

practices of the Paraiyar. At Valghira Manickam the majority consist of Christian converts, while the Hindu Paraiyar are in a minority. The Christian Paraiyar experience peculiar difficulties which result from their low social status in spite of the fact that the Christian faith does not permit the kind of avoidance and social discrimination which the Hindus practice. They, of course, justify it by their belief in *karma* and rebirth. In Tamilnad many Christians of higher caste, even the clergy, practice untouchability, which in modern times the Christian Harijans, especially the younger generation, find reprehensible, and rightfully so. Thus a number of Christian Paraiyar have left the Church and embraced Islam, as the Muslims promised them social equality and financial benefits of which the Harijans were deprived when they became Christians.

The author further describes the religious beliefs of the Christian and Hindu Paraiyar and shows that the Christian Paraiyar after all do not differ much from their Hindu counterparts. Since their instruction in the Christian religion is very rudimentary, and they are not welcome to take part in the religious life of the parish, they share the traditional beliefs of the Hindu Paraiyar, but give their old gods Christian names. Their ideas about death and after-life, morality, purity and sin, poverty and suffering are practically the same as those of the Hindu Paraiyar. Like the Hindu Paraiyar they firmly believe in the existence of evil spirits and in spirit possession. They exorcise these evil spirits through certain charismatic individuals who derive their power from the Virgin Mary (Arockyai Mary) or other saints, such as St. Anthony or St. Sebastian. The Hindu Paraiyar exorcise their evil spirits in a similar manner through magicians who get possessed by a stronger and benevolent spirit.

The folklorist, however, will not find much of interest in this monograph. The author has not included any myths, folktales and folksongs, riddles and proverbs in his otherwise very informative description of Paraiyar life in Valghira Manickam. We are especially grateful to him for this study of a Christian Paraiyar community because no such study has so far been published in India.

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RICHMAN, PAULA. *Women, Branch Stories, and Religious Rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text*. Syracuse, N. Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1988. xii + 273 pages. Tables, figures, bibliography, index. Hardcover US\$19.00; ISBN 0-915984-90-3.

In the introduction to his monumental translation of the *Pañcatantra* (1859), Theodor BENFEY, following A.L.A. LOISELEUR DESLONGCHAMPS, noted that a majority of the *apologues* in the text bore a family resemblance to Indo-Buddhist pedagogical literature. He therefore concluded that the stories of the *Pañcatantra* must have arisen in India because Indians were thoroughly accustomed to Buddhist educational storytelling in the form of parables and moral-ethical tales. While Joseph BÉDIER's *Les Fabliaux* (1925) definitively put Benfey's (and his admirer Emmanuel G. COSQUIN's) larger diffusionistic theories to rest, the question of the relationship between Buddhist modes of storytelling and the general Indic pattern of moral-religious instruction through narrative still remains open. Had Benfey known Tamil, he may have cited *Mañimākalai*, the sixth-century Buddhist text discussed by Paula Richman in the book under

review, as corroborating evidence for his notion of the persuasive and communicative power of Buddhist ethical narrative.

Cāttaṅār's narrative, the only extant Buddhist text written in Tamil, consists of a soteriological frame story concerning the plight of a courtesan's daughter (*Maṇimēkalai*) during her quest to uphold the ideals of a nun, and sixteen "branch stories" (*kiḷaikkatai*) that sprout from the central narrative. Richman explores the connections between the main narrative and five of the branch stories. Her reasons for utilizing the five that she selects are length, structural complexity and degree of rhetorical sophistication. She feels that Cāttaṅār's rhetorical strategies even reveal the text's structure, for each story functions to expound a particular Buddhist principle or mode of behavior in order to persuade the intended audience that Buddhism is superior to other religions both in terms of philosophy and morality. Because the branch stories "resonate with, and add depth to, the explanation of themes found in the main story" (5), Richman correctly insists that the text should be seen as an integrated whole. If we view *Maṇimēkalai* as a coherent and unified piece of literature, then we must read and interpret it not simply as a story of female renunciation, but as a polemic, "a tale in the service of an argument" (34).

Cāttaṅār's argument, however, is multifaceted. As Richman points out, it is impossible to delineate the specific school of Buddhist thought that the text adheres to. The canonical sources alluded to in the text are eclectic, and so is the interpretive toolbox used for its exegesis by Richman. Indeed, one methodological approach would certainly not be able to account for the multiple readings that are possible. But the straw man rhetoric that she utilizes to draw in sources from other disciplines is not the most productive way to approach the problem. The author notes, for example, that Indologists have tended to devalue the branch stories in the *Mahābhārata* (38–39). This may be true in specific cases, but her claim that South Asian textual scholars have only recently realized the contribution that branch stories can make to the complete "overall goals of the text" (37), is a bit inaccurate. To cite just one counter-example, Franklin Edgerton used the term "Chinese nest" to discuss emboxxment in his attempt to draw attention to story within story (EDGERTON 1924, 5).

Richman's decision to use Sanskrit epic (*mahākāvya*) as an illustration of branch stories in operation is not the most appropriate example, especially in light of the fact that she does not view *Maṇimēkalai* as conforming to the standard *mahākāvya* pattern of composition (158–159). A more fruitful comparison could have been made with the *Pañcatantra* or the *Veṭālapañcaviṃśati*, both of which share more thematic and structural features with *Maṇimēkalai* than the *Mahābhārata* does, but are not mentioned in Richman's study. The case of the *Pañcatantra* is most poignant. As a *nītiśāstra*, one of the central themes of the *Pañcatantra* is moral and/or ethical conduct. Had Richman utilized the comparative potential of the *Pañcatantra*, especially its southern recensions (HERTEL 1904 & 1906), her argument could have been greatly enhanced.¹

This criticism aside, there is very much to be praised in the book. Her rich data address a number of sociological themes and philosophical issues, ranging from the conflict between laypeople and renunciants to cosmology. Richman constantly returns to Tamil texts and indigenous modes of interpreting things to analyze the clever and subtle ways in which Cāttaṅār uses Tamil literary and symbolic conventions to propagate Buddhist ideals. She is always careful to consider both "classical" views extracted from the Pali canon and "local" views propagated by the Tamil Buddhist missionary *cum* preacher. It also affords us glimpses of how one type of proselytizing mechanism dynamically functions in a religious tradition that values rhetoric so highly.

Richman's discussion is all the more relevant today, since at least one author has recently demonstrated the didactic power of narrative in contemporary India (NARAYAN 1989). The book will certainly be of interest to an interdisciplinary audience. Scholars of the history of religions, women's studies, South Asian languages and literature, as well as folkloristics will each find data pertinent to their own fields in this study.

NOTE:

1. Richman similarly criticizes folklorists for not dealing adequately with framed stories (50). To support this contention, she cites the outdated article in *Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Legend* (1972), relegating more important and contemporary articles on this subject to a footnote (197). Once again, Richman's thesis could have been positively strengthened with a discussion of the work being done on discourse analysis under the general rubric of folkloristics.

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SWIDERSKI, RICHARD M. *The Blood Weddings. The Knanaya Christians of Kerala*. Madras: New Era Publications, 1988. vii+190 pages. Bibliography, select index. Hardcover Rs 100.

Though by and large unknown in other parts of the country, the Knanaya Christians