

SMITH, JOHN D. *The Epic of Pābūji: A Study, Transcription and Translation*. University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. xiv+512 pages. Map, plates, figures, line drawings, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth £42.50; ISBN 0-521-39536-4.

John Smith's book presents the Rajasthani text and English translation of the vernacular oral *Epic of Pābūji*. Pābūji is a medieval Rajput hero worshipped as a divinity in India, where the performance of this epic is regarded as at the same time an act of worship. This work is a wonderful gift to the academic world: it marks the start of Pābūji studies, introducing a piece of literature that deserves to become the subject of an entire branch of scholarship, exceeding as it does the capacities of any single researcher.

As a work of literature, the original *Epic of Pābūji* has its own intrinsic qualities that merit examination from a number of perspectives. Smith, for example, deals with the narrative parts of the work, leaving its lyrical parts to investigation by future scholars (20, 30; note 42). Smith's book provides the first edited and translated text of any complete Indian version of this vernacular epic: BECK's work (1982) lacks both the Tamil text and its translation; WATERFIELD's version (1923) comprises a partial recreation-in-translation of the Hindi version; ROGHAIR (1982) provides a part translation/part summary of the Telugu work; PANDEY (1979, 1982) gives the text of the Hindi version, but without a translation that would enable comparison with other vernacular *Pābūjis* either inside or outside of India (an important point, since the only other complete text and translation of the epic is in TEMPLE's [1881-1901] series on Punjabi oral literature).

There is a need for the further publication of well-translated Indian vernacular oral epics (of which there are scores) to provide *The Epic of Pābūji* with its proper literary context. Its narrative forms and details of content must be situated in the framework of Indian literature and culture as well as compared to the ethnopoetic genres and medieval literature of neighboring cultures. Ethnography should elucidate the epic's structure and meaning by explaining its beliefs, actions, and objects, and relating them to the particulars of the performers' and audiences' cultural background. Anthropological fieldwork is needed to supply the social context of the epic and its performance, and to clarify its function in the community for performers and audience alike. Also necessary are linguistic analyses and dialectological investigations of the Rajasthani text.

The first hundred pages of Smith's book comprise the author's introduction to the text, addressed to the educated layman (a wise choice since we are all laymen on this subject, this being the first presentation of the complete *Pābūji*). The introduction describes in some detail several aspects of the work's transmission and performance, its musical side (with samples of notation), and the divine qualities and possible historicity of its hero. It also describes and analyzes the *par*, the painted cloth that serves both as *Pābūji*'s mobile temple and as a backdrop for the narration of the epic text during performances. For descriptions and analyses of other aspects of the epic (e.g., elements of its poetics, the nature of its "deep-level under-text," etc.), the reader is advised to refer to Smith's earlier work, listed in the bibliography of the present book (508), to BLACKBURN et al. (1986, 1989), and APPADURAI et al. (1991). These writings provide information complementing that provided in Smith's introduction.

The author is to be congratulated for his work. As the investigation of Indian

vernacular oral epics has only recently begun, let us hope that more publications will soon follow.

## REFERENCES CITED:

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SOIFER, DEBORAH A. *The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana: Two Avatars in Cosmological Perspective*. SUNY Series in Hindu Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. xiv+321 pages. Figures, appendices with translations of myths, bibliography, index. Paper US \$16.95; ISBN 0-7914-0800-0. Hardcover US\$49.50; ISBN 0-7914-0799-3.

*The Myths of Narasimha and Vāmana* is an excellent study of Narasimhāvatāra (the fourth avatar of Viṣṇu) and Vāmanāvatāra (the fifth avatar of Viṣṇu) as portrayed in the eighteen multiforms of the Narasimha tale and the thirty multiforms of the Vāmana tale that are found in the *Vedas*, *Brāhmaṇas*, and *Purāṇas*. Soifer finds particular significance in the complementarity of this pair of avatars.

Beginning with an analysis of Viṣṇu in the *Vedas*, Soifer discusses the foundation