

to act on categories of identity other than those defined by religion.

In the third part (Ch. 5), the author explores the Kashmir conflict with regard to the formation of a political identity. Due to the Kashmir conflict the Northern Areas are under the sole administration of Pakistan. Today its inhabitants are still deprived of fundamental civil rights such as the right to vote in the elections for the National Assembly. This unsatisfactory political situation led repeatedly to insurrections in the area, to reforms in the 1970s, and finally to various demands by different people and political parties. One is for the integration of the area within the state of Pakistan as a fifth province, another is a call for an independent state. In the process of the new political mobilization since the mid 1980s, different categories of identity which are supposed to support the creation of a political entity, such as language and local culture, are being discussed; but one may doubt whether the pluralistic political culture with its differing aims and ideologies can be united into one force against the domination of the Northern Areas by Pakistan.

In the final chapter (Ch. 6), Sökefeld summarizes his central point: Individuals cannot and should not be seen as representatives of a group but rather be taken seriously as those who speak, act, and interpret events on their own account. Citing Giddens, he stresses the mutual influence of actors and structure. Throughout the presentation of his ethnographic material, Sökefeld shows that the positioning of the actors and the practical logic of daily life can only be understood if one takes seriously the flexibility of mutual ascriptions.

Swasthani adaptation by Pallav Ranjan. Kathmandu: Spiny Babbler, 1999. 126pp.

Reviewed by Michael Hutt

Pallav Ranjan divides his English adaptation of the *Swasthani Vrat Katha*, the 'Story of the Fast to the Goddess Swasthani', into twenty-two short 'readings'. Two thirds of these deal with characters and myths from the Hindu Puranas. Readings 1 and 2 deal with cosmology and the creation of the world. The main theme of readings 3 to 7 is the story of Shiva's marriage to Satidevi, daughter of Dakṣya Prajapati, Dakṣya's insulting of Shiva, Satidevi's self-

immolation, and Shiva's mourning and scattering of the pieces of Satidevi's body, during which the demon Taraka takes over the world. Readings 8 to 15 begin with the birth of Parbati, who manages to secure Shiva as her husband by reading the Swasthani stories, and go on to recount the myths of Shiva as Kirateswor in the forest near Pashupati, the births and exploits of Ganesh and Kumar, the defeats first of Taraka and then of the demons who had created Three Cities, and the bizarre series of seduction, murder, and suicide involving Bishnu and Shiva, and Jalandar and his wife, Brinda.

Finally, readings 16 to 22 contain the story of Goma, a girl who is cursed by Shiva to marry a man ten times her age. This is in some ways the most interesting section of the text. At the age of seven, Goma marries a 70-year-old man, Shivasharma, and they live with her parents. Some years later, Shivasharma decides he must go home, and Goma goes with him. As soon as they have departed, her parents die in an accident, and on their journey thieves steal everything from Shivasharma and Goma, then Goma becomes pregnant. When they reach Shivasharma's village he goes begging for food but dies in a fall. Goma bears a son, Nawaraj, and they are supported by some local rich people. In time, Nawaraj marries Chandrawati, then he searches for and finds his father's bones but does not return to his mother. After a while Chandrawati goes back to her parents, leaving Goma alone. Goma goes mad, but Parbati sends the Rishis to teach her the Swasthani rites, and when they leave she finds gold under their seats. Goma's readings of the Swasthani stories bring her son back to her, and Shiva, now suddenly benevolent, sends Nawaraj to become king of Labhanya and take a new wife. Goma is summoned there too. Nawaraj holds a feast and magnanimously invites Chandrawati too, but on her way to Labhanya Chandrawati becomes angry with her bearers for stopping to listen to the Swasthani stories en route, and when they resume their journey she falls into a flooding river. Chandrawati is so evil that the river does not flow again until some villagers dump her body on the bank, where she becomes an unrecognizable object. Not even the soil will allow her to eat it. Two priests on their way to the feast promise to bring food back for her but the grainstore suddenly empties when they go to get some, and the rice turns to ash when she tries to eat it. The Apsaras come and tell her to read the Swasthani and make offerings of sand; finally, she is restored to her family.

The *Swasthani Vrat Katha* is a crucial text for anyone who wishes to understand the ideals and constraints that have traditionally governed the lives of women (particularly, but not exclusively, Brahman and Chetri women)

in Nepal. My understanding of it prior to reading Pallav Ranjan's rendering relied heavily on the summary and analysis that appear in Lynn Bennett's book *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and symbolic roles of high-caste women in Nepal* (Columbia University Press, 1983, especially pp. 274-306). Bennett referred to an edition compiled by Babu Madhav Prasad Sharma and published in Banaras in 1955, which extends to around 300 pages. Pallav Ranjan's retelling of these stories is in almost flawless English and is highly readable. For instance, when Shivasharma hears Goma's mother, Sati, voicing her horror at the idea of her daughter marrying such an elderly man, the words Ranjan has him say are genuinely poignant:

There are old people in this world, mother, and then there are children. There are people who are pleasant to look upon and people who are ugly. Some people do not have descendants and some have too many. Some have wives that are older than they are and some have husbands who are older. Some of us are rich and some poor. The world is like the potter's wheel. It is always spinning. Everyone becomes old and dies. There are none who will not age. Why do you feel that you are better than I am? Why will you not respect my life? If this is how you feel, I will die now, before your eyes.

Parts of Ranjan's adaptation appear highly condensed in comparison with the edition cited by Bennett. For instance, Bennett quotes from her own translation of the episode towards the end of the Goma story, in which an Apsara instructs Chandrawati how to perform the Swasthani vow, and these instructions continue for 26 lines (Bennett 1983: 277), but Ranjan simply gives us "So she asked the Apsaras what she should do. According to their advice, Chandrawati learned to worship the Swasthani with a clean mind" (p. 118). Thus, it would seem that Ranjan has prepared his adaptation for a readership that would find this level of detail irrelevant and tiresome.

It would have been instructive if Pallav Ranjan had provided some insight in his brief preface into the way in which he prepared this adaptation. Certain passages are very close indeed to the original, which suggests that a text was at least consulted, while others are omitted (suggesting an intention to abridge, perhaps) or simply different (suggesting that a different text was consulted or that Ranjan relied on an oral source or his own memory). It is also a shame that Ranjan's introduction does not really bring out the important role the text has played and continues to play in the lives of so many women in Nepal.

Which brings us to the question of readership. For whom is this 'adaptation' intended? Nepali readers with a mastery of English will admire the elegance of its prose, and will also appreciate this effort to bring this text to the attention of a wider readership. To introduce the text to a foreign readership which is unable to approach it in its original language would be a worthy aim, but if this is indeed the intention the success of the initiative is rather circumscribed by the absence of any real explanation or analysis of the text's precise significance and meaning, despite the fluency and accessibility of the English rendering itself. To fully understand what is going on here, a foreign reader would need also to be directed to a work like Bennett's.

This is not to detract from Pallav Ranjan's achievement, which is notable and worthy of praise. The text is also greatly enhanced by the inclusion of illustrations whose abstract nature suggests that they emanate from the same mythic dimension in which these stories take place.

Information for authors

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Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the 'Harvard' format.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.D.D. 1988. 'A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya' *Kailash* 6(2): 121-83.

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