

“sketchy.” As such, they form a nice balance to the much longer, more densely argued papers that immediately precede them and deal briefly with questions of gender, sacrifice, genres of Aoheng oral tradition, and, finally, Aoheng geological taxonomies and notions relating to stones, their uses and cultural significance.

Innermost Borneo is an important volume, bringing together twenty years of writing by a distinguished anthropologist, and deserves to be viewed as essential reading for all Borneo specialists and others concerned with upland minority peoples in Southeast Asia. Although, regrettably lacking an index, the book is otherwise enhanced by a wealth of maps, figures, and by forty-one black-and-white photos. In his introduction, Sellato tells us that he began his fieldwork among the Aoheng by being interested in everything. “I worked,” he writes, “on language, ritual, history, social organization, oral literature, and more” (14). That he did so, taking the time to inquire deeply and at length into so many diverse facets of Aoheng life has since served him well and is richly apparent in this collection in the close attention he gives to ethnographic detail and cultural interconnections. “Later on,” he continues,

I focused on the modalities of interaction between society and the environment, and the customary institutions controlling the access to and management of land.... Through time, I became increasingly involved in investigations in ethnohistory and comparative linguistics, in an attempt to reconstruct Borneo’s culture history.

In the same way, these interests, too, are amply on display here.

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INDIA

DUBIANSKI, ALEXANDER M. *Ritual and Mythological Sources of the Early Tamil Poetry*. Gonda Indological Studies, Volume VIII. Groningen, The Netherlands: Egbert Forsten Publishing, 2000. xxi + 224 pages. Tables, bibliography, glossary of plant names, indexes. Paper Dfl. 100; ISBN 90 6980 1108.

There are not too many books on the Tamil literary shelf that make an in-depth study pertaining to the ritual and mythological sources of the poetry. The present work is a distinctive contribution towards this direction. The author is concerned with the study of the problem of Tamil poetic tradition and tries his best to trace out the ritual and mythological features which served as the sources for the early Tamil poetry.

The work consists of four chapters, namely, Mythological Background, Ancient Tamil Poetic Tradition and Its Creators, The Love Situations and the Heroes—Ritual and Mythological Sources, and The Poetical Canon and Folklore. His remark that through a literary source, that is, Ancient Tamil poetry, a more or less comprehensive picture of the social, material, and spiritual culture of the Tamils can be construed is certainly true. Literary sources still serve as the framework and the authentic foundation upon which the multifarious ingredients of Tamil culture are constructed.

The “energy concept” discussed by the author is one such framework whereby the seeds of its genesis are well discernible in the “Mother goddess” worship that prevailed in the Indus Valley culture. This presages its close links with the continuity of the Tamil cultural milieu.

It is also true that the world view of ancient Tamils, particularly their mythology and religious cults, were largely determined by this “energy concept” as exemplified in *Ananku*, *Korravai*, *Valli*, *pey*, and so on.

The author discusses the key role played by the bards Panars, Viralis, and other performers in the continuity and transmission of folk traditions to the literary vaults, and the transfiguration of those traditions to a more perfected and finished form at the hands of the courtly Pulavars who wielded immense sway over the kings and chieftains. Furthermore, the interaction of the poetic tradition with the mythopoetical layer of Tamil culture is well addressed.

One of the author’s objectives is to establish the earliest known mythico-religious sources of ancient Tamil love lyrics. A careful reader of the work will not fail to notice his efforts to do justice to the task at hand. He has made a brilliant attempt at categorizing the activities of the ancient Tamil bards into three major spheres, which are the community sphere, the household sphere, and the courtly sphere.

The fivefold divisions of land as *Kurinji*, *Mullai*, *Marudham*, *Neydal*, and *Palai*, otherwise called *aintinai*, serve as the bedrock upon which the pillars of ritual and mythological sources rest. That Tamil poetry is associated with the landscape and its affinity with the ritual behavior and the seasonal cycle is something like “Caesar’s wife” is beyond doubt. But the problem of the genesis of ancient Tamil poetry still remains as inscrutable as the “Smile of Mona Lisa,” although the erudite author has expended much effort in unraveling its mystery.

It is heartening to note that the author has laid due emphasis on the *historical poetics* which studies literary forms as being linked with the historical and cultural conditions in which they have taken shape. The main situations and the techniques employed in the delineation of characters regarding *Agam* poetry are analyzed well, and the underlying principles in the formation of poetry characters are defined reasonably.

The most revealing part of the book is the author’s establishment and elucidation of folklore sources, namely those of women’s songs of separation and the lore of rites and rituals. This leads him to the conclusion that ancient *Akam* poetry sprang from the folksongs intimately connected with various kinds of rituals then in vogue in Tamil Nadu in the ancient past. The *Akam* genre owes heavily to them for its growth. At the same time there was a close link between the two groups of performers—the low-caste bards, and the poets of higher social status. This connection between these groups is treated as the cornerstone for the establishment and growth of the poetic tradition.

Mythological syncretism, an ideology characteristic of ancient Indian culture in general, has been identified with the early Tamil verses. This quality endows them with the solemn tenor inherited from myth, and we see it continued and illustrated in the verses of the Bhakti movement later on.

The book design and overall layout is good. In addition to the bibliography and the indexes, the glossary of plant names found in the poetry is an added feature that makes it conducive to a better understanding of the work.

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EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI, GABRIELLA. *The Maze of Fantasy in Tamil Folktales*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002. x + 190 pages. Paper €51.00; Sfr. 88.00; ISBN 3-447-04568-X.