to it. Leach considers the book a most worthwhile effort and wishes it every success.

Mahapatra calls his translations "transcreations." He opens doors towards an understanding of the Munda world in pointing, for example, to the Munda obsession with the passage of time. "While life lasts, happiness can be found all round, in flowers, in green leaves, in the streams, in dances, in songs, in company, in love and sex."

The Munda live in northern Orissa in physical proximity to Oraons and Santals. The Proto-Australoid Mundari language has no script of its own. Mahapatra gives a brief outline of Munda material culture and their religious customs and attempts to explain the system of symbols in Munda poetry, symbols which are so compulsive because of the vitality of their imagery but which can be understood and appreciated only by an insider.

All three books are highly recommended to readers who want to familiarize themselves with the oral traditions of Orissa. They are a mine of information for the specialist.

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