



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts by Gregory G. Maskarinec
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there two distinct principles, one based on precedence of occupying lands and the other on relations to the powerful island of Yap.

Another coupling is Clifford Sather's "All Threads are White: Iban Egalitarianism Reconsidered" (chapter 5) and Aram A. Yengoyan's "Origin, Hierarchy and Egalitarianism among the Mandaya of Southeast Mindanao, Philippines" (chapter 6). Both papers are impressively balanced pieces of work that try to consider in-depth the egalitarian tendencies or inclinations of the societies in question while not neglecting their hierarchical aspects, potential or actual. Yengoyan's treatment of the *bagani* system as an expression of hierarchy and of gambling of rice as an economically equalizing mechanism is persuasive in presenting the contrasting values inherent in Mandaya society. Sather's paper discusses in full logical relations among hierarchy, equality, and *égalité*. Distinguishing between the last two concepts, as he rightly propounds, is the first step necessary to avoid confusion aroused by controversy over so-called Iban inequality. Sather succeeds in taking this first step by applying his theoretical idea to a number of concrete aspects of Iban cultural expressions and social behavior.

The last coupling is Peter Bellwood's "Hierarchy, Founder Ideology and Austronesian Expansion" (chapter 2) and Charles O. Frake's "The Cultural Construction of Rank, Identity and Ethnic Origins in the Sulu Archipelago" (chapter 14). As an archaeologist of the southern Pacific region, Bellwood submits a hypothetical theory that would explain the dynamics of the Austronesian expansion from a highly universal angle, that is the existence of the founder-focused ideology among the Austronesian speakers. He argues that the younger branches of the founding groups in established lands would tend to migrate to new lands in order to enhance their rank as the founders of new groups, a rank that would be denied to them in the old lands. This argument assumes by extension the existence of hierarchical rank systems at the dawn of the Austronesian expansion, which Bellwood propounds on a linguistic basis. Frake, on the other hand, is definitely skeptical about this assumption. After having considered varying social systems in the zone of the southern Philippine Sea and their historical formations (especially, ethnic identity and rank formations), he suggests that the shaping of a hierarchical system is a product of historical experience, and then concludes that no commonality of such historical experiences can be evidenced in widespread Austronesian speaking societies. He goes so far as to say that "one could as easily argue that the fundamental Austronesian ethos has been egalitarian rather than hierarchical."

The fundamental difference seen between Bellwood's and Frake's views concerning the Austronesian heritage of cultural and social values is symbolic of the complexity of the composition of this book. Whilst the core cluster of papers stands out as representing a coherent collection of ethnographic comparisons, the remaining papers seem to form a somewhat diffuse collection of individual works rather loosely connected by the common themes of hierarchy, rank, origin, or alliance. This by no means is to say that each individual paper is diffuse in itself. On the contrary, all the papers are extremely informative as well as exploratory, and as such they should be regarded as important contributions to ethnography even beyond the sphere of the Austronesian world.

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NEPAL

MASKARINEC, GREGORY G. *Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts*. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 55. Cambridge MA: The Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1998. xii + 695 pages. Bibliography,

indices of titles and subjects in English and Nepalese. Cloth US\$90.00; ISBN 0-674-60795-3.

We have been waiting a long time for a book like this. Not since researchers started to collect ritual oral traditions in the Nepal Himalayas more than thirty years ago (in a few cases nearly forty years ago), has there been issued a single published work that presented a local corpus of shamanic lore in its entirety. It is true that attempts to record, transliterate, and translate whole bodies of knowledge orally transmitted in one place have been done before in the course of prolonged ethnographic fieldwork, but they have either not been published and thus not been widely available, or they have been published but not in their entirety. Here are some examples. We have in manuscript form the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Nicholas Allen on the "Myths and Oral Traditions of the Thulung Rai" (1976); the magnificent collection of Gurung *pe*, contained in Simon Strickland's Ph. D. dissertation, "Belief, Practices and Legends: A Study in the Narrative Poetry of the Gurungs of Nepal" (1982); a similar, but smaller and practically inaccessible collection of Gurung shamanic texts was put together by Bernard Pignède in the late 1950s; concerning the northern Magar, there is a full body of shamanic texts collected and translated by Anne de Sales appended to her doctoral thesis "Actes et paroles dans les rituels chamaniques des Kham-Magar" (1985, University of Paris, Nanterre) but omitted in her subsequent book *Je suis né de vos jeux de tambours* (1991); equally out of reach, at least for the time being, is this reviewer's collection of Magar shamanic texts, recorded between 1978 and 1984. Partial collections are at our disposal in various published works and articles: on Magar shamanism there are works by John Hitchcock (1967, 1974, 1976), David Watters (1975), and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (1991); and on Mewahang Rai traditions we have Martin Gaenszle's work (1991). Paraphrases of shamanic texts can be found, for instance, in the works of the following authors: David Holmberg (1989) on the central Tamang *jhākri*, Stan Royal Mumford (1989) on the Gurung *paju*, and Martino Nicoletti on the Kulung *jhākri* (1999). And finally, we can go back to the trailblazing work of Andrés Höfer who deals with western Tamang *bombo* texts in three books (1981, 1994, 1997) and various articles (1973, 1985, 1992)—all of them crafted with ethnographic and philological accuracy. But even with Höfer's works we do not get a complete picture of a local oral tradition.

With his massive book *Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts* Gregory Maskarinec delivers not only a full panorama on a single oral tradition, but he also gives the reader the opportunity to view it in its variations. The complete repertoires of three shamans are exposed: Karna Vir Kami's verse with over 5000 lines, Kamaro Kami's with 2600 lines, and Guman Kami's with 1900 lines. Also included are the variants that each of these shamans has at his disposal on different recital dates. There are 1200 variant lines, making the total number of lines of recited verse 10,700.

The site of Maskarinec's study is Jajarkot in western Nepal, where in a number of Kami (blacksmith) villages a very lively tradition of shamanic practice has been flourishing up to the present. It is the verbal treasure of these Kami, a low-caste of untouchables, that Maskarinec brings to our attention. The title of his book is therefore somewhat misleading. Instead of "Nepalese" one would have wished to find this blacksmith caste mentioned.

The prosodic material assembled by Maskarinec is normally recited in the various shamanic séances of the Kami *jhākri*, as a constituent part of their rituals. The recording was done partly during such séances and partly in a kind of studio situation, where the shamans dictated their recitals to the ethnographer. These artificial performances prompted by the anthropologist's request were probably necessary because of the confusing mixture of sound that gets recorded when taping real séances, where the beat of a drum or the cries of children

may wipe out some of the recited words. Moreover, the studio situation gave the shamans the opportunity to comment on and to amend their texts and to answer related questions by the anthropologist on the spot. The price paid for these advantages was a higher degree of reflectivity on their part.

The texts presented may be divided into roughly two classes: origin stories and auxiliary chants. The former are long public recitals (between 200 and 500 lines) with recountable narrative plots; the latter are shorter texts (from one line to less than a hundred lines), consisting of murmured or chanted mantric formulas, invocations, or ritual action accompaniments.

The long origin myths relate, in more or less chronological sequence, the creation of the world, especially that of man from the droppings of a cock mixed with the ashes of sandalwood. The origin myths also tell about the following: the introduction of death and diseases; the problems of birth and rebirth; the division of beings into humans and spirits with clearly marked territorial boundaries; the origin of human activities; the origin of afflictions; the origin of different types of healers, astrologer seers, pandits and oracles; the story of the first shaman; the origin of animal sacrifices; the origin of witches as negative counter-parts of the shamans; the origin of the shaman's accessories, such as his drum and his gear needed to guard him during his missions to negotiate with the spirit world and his alcohol used to invigorate him; and the life stories of some famous healers and their conflicts with worldly rulers and with religious specialists.

These origin stories are locally characterized as *mela* or *melo*, translated by Maskarinec as "events." Alternatively they are classified as *dhur*, a term also used amongst the northern Magar, especially in the Lukum area. In Taka, the origin stories are generally called *kheti*, a term employed only once amongst the 180 designated Jajarkoti texts. The auxiliary chants, formulas, and invocations are called *jap* or *mantar*, which both mean secretive texts recited aloud. *Jap* is glossed by Maskarinec as an incantation quietly muttered, but used in Jajarkot interchangeably with *mantar*. Half of the auxiliary chants are left without a generic term, carrying just a descriptive title followed by an infinitive verb.

Maskarinec has given special attention to the short mantric utterances in this book as he did in his previous book on the Jajarkoti Kami shamans, *Rulings of the Night*.¹ Once again the author demonstrates that they are not simple jingles, void of meaning, or magical sound formulas, but that they contain clear grammatical statements—imperatives often—and can, consequently, be translated.

The rich and diverse material of the chants, collected by Maskarinec mainly between 1977 and 1982, has been organized, according to his own statement in the Preface, along etiological lines. As he describes it, the local healers divide the afflictions of their patients into seven categories of causes: 1. star obstructions; 2. curses and spells by shamans or witches; 3. intrusion of alien objects into the patients' bodies; 4. weakened life force, soul-loss, and madness; 5. social disorder; 6. fevers of autonomous origin; 7. activities of spirits. In accordance with this, the author has grouped his oral texts into seven chapters. Chapter 1, "The Work of Creation," deals with material to treat life crises; it assembles the myths of cosmogony, tells how the star obstructions originated, and gives instructions on how to start and end a ceremony. Chapter 2, "The Work of Iron," concentrates on the mythical biography of the shaman Jumratam, his troubles at a royal court, his exile life as a blacksmith in Tiligrama (a kind of netherworld) and his glorious rehabilitation in the world of man. This epic is recited on many ritual occasions, including the initiations and deaths of shamans. The chapter also deals with curses by and against shamans, with the securing of crossroads, and with encouraging and dismissing spiritual warriors. The focus of chapter 3, "Regarding Witches," is the story of the Nine Witch Sisters, their journey with the primordial shaman, and their final

subjugation by him; it also assembles texts to combat them. In chapter 4, "Diagnosing Disease and Affliction," one finds various texts on the striking of afflictions, on the introduction of special ritual grains, on the invention of alcohol by a bent old woman, and on the drinking of blood from sacrificial animals. Chapter 5, "Ancestral Events," tells various mythical and semihistorical stories of social disputes such as the story of a neglected child that turns into a bird causing parturition troubles. Chapter 6, "Various Mantars," assembles magic formulas against all kinds of critical situations: snakebites, toothaches, digestion problems, bleeding, cataracts, colics, dogbites, burns, lumps in women's breasts, scorpion bites, and love charms. The final chapter, chapter 7, "To Summon the Gods," demonstrates how to summon deities and how to dismiss them.

To a degree this short content description of the main chapters may support the author's proposition that they reflect the seven categories of causes for affliction and that the arrangement of his material is therefore etiological. The sequence of the mythological narratives, apparently given as they are sung (provided they are all recited in a single *séance*, which in most cases they are not), points yet to another principle of textual organization. The sequence of the myths follows the indigenous chronology of the origins of things (and of human history). This can be deduced not only from the stories themselves, but also from their cumulative introductory incantations: the longer these are sung, the longer they get because in each case a reference is added to the creations dealt with in the previous chants. In this way Maskarinec's textual arrangement reflects the shamans' grand scheme of evolution.

Still, one could have conceived another arrangement of the vast material. For example, the material might have been arranged into two parts with the first part being entitled "Narratives—in their cosmogonic and legendary sequence" and with the second part being "Auxiliary chants, either according to types or in their performance order in actual rituals." The arrangement as decided upon by Maskarinec, considerate as it may be, leaves the reader with the hard task of finding certain things in the book. The detailed indices at the end of the book, both in English and Nepali, and the 250 pages of notes appended to the textual presentation, give the reader innumerable suggestions for paths he may follow, but they also include many impasses. How is a shamanic *séance* composed? What elements is it made up of? How are they ordered in a sequence? What implements are used and when? Which actions are executed and for what reason and when? These are all questions of the ritual montage that are answered in Maskarinec's book, but only for the textual parts. Their interconnection with dance, music, and ritual actions might have been clarified in a more detailed introduction. Some further remarks on the verbal craft of the shamans, for instance on the employed forms of parallelism, alliteration, and metaphoric speech might have helped as well.

These properties have, however, been saved to an admirable degree in the translations, including the properties of rhythm and rhyme. The author has strictly followed a line-by-line translation; he has restrained himself from corrections of unclear passages and from interpretative amendments. The translation is as clear as the original permits, and is simple and easy to read. Sometimes, when the shamanic masters of the word are riding on the verbal crest of their genius, Maskarinec's translation follows suit in a style comparable to Ezra Pound: "He made a bowl of gold, made a lid of silver / put in snowstorms, foggy patches, cyclonic dashes / put in lightning flashes, total darkness splashes" (I 20: 204–206).

The transliteration of the oral texts may disturb some Western readers. Instead of Latin letters, Maskarinec has chosen to transcribe them into the Devanagari script. This is not just to provide an aesthetic calligraphy: Maskarinec's book is a gift of a appreciation to the people from whom he got the texts it contains. They will be able to read it once their capacity to recite these fantastic oral treasures from memory has faded away. This book will outlast the life of the traditions it carries, and it will survive our theories of them as well.

NOTE

1. This title was apparently taken from a line in the chants: "Ah, elder brother, the rulings of the day are mine/the rulings of the night are yours" (II. 10:455–56). This line is presented as an announcement of a king made to the first shaman, Ramma Jumratam, to distinguish their respective fields of competence.

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INDIA

VARGHESE, EARAPLACKAL and PETER PAUL HEMBROM. *Ethnomedical Lore of the Paharias: Applied Ethnomedicine of the Paharias of Santhal Parganas-Bihar*. Mumbai: Centre for Human Ecology, 2000. 232 pages. Illustrations, bibliography, index to local names, general index. Hardcover Rs. 400.00/US\$25.00. (Ravi Kiran, Andheri [W], Mumbai 400053, India)

Ethnomedical Lore of the Paharias: Applied Ethnomedicine of the Paharias of Santhal Parganas-Bihar is a beautifully written book that provides detailed and well-crafted explanations of the culture, society, and ethnobotanical documents of the Paharias, an indigenous tribal people. It is obvious that the immediate concerns of the majority of people throughout the world are survival and the obtainment of basic amenities. Many people, especially in poorer countries, rely on plants that grow in the wild for their shelter, food, medicines, and as sources of cash income, while the richer countries rely on them for their herbal-based medicines and cosmetics. Natural forests are indispensable components in traditional tribal economies; thus traditionally, local communities are extremely knowledgeable about the local plants and other local natural resources on which they are so immediately and intimately dependent. This rich traditional knowledge and the age-old cultures in which this knowledge is preserved are quickly disappearing as the lives of aboriginal rural people are changing as the world develops at ever greater speeds.

The documentation of the Paharias's knowledge, which the authors have done skillfully and comprehensively, will serve to preserve this knowledge as well as to promote and revive the dying wisdom of indigenous tribal knowledge. This book's documentation of endangered ethnobotany lore and indigenous knowledge contributes to the literature on applied ethnobotany that deals with ethnomedical lore. It will no doubt be appreciated by folklorist, ethnobotanist, anthropologist, pharmacologist, medical practitioners, and all people interested in the study of plants. The authors are well experienced and qualified to write about this ethnomedical lore from the perspective of applied ethnobotany. In order to write this book, the authors not only had to make inventories of useful plants but also needed to have a broad-range knowledge of various academic disciplines and to have established relationships with the local communities.

The bulk of the text is given in chapter 4, which lists in total 146 medicinally important plant species used by the Paharias in the Indian states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. For each plant species the following information is given: the different ailments the plants are used for; the elaborate ethnomedical information available in published sources; the scientific and the