Book Reviews

Jagadish Gan-Choudhuri. *Folk-tales of Tripura*. Tripura: Tribal Research & Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, 2015, Price Rs. 253. ISBN: 978-81-927167-4-9.

Reviewed by
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The book under review, written by Dr. Jagadish Gan-Choudhari author of a good many high-quality books written in English and Bengali and editor of no mean number of anthologies, English and Bengali, is an important and significant contribution to the research into the folklore of Tripura, nay, of North-east India. Several years of research into the folklore of Tripura and that of Northeast India, reference the contents of the book, has culminated in the preparation and publication of this mammoth book, as the author's preface tells us.This book is inundated with a flow of folktale out of the folklore of Tripura and other north-eastern regions. All the folktales, one hundred and thirty-two in number that have peopled this book reminisce of the bygone or rather, halcyon 'days & smiles…Theses folk-tales, varied in contents & theme, have a rural flavour.' (p. xi) In compiling a selection of the folktales the author has laid a particular emphasis on the folktales of Tripura and the Bengali folktales. The Bengali folktales that the Bengali refugees from Bnagladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan brought across to Tripura and the tribal folktales have intermingled in a common folklore. Dr Gan-Choudhari has not, as befits a true scholar, trodden the wonted path of compiling only tribal folktales; he has incorporated the popular Bengali folktales that have mingled in the folklore of Tripura, consequent upon the mass exodus of the Bengali refugees into Tripura.

What is likely to tantalize the reader, when he/she is reading through the book is the title of the book itself. He is likely to find himself wondering as to the appropriateness of the title to the contents of the book.The averment with which the preface to the book begins ('In Folk-tales of Tripura one hundred [and] thirty-two folktales of north-eastern India have been incorporated') does not bear out the appropriateness of the title. The initial confusion the reader is initially exposed to could have been avoided if the title had been written as 'Folktales of North-East India'. Every researcher into the folklore of Tripura knows thatby 'folktales of Tripura' are meant the tribal folktales of Tripura. But in this book the Manipuri folktales and the Bengali folktales are juxtaposed with the tribal folktales. It is the nature of every folktale to travel, riding on the shoulders of men, from one country to another country and from one state to another state, but it does not get rootless and lose its intrinsic characteristics, though it mingles in the folklore of the country or the state to which it has travelled.

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The purpose that has governed the author's compilation of the select folktales of Tripura is to acquaint the readers loving outside Tripura with the richness and diversity of the folktales of Tripura in the hope that they will find in the tales incorporated 'a deep sympathy with the flora & fauna of Tripura; with the hills and [the] rivers of Tripura; with the rites and rituals of Tripura' and 'an element of heritage of Tripura'. These tales, as the author avers, demonstrate the spirit of the age and the supernatural view of the world,

Nowa few words about the foreword to the book. The forward is written by 'Sailohnuna', Director, Tribal Research & Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala. In the foreword he heaps praise on the author, but does not write anything worthwhile to prepare the reader for what he/she is going to read. The reader shall rest satisfied with knowing that the author is a great scholar and the contains such and such things that habitually embellish the books of such kind

It deserves to be mentioned in this context that we have heard since our childhood that folktales are meant for children only to read and enjoy. This idea has birthed a lack of interest in the folktales when children have reached their majority, But in the folktales is enshrined a realistic history of how ancestors used to live their familial and social life. This history enshrined in the folktales is not revealed to children; it is revealed to them when they have grown up. Nowadays a considerable emphasis is laid throughout the world on the study of folktales to unveil the social history of the ancient races. Dr. Gan Choudhari has attempted to unveil the social history of the ancient people of Tripura in the folktales of Tripura.

This book features twenty seven Tripuri, one Jamatiya, three Reang, one Noatiya, seven Lusai and sixty-eight Bengali folktales. The book deals, in addition to these folktales, with five myths and legends of Tripura. Nowhere in the narration of the folktales does the author exhibit his erudition, rather he has chosen to use simple but lucid language so much so that all the folktales have become pleasant reading, equally to the young and the old..

In the Tripuri folktales chapter the author has dwelt upon some common terms which we come across in the folktales of Tripura, besides narrating other folktales as storiesthere are Larima (kindhearted goddess), pilgrimage of the soul, the sky and so on.

Apropos of the five myths and legends of Tripura referred to above the author says that there were several 'ancient settlements in Tripura' which had their local myths and legends which have got embalmed in the royal chronicle of Tripura. Tripura can pride itself on being an ancient source of mythology. Many of the myths and legends, not chronicled, were lost in an abyss of oblivion. The five myths and legends that have survived the onslaught of time are: 1) Sato's right leg falling in Tripura, 2) The Killing of Tripurasur (the name of a demon), 3) A God's Tragic Visit to Tripura, 4) Treasure in a Pond and 5) The Spot where one Horase was Shot Dead by a Prince.

What distinguishes the book from other books dealing with the folklore of Tripura is the appendices. As appendices the author deals with motif and motif-index, the

quality of life, the ethnography of Tripura, folktale as a genre, the rational interpretation of myth and a glossary of terms. This book is embroidered with index.

In his brief note on motif and motif-index the author confesses to his failure to collect Prof. Stith Thompson's complete list of motif-index. He admits that he had to rest content with alluding to Dr.Verrier Edwin's Tribal Myths of Orissa which, Dr. Gan-Choudhari says, 'contains an incomplete list of mythological morifs.' (p. 479)

As says the author, this folktale book is divided into two groups, one group related to the 'culture of the greater Tripuri communities' and the other to the culture of the Bengali people who are co-living with the tribal people in Tripura. The tribal people call a folktale kerengkathama whereas the Bengali people call it Rupakatha or Galpa.

The folktales of the Tripuri communities contrast with the Bengali folktales in this that the Tripuri folktales tell of animals, plants, family life, love and romance, jealousy, cruelty, wickedness, foolishness, unusual heroism, magic, chain of events, and formula, whereas the traditional four-fold caste structure that characterizes the Bengali society has moulded the Bengali folktales. Almost all Bengali folktales begin with a 'There was a poor Brahmin'.

Further down the note the author touches upon the term 'motif', originally a French term. 'Motif has,' he says, 'various shades of meaning, such as motive, a theme, a factor, an element, an emotion, an intention, an indication of behavious of a person.' (p. 481). It acts upon a person to behave in a particular way and appears as a theme in a literary composition.

Now the author sets out to deal with the quality of life revealed in the folktales of Tripura. In his brief discussion on the quality of life the author strives to the historical background to the modernization of the tribal folktales, subjected to foreign influences.

The author has not omitted to write about the ethnography of Tripura which will help the reader in understanding of the motif of the folktales of Tripura. The scope of this review does not allow ofeven a brief description of it in this review lest it might jar on the patience of the reader.

The author's note on folktale deserves to expatiate upon in a few words. He says, to begin with, that the 'habit of telling stories and listening to these stories is a short of craze, eternal and universal.' (p. 501) Recorded long ago were some of the folktales. The author, emotions as examples of the folktales recoded the Pancha-tantra, the Hitopadesa, the Vetal Pamcha-Vimsato, the Katha-saritsagar, and the Jataka.

The author in his note on folktales endeavours to interpret in simple language 'myths', 'legends', 'folktales', 'allegories', 'proverbs', 'ballads', 'folksongs', 'anonymous authorship' and so on.

I do not, as a reviewer, subscribe to his interpretation of 'anonymous authorship'. In his note on anonymous authorship he says, 'It is very difficult to ascertain the authorship of folktales. In some remote past and in some remote place, an intelligent person might have started a nucleus of a story; subsequently matters gathered around

the central mass." (P. 503). This hypothesis goes against the nature of a folktale. No one wrote or imagined folktales. They originated from the ancient soil. Illiterate grandmothers used to tell these tales to their grandchildren; they themselves had listened to their illiterate grandmothers tell them the tales. They have passed through the generation down to the modern age.

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