

to the Gardens only to find that the cave had been obscured, its entrance sealed forever.

*The White Cranes of Sri Ramakrishna* is another fragment, this one containing the reflections of one Anand Mookerjee, a Boston theosophist of the 1930s, on his reading of Romain Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna*. Mookerjee suggests that Ramakrishna's vision of the white cranes at the age of six reveals a directness of perception that is the essence of true knowledge.

There are numerous questions for Prof. Sadler: how shall we classify this material; is it strictly entertainment; is it offered as historical evidence; or, is it a teaching work, designed to induce the kind of reflection that will lead to theosophical enlightenment? Without more information, we are not in a position to offer critical assessment.

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STRONG, JOHN S. *The Legend of King Aśoka. A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna*. Princeton Library of Asian Translations. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1984. Xii+336 pages. Glossary, bibliography and index. Hardbound US\$37.50, ISBN 0-692-06575-6.

Most South Asianists find the Aśoka known through his royal edicts and rock inscriptions to be an intriguing figure. The Aśoka who emerges from Buddhist legend, however, far surpasses the inscriptional Aśoka in both cruelty and beneficence. The historical King Aśoka (third century B.C.) brought most of India under his control. In North India during the second century A.D., one or more compilers brought together a cycle of Aśoka legends. Also featured in the collection is Upagupta, the monk who guided Aśoka on a tour of sites where the main events in the life of the Buddha took place. These legends and stories make up the *Aśokāvadāna*, a Sanskrit text here fully translated into English for the first time by John Strong.

Strong's translation (comprising Part Two of his book) is powerful, clear, and methodologically sound. The characters come through vividly, especially the monk Upagupta, the fierce executioner Caṇḍagirika, and the blind but enlightened Kunāla. Because Strong's translation draws the reader into the events, one can see these stories for what they truly are—didactic but also entertaining. As Strong comments, they "tended not to be heavily doctrinal but were designed to attract potential converts or maintain the faith of previous converts" (32). Strong manages to retain a popular flavor and an appealing quality in English. Unlike the only earlier English translation by Winifred Stevens, *Legends of Indian Buddhism*, which provides only selected tales and little of the Upagupta material, Strong sets forth the entire text, thus revealing the crucial links between different cycles of stories. His appendix also makes available twelve additional Aśoka legends no longer extant in Sanskrit but preserved in texts translated into Chinese during the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. Strong summarizes many of these legends from Jean Przyluski's *La Légende de l'empereur Aśoka*.

In Part One, Strong offers a highly intelligent interpretation of the meaning of selected legends contained in the *Aśokāvadāna*. These five chapters can be read with profit either before or after the translation. In them Strong emphasizes the factor which unites the Aśoka legends. As he says "... The *Aśokāvadāna* constantly seeks solutions enabling it to maintain the ideals of the Buddhist tradition—the Bud-

dha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the cakravartin, the goal of enlightenment—while making these relevant to the ordinary Buddhist in his everyday religious activities” (163).

Strong’s explanations display the inner logic of otherwise puzzling stories. Though the inscriptions describe Aśoka as fierce before his conversion and compassionate afterwards, the legends portray Aśoka as sometimes cruel, long after he becomes a Buddhist. Strong marshals wide-ranging evidence about attitudes towards kingship to argue that Aśoka’s fierceness as well as his compassion indicate a deep-seated ambivalence towards the political realm on the part of ancient Buddhists. Strong’s analysis also reveals that Aśoka interacts with monks in different ways. Charismatic monks attract him because they remind him of the Buddha; he resorts to other monks, in contrast, because of their institutionalized authority. Sometimes monks treat him as an ordinary layman; at other times he is their patron-king. Strong demonstrates that Aśoka conceived of himself as symbolically establishing contact with the body of Buddha through his erection of 84,000 stupas and establishment of a set of pilgrimage sites. His final chapter argues that Aśoka’s teaching strategies force people into situations where they experience certain aspects of life in the other *gatis* (modes of existence)—as hell dwellers, heavenly hosts, animals, and hungry ghosts—so that they come to understand the impermanence of life, the insignificance of caste for a monk, and the importance of merit-making.

In addition to these specific interpretations, Strong’s endeavor is praiseworthy for more general reasons. First, Strong gives his reader a sense of the *avadāna* as a genre and sets the *Aśokāvadāna* in the context of a whole set of Buddhist texts which rework old legends and stories for preaching and proselytizing (32–35). Second, he deftly brings together a great deal of research on Indian, Chinese, and Sri Lankan Buddhism to establish connections between incidents in the *Aśokāvadāna* and themes significant in either Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism. At the same time, he insists on the text’s singularity and lack of concern with sectarian issues (37). Third, Strong shows great sensitivity to the cosmological dimension of Buddhist legends. Building upon certain concepts first put forth by Paul Mus, Strong analyses legends which use the structure of the universe as a pedagogical device (104; 147).

A few of Strong’s claims might appear slightly problematic to some scholars. For example, one may wonder whether it is appropriate to infer so much about Aśoka’s quinquennial festival from descriptions of the festival held by the seventh century King Harṣa. Although the reader easily accepts Strong’s interpretation of Caṇḍagirika’s execution house as the establishment of hell on earth, the story of minister Yaśas seems to concern the irrelevance of caste in the monastic context far more than the animal *gati* as Strong claims. In addition, Strong’s analysis of the term *sāra* (essence) in the *Aśokāvadāna* remains unsatisfactory, though hardly for want of effort on his part; the historical precedents of the term seem difficult to identify.

Strong has nevertheless succeeded admirably in opening up the text to a variety of readers. The book will be of interest to scholars of South Asian story literature, where tales often help to inculcate and strengthen commitment to religious ideals. Specialists in both Mahayana as well as Theravada will appreciate the book’s analysis of royal, cosmological, monastic and popular traditions in Buddhism. Folklorists will find the stories intriguing, including those which Strong presents in the appendix. One suggestion: In order to fully appreciate the subtleties of Strong’s arguments, the reader may want to glance at pp. 169–171 first because they explain the relationships between the various editions, translations, and variants cited in the footnotes of Chapter One and elsewhere.

## REFERENCES CITED:

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VATUK, VED PRAKASH. *Studies in Indian Folk Traditions*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979. 221 pages. Hardcover Rs 55.

*Studies in Indian Folk Traditions* is a very interesting collection of nine essays that were written by Ved Prakash Vatuk (one is co-authored by Alan Dundes and four are co-authored by Sylvia Vatuk). These essays were written between 1966 and 1974 and appeared in scholarly journals such as *Asian Folklore Studies*, *The Journal of American Folklore*, *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *The Journal of South Asian Literature*, and *The International Journal of Addictions*. The essays cover a broad range of topics in the folklore and folklife of India. Vatuk's motivation for these studies is summed up in the opening essay entitled "Method and Interpretation in the Study of Folklore in India-A Comment." Vatuk states that the "field of folklore scholarship in India is characterized . . . by a number of basic defects which call into question the usefulness of much if, not all, of the published literature, either for informing the reader as to the actual nature of the oral literature of village India, or for drawing conclusions of a theoretical or historical nature . . . Inadequate field-data collection methods and improper handling of the raw folklore material appear to mark much of Indian folklore scholarship . . . In general, Indian folklore scholarship seems out of touch with the developments of folklore scholarship in other parts of the world." (1-2). This unfortunate situation has been somewhat corrected in recent years with the work of trained folklorists such as Stuart Blackburn and Brenda Beck. Vatuk's own efforts have also been very influential in this recent trend toward the application of rigorous scholarly methodologies to field data from India.

In "Method and Interpretation in the Study of Folklore in India-A Comment", Vatuk points out a number of the ways he feels Indian scholars have not used proper methodologies. He points to inadequate field work, some of which is focused on reminiscences and memories rather than on field transcriptions and descriptions of the context. Some of the poor methodologies are the result of a cultural bias against the artistry of folk traditions. Many Indian editors have also "purified" the materials that they have collected and have lost the village dialects entirely in their "transcriptions." Vatuk concludes this essay with the exhortation that "a basic change in attitude and the instilling of devotion to principles of objective scientific investigation would go very far to ameliorate the conditions I have pointed out in this paper" (12).

Two of the essays focus on the intricacies of the metrics employed by folk artists. In "Poetics and Genre-Typology in Indian Folklore," Vatuk quotes several Indian authors who claim that there is no system of metrics in Indian folksongs or in other types of folk poetics and then demonstrates why they are wrong. Vatuk surveys a