

PAULA RICHMAN (ed.): *Many Rāmāyaṇas: the diversity of a narrative tradition in South Asia*. xiii, 273 pp. Berkeley: University of Los Angeles, 1991.

MONIKA THIEL-HORSTMANN (ed.): *Rāmāyaṇa and Rāmāyaṇas*. (Khoj, 3.) vii, 249 pp. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991.

The problem of how adequately to review a collection of disparate papers is here doubled in this dual offering of researches on various of the Rāmāyaṇa traditions of South Asia. To begin with a physical description: the longer book is actually very considerably longer, being set in much smaller type than the shorter; each of its authors is also allowed more space pro rata, the former book containing twelve articles, and the latter fourteen. Richman's collection (henceforth 'PR') is the more attractively produced, being edited and typeset to a high standard; Thiel-Horstmann's (henceforth 'MTH') suffers from having been reproduced from a somewhat wayward computer printout.

These two books together constitute a rich collection of Rāmāyaṇa scholarship in which the varieties of Rāmāyaṇa analysed are matched by the variety of interpretative approaches from the several contributors. Richman's introduction includes a summary of the Rāmāyaṇa narrative, and is followed by a paper by A.K. Ramanujan which itself stands as the ideal introduction to Rāmāyaṇa studies, briefly alluding to the many hundred Rāmāyaṇas from South and Southeast Asia, and contrasting five of them. Frank Reynolds compares Hindu and Buddhist readings of the story and examines the Ramakien tradition of Thailand (PR). Several papers in both collections offer views on particular 'regional' Rāmāyaṇas or interpretative traditions: Clinton Seely (PR) looks at Michael Madhusudan Dutt's recasting of Rāvaṇa, managing en route a very perceptive character-sketch of the Bengali author; 'Rāvaṇa as tragic hero' reappears in Clifford Hospital's paper on a modern Malayalam play (MTH); Stuart Blackburn offers two perspectives on a puppet version from Kerala, achieving a skilful balance between presentations of content and of ethnographic detail (PR and MTH); Patricia Mumme gives a lucid account of Rāmāyaṇa exegesis in Tenkalai Śrīvaiṣṇavism (PR); women's Telugu Rāmāyaṇa songs are analysed by Velcheru Narayan Rao (PR); a version of the post-classical 'Mahī-

Rāvaṇa' episode as told in the oral literature of a Nilgiri hill tribe is introduced and summarized by D.B. Kapp (MTH); folk traditions of Maharashtra are the subject of a paper by the late Günther Sontheimer (MTH); a survey of Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇas from the West coast of India is offered by A. Govindakutty Menon (MTH); Elke Löschorh describes Mewari Rāmāyaṇa illustrations in a paper sadly bereft of the illustrations it so badly needs (MTH).

Most of these papers analyse their material in such a way as to show how a particular tradition emphasises this or that aspect of the narrative. Amongst papers with a very particular focus of enquiry are those dealing with specific 'problematic' incidents in the story, such as the mutilation of Śūrpaṇakhā (Kathleen Erndl, PR), and the testing of Sītā in Kampan's *Irāmāvatāram* (David Shulman, PR), while Rāma's slaying of Vālin is alluded to in several papers; ethical considerations are also considered by Harry Buck's investigation of *dharma* in Vālmīki (MTH), and by Richard Barz in a discussion of the conflict between *bhakti* and *dharma* in the Nepali Rāmāyaṇa of Bhānubhakt (MTH). The Awadhi *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās forms a special focus: Philip Lutgendorf discusses both the ritualised *mahāyajña* style of text performance in Banaras (MTH) and argues that the so-called *rasik sādhanā* tradition which plays up the erotic aspect of Rāma-Sītā bhakti is not to be dismissed as a mere imitation of Kṛṣṇaite conventions (PR); Ramdas Lamb describes the use of *Rāmcaritmānas* and other material in the institutionalised chanting of the Chhattisgarhi *Rāmnāmī* tradition (PR); Anuradha Kapur's brief paper focuses on the role of the Maharaja of Banaras in the Ramnagar *Rāmlīlā* (MTH), itself largely based on Tulsī's text.

The *Rāmcaritmānas* is also the basis for the Doordarshan Rāmāyaṇa, whose vast popularity contributes to a standardisation of a narrative whose erstwhile richness of diversity is so well demonstrated by these two collections of articles: Vasudha Dalmia-Lüderitz contributes a highly perceptive paper on this subject (MTH). The manner in which the town of Ayodhya lends a local habitation to contemporary *Rām-bhakti* practice is described by Peter Van der Veer in an article whose political dimension has been overtaken by post-publication events (MTH). Political and social perspectives determine attitudes to the narrative demonstrated by S.G. Tulpule's paper on Eknāth's Marathi *Bhāvārth-Rāmāyaṇ*

(MTH), which may, as Thiel-Horstmann points out, 'be read as an example of the appropriation of the Rāmāyaṇa tradition for the expression of national identity'. A similar (mis-) appropriation applies, only more brazenly, in E.V. Ramasami's politically motivated exegesis of the Rāmāyaṇa as part of a campaign to remove the Northern, Brahmanical domination of Southern (and especially Tamil) India, discussed in a wide-ranging paper by Paula Richmond in her own volume.

Given the significance of these two books of papers and the value of such varied approaches being brought together within four covers, it is a pity that neither editor chose to compile the consolidated bibliography that would have been such a useful resource; but given the complexity of editing papers based on such a diversity of languages, it is easy to imagine that such a further task might have had little appeal.

RUPERT SNELL

