

Jagannātha), even an untouchable (candāla) will be released from the cycle of rebirth;

Whereas someone possessing perfect knowledge of Vedānta philosophy, as long as he hasn't seen the wooden idol on Blue Mountain, will restlessly wander through this circle of birth and death so hard to overcome.

(Chapter VIII, 157/158)

This apparently egalitarian attitude is countered by an attempt to reestablish or perhaps rather to reinforce Brahmanical exclusiveness. Devotion (*bhakti*), the main element in the cult of the wooden God, is matched by knowledge (preeminently Vedānta) and ritual (Tantrism), both tendencies stressing the importance of the priestly class.

Schneider's at times sarcastic style (a good example is the passage on Māhātmyas in general on p. 8/9) leaves no doubt as to his attitude towards the whole cult of the wooden Lord of the Universe which to him hardly seems to be more than an extraordinary case of pious fraud. However, I can't follow his generalizing remarks on devotion (*bhakti*) that seem to me to neglect the rather complex nature of this religious phenomenon. Simple-hearted devotion may indeed be misused by the ruling class or classes, but one cannot overlook the fact that *bhakti* at the same time proved to be the vehicle for the claim of individuality against a repressive society as in the case of great devotees (*bhakta*) like Lāl Ded, Mīrā Bāī and Kabīr. Especially Kabīr who probably lived some decades before the final redaction of our Māhātmya has become an attraction for many contemporary Indian intellectuals. For the man who confessed to be just God's dog, devotion (*bhakti*) was the way to individuality and freedom – freedom not in the restricted religious sense, but as a provoking, at times even shocking challenge to all that was and is orthodox in Indian tradition.

Rainer Kimmig

**Konrad Meissner:** Mālushāhī and Rājulā. A ballad from Kumāūn (India) as sung by Gopī Dās. Part I: Kumāūnī text, translation and appendices; Part II: Commentary; Part III: Glossary; 1 sound cassette. (Neuindische Studien, 10). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985. 341, 221, 260 pp., 1 map, 16 plates. DM 124,-

Ours is an age of waning traditions, some of them coming to an abrupt and often violent end, some just slowly dying away. The impact of modern civilisation is felt in even the remotest parts of the world, and one feature typical of traditional society that hardly has any chance to survive is what has been labeled oral poetry since the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord. The "Singer of Tales" seems to be a figure

of the past, and the poems recorded by linguists and anthropologists are but a faint shadow of a richness irrevocably lost or in the process of becoming lost. Oral poetry is more than the words of the poem; it is social interaction between singer and public, something you can't store away in a book.

The song of king Mālushāhi and his beloved Rājulā is a charming ballad once sung all over Kumāūn and some of the adjacent parts of the Himalayas. As usual with oral poetry, it is recited in many versions differing considerably both in plot and language from region to region and singer to singer. Meissner's edition is prepared from a recording made in 1966 with the late Gopī Dās, a tailor from Kausani (district Almora), whose straightforward, unsophisticated handling of the story as well as his singing style seem to be comparatively close to the original tradition of the ballad. The narrative is very pathetic, yet hardly psychological, the main theme being (socially not accepted, but poetically sanctioned) love in separation and final reunion, both treated in accordance with the general rules of Indian aesthetics. As there is no regular meter, a set of meaningless syllables and stereotyped phrases serving as a kind of refrain after each period is the only means for the singer to give contour and coherency to the song. But one has to admit that despite its simplicity Gopī Dās's recital is most impressive and of no mean skill. (Unfortunately the quality of the recording is rather poor and far below the standard possible with the Uher 4000 Report. A copy of the complete recording is available from the editor.)

In addition to the text Meissner gives a running translation, a detailed linguistic commentary and a comprehensive glossary that enable every reader of standard Hindi to follow the Kumāūnī original. However, as the language of the song differs markedly from the description of Kumāūnī in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (vol. IX, part IV), a systematic treatment of its grammar would have been desirable. This would also have allowed for being more concise and systematic both in the commentary and the glossary.

There is no doubt that everybody interested in the cultural heritage and the folklore of the Himalayas must be thankful to Meissner for the painstaking work he did on the song for more than fifteen years. (He intends to bring out an edition of a second recording with Gopī Dās made in 1967). But I can't help criticizing his translation that can hardly be called a translation at all, resulting often in an extremely strange blend of Kumāūnī syntax and English vocabulary that just makes awkward reading and definitely does injustice to the original. As there is no room here to go into linguistic and stylistic details, I may confine myself to giving one example typical of Meissner's so-called "literal" (p. XXV) procedure. In the Kumāūnī, there is a recurring phrase consisting of the relative pronoun (*jo*) and the past tense of the substantive verb (*chī*) that is used as a device to mark emphasis or shift of focus, but is rendered into English always by *who was* or *who were*, the result being sentences



like "The Huṇiyā went to Hundesh, and Shauk – who was – went to his Shaukān ..." (2.30) or "We must go – said the Huṇiyās, who were – off from Hundesh ..." (2.67). This approach to translation that is sometimes justified as being scholarly betrays a serious misconception about language as being made of isolated words. One may discuss the possibilities of translating oral poetry into written language (and I frankly admit that I don't know how to do it), but Meissner's rendering, even if just meant as a crib to enable the reader to decipher the original, is surely not the right way.

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**Gerhard Heller:** Krankheitskonzepte und Krankheitssymptome. Eine empirische Untersuchung bei den Tamang von Cautara/Nepal zur Frage der kulturspezifischen Prägung von Krankheitserleben. (Medizin in Entwicklungsländern, 18). Frankfurt/M., Bern, New York: Peter Lang Verlag, 1985. XIV, 255 pages, SFr. 38.–

This study is the result of joint medical and anthropological research which was conducted in a village in Central Nepal in 1974. The author, a physician by training, was invited by Andras Höfer, an anthropologist who had been working in this area for many years. So the basic data of the culture of the Tamang, the largest ethnic minority group in Nepal, were available from the very beginning of the project and the team could concentrate on the ethno-medical issues. The central theme which gradually evolved during the first months of fieldwork led to the following question: do culture-specific illness concepts predetermine the space – and time – orientation of the illness experience of the Tamang?

Right from the beginning of the fieldwork Gerhard Heller noticed that the doctor-patient-relationship was "disturbed" due to the diverging notions about body, health and illness. He illustrates this with two very striking examples, viz. a mother who came with her young daughter to the health post built by the team to ask for medicine against worms. Although the girl was suffering from a severe cough – the author suggests pneumonia or bronchitis – the mother adamantly declined any further help, saying that the girl was only coughing now in front of him. The other case is a father of three children suffering from severe post-measles marasmus. Three times he invited the team to see his children, but the mother declined any help offered by the doctor. These two incidences of "non-compliance" sharpened the curiosity of the research team and the red thread for their future research was discovered.

The data were gathered by the following methods: On a quantitative level: 441 patients were seen, treated and interviewed. Complementary to this on a qualitative