

Another interesting essay by Arvind Sharma, although all too short (15–18), delves into the tradition of indigenous protests against *sati*, involving litterateurs and commentators on *smritis* and *tantrikas*. Of these, the role of tantric and *shakta* cults can be analysed not only in terms of protest but also as positively offering, within the Hindu fold, perhaps a different model to Hindu widows than that of *sati*, i.e., a somewhat more equitable status for women in direct opposition to the complete subordination of the upper-caste widows.

The final essay, “*Sati, Widowhood and Yoga*” (73–84), by Alaka Hejib and Katherine K. Young, attempts to see *sati* as the orthodox Hindus saw it and to explain the logic of *sati* in terms of the ideals and values of orthodox high-caste Hindus. An uneasy impression that the authors are attempting to justify the practice is laid to rest by their explicit assertion to the contrary. The use of a *yoga* analogue operating as a philosophy of action behind the Hindu widow and those who perform *sati* is refreshing, though it fails to explain much. The authors themselves are unsure whether the Hindu widows and *sati* widows were conscious of the *yogic* dimension of their lives. Moreover, the suggestion made by the authors about the *bhakti yoga* linking the twin issues of devotion to the *pati* (god husband) and attainment of personal salvation (the *yogic* ideal of a man, not a woman), remains dubious. Recent research on *bhakti yoga* shows an implicit devaluation of the *pativrata* (faithful) wife concept, where salvation lay in unqualified devotion to the husband. In fact, the life of a *bhaktin* (female devotee of *bhakti yoga*) shows the weakening and sometimes even discarding of the marital tie, rather than its strengthening, and the finding of space outside the role of a dutiful wife or a chaste and austere widow or a *sati* widow. However, the internalization of the *sati* ideology by women, in which they join their husbands after death and also act as vehicles for the departed husbands to enter heaven, is effectively brought out. To this ideology is conjoined the *sati* widow’s own elevation to the place of a goddess. In fact, this idea needs to be investigated more closely, as it may very well have been the overriding one. Quite clearly, somewhere along the way the idea of the faithful wife following her husband into death was superseded by the idea of the *sati* being a goddess. A clue to the dominance of this idea and feeling can in fact be gleaned from the quotation of Janaki Devi Bajaj given on the front page of this book itself, which reads:

“As soon as I got married, I thought of committing *sati*, so that I, too, would be worshipped.”

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ZVELEBIL, KAMIL V., trans. *Two Tamil Folktales: The Story of King Matanakāma, The Story of the Peacock Rāvaṇa*. UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Indian Series. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. lvii+236 pages. Introduction, list of Indie terms, selected bibliography, index. Hardcover Rs120; ISBN 81–208–0212–8.

Two Tamil Folktales is a welcome addition to the growing body of English-language material on Indian folktales. The two popular narratives Kamil Zvelebil has translated here are *Matanakāmarājan katalai* (“The Story of King Matanakāma”), and *Mayilirāvaṇa katalai* (“The Story of Peacock Rāvaṇa”). The first of the two tales is in reality

a collection of twelve stories narrated within a frame-story. The second tale belongs to a somewhat different genre, being an offshoot of the main narrative of the pan-Indian epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. In this book we have the first accurate as well as readable translation of the first tale in modern English, and the first translation of the second tale in any form.

Zvelebil has prefaced his volume with a substantial Introduction in which he explores the many interesting issues raised by the two narratives regarding the nature of Indian folk texts. In both stories the author finds excellent evidence for the "symbiotic continuity" between what has traditionally been called "folk" culture and the other levels of Indian culture: the "diffusion and borrowing of (folkloric) motifs and their vertical and horizontal movement is a part and parcel of this situation" (xxii). His holistic approach is of a piece with the new scholarship represented in two other recent publications on Indian folklore (BLACKBURN and RAMANUJAN 1986; BECK et al. 1987).

The literary and cultural affiliations of the peacock story appear to be straightforward; however, a closer look at the text reveals complexities of ideology and intent. Like the *Catakaṅṭarāvaṇaṅ katai* (CRK), another *Rāmāyaṇa* folktale in Tamil, it celebrates the victory of an active folk-hero figure over a new demonic threat to the order established by the hero Rāma (see SHULMAN 1986). In CRK the figure is the uncharacteristically aggressive heroine Sītā, fighting against the demon Catakaṅṭarāvaṇaṅ, an allomorph of Rāvaṇa of the epic's main narrative; in the peacock story it is Hanumān routing Mayilirāvaṇaṅ, the demon-king of Laṅkā of the netherworld. More than the former text, the latter has been assimilated into the fantasy world of the märchen-type folktale, for magical elements prevail over the "ambiguous and dynamic reality"—of blood and gore in battle, tragic death, and the powerful confrontation with evil and disorder—that informs Tamil war poems and heroic tales at both folk and "classical" levels, a feature that Shulman has adduced for CRK (SHULMAN 1986, 115).

Zvelebil covers more familiar ground in his analysis of the king story: the tales are discussed in terms of motifs (with reference to the Thompson-Balys Index), regional, pan-Indian, and universal features, and so forth. The comparison of parallel motifs in this highly literary story and oral narratives of the Dravidian-speaking Iruḷa tribe illustrates the process of the diffusion of these motifs in south India. Not surprisingly, given its content, the king story turns out to share an enormous number of motifs with the worldwide märchen-type tale. The peacock story, on the other hand, despite its affiliation with a pan-Indian epic, appears to be an entirely south Indian narrative, with versions in the other Dravidian languages as well as in Tamil.

Zvelebil has based his translations of the two tales on printed editions that represent the texts in their finalized literary version, dating, most likely, from the middle of the nineteenth century. An obvious issue surrounding the printed editions is the fixity of these texts in contrast to the fluidity of texts preserved mainly or entirely in an oral tradition. The language of the texts is typical of mid-nineteenth-century Tamil literary prose, which is highly Sanskritized; but the tales also contain many colloquialisms and popular idioms. Everything about these tales—language, narrative style, content, selection of detail—offers a fertile field of study for not only the folklorist but the historian as well. It is to be hoped that scholars will use these translations to investigate aspects of the florescence of "folk" genres such as the Kuṛavñaci (Gypsy dramatic poem) and *katai* (tale) in the literature patronized by southern Indian courts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It seems to me that the Brahmanizing editorial hand so evident in these two stories

is part of a very old process by which popular narratives have moved in and out of the "literary" traditions of India; I am thinking of the great old Sanskrit tale collections such as the *Pañcatantra* and the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (itself based on the *Bṛhatkathā*, "Great Story"). Even clearer is the thematic and cultural affinity between the Tamil tales, especially the first one, and the Sanskrit literary *kathā* (whence Tamil *katai*, story) genre. The dark, tragic, ritual, and myth-oriented world view of other kinds of Tamil folk literature—in particular, heroic and epic texts—is totally absent from the tales in the king story. In a manner quite reminiscent of the Sanskrit tales (themselves representing literary versions of popular tales), the minister's son in the frame-story tells one tale each night, to make twelve in all, to hold off the amorous advances of the two princesses whom he has supposedly married, but whom he intends to give in marriage to his lovesick friend, the prince Maṇḍakāmarājaṅ. The tales are not only about the staples of the märchen-type tale—princes, princesses, aerial voyages, magic swords, and horses swifter than the wind—they are also about the relations between these fantastic, heroic beings and merchants, courtesans, con-men, and common folk who are distinctly identifiable as members of an urban culture and demi-monde, the familiar milieu of the medieval Sanskrit tale collections (see VAN BUITENEN, 1959). The character-type of the loyal friend who is a prince or a minister's son is a favored one in the Sanskrit tale literature, from tales in the *Pañcatantra* to the main narrative in the seventh-century court poet Bāṇa's *Kādambarī*; so are the love-sick courtesan and the articulate, witty, quick-thinking and active, yet completely chaste and loyal wife. There is a rich field for comparison here. And yet the Tamil tales are essentially Tamil in their "feel" and ethos, even their stereotypes; the merchants of these stories are the Chettiars of southern India, the sentiments endorsed are those of Tamil culture, and, even though the locales are vaguely identified, the descriptions place the tales in the Tamil region.

Scholars and lay readers alike will enjoy these tales, which have delighted generations of Tamils from all walks of life. Zvelebil's translations capture the dynamic movement of the narrative, and the immediacy and richness of the language, of the originals. We should be grateful that this eminent scholar of classical and modern Tamil literature has taken the time to translate these folktales, thereby helping us hear what Blackburn and Ramanujan have called "another harmony" in Indian literature.

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