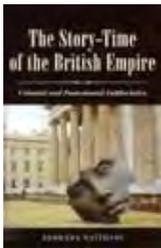


REVIEWS



General



Sadhana Naithani, *The Story-Time of the British Empire: Colonial and Postcolonial Folkloristics*

Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 145 pages, preface, endnotes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$50.00; ISBN 978-1-60473-455-3.

IN THIS short book, the author makes the case that what she calls “colonial folkloristics” deserves recognition in and of itself for its contribution to the development of the field of folklore studies as a truly transnational and global discipline before the concepts of transnationalism and globalization were even being discussed in relation to the human and social sciences. To make this point concrete, Naithani draws on historical data pertaining to both India and Africa, and to a far lesser extent, Australia. In each location, she draws on published volumes of folklore collections (primarily folktales) as well as archival materials consisting of unpublished papers and correspondence.

What makes colonial folkloristics distinct from European folklore studies of the same period is that the former looks at empire, while the latter looks at the bounded nation. Her point that folklore collecting needs to be studied transnationally is well taken. Indeed, a true history of the development of folklore studies would be amiss were it to completely ignore this aspect of the discipline’s development. However, the author’s claim that no previous studies have attempted to study folklore collecting comparatively and within the context of colonialism is somewhat overstated and misleading, since COCCHIARA’s monumental *Storia del folklore in Europa* (1952) is acutely aware of the significance of colonial collections in comparative context, as are ISLAM (1970) and SIDDIQUE (1979–1980). This notwithstanding, the fact that Naithani situates her study within a postcolonial discourse is a timely addition to the literature.

Her frame for pursuing the analysis focuses on a keyword in each chapter: motive, method, theory, and, finally, story-time. In chapter 2, she suggests that the motive

for collecting was place; that is, most collectors were not professional folklorists, but civil servants or spouses of them. They thus collected in their spare time in the country to which they were assigned, not only to document and preserve oral traditions but to disseminate them in published form, thereby creating a new knowledge set for the British public and other readers of English. This new epistemology, argues the author, was central to the empire defining itself through the lens of the colonial other. Collecting, therefore, has a political agenda, but Naithani cautiously stops short of being overly critical of the colonial and missionary agendas of the early collectors, for she wishes to understand their collecting activities in an objective manner.

Chapter 3 focuses on three methods used by colonial collectors, which she terms “folkloristic methods,” “amazing methods,” and “native folklorists of colonial archives” (27). The first refers to a concern for authenticity by adhering to “scientific” principles of documentation, while the second concerns innovations made by the colonial collectors themselves to document oral traditions. Lastly, and in many ways most importantly, is the role of indigenous assistants in the collection process. TRAUTMANN (1997) and VAN DER VEER (2001) had already pointed out earlier that colonial knowledge is always constructed in a collaborative fashion between European colonizers and indigenous scholars through their cooperation in research, and Naithani reinforces this by suggesting correctly that the so-called “natives” were not merely assistants but “associates,” whose contributions were integral to the success of the collecting projects in question, despite the fact that they were rarely given recognition for their contributions.

In chapter 4, the author tackles the question of theory, of which colonial folklorists had very little, since they worked largely outside of current theoretical debates, mainly due to their amateur status. However, Naithani convincingly argues that theory does exist in their descriptions largely as unarticulated fragments (77). Empiricism, she suggests, was important to them, so the way to seek theory is to read between the lines of their descriptions to interpret what their intentions were. But what is not written is also significant because it indicates the realities of colonialism by drawing attention to power relationships between native associates and colonial administrators-cum-folklorists. She also points out how African folklore collectors created emic taxonomies of genres whereas their Indian counterparts did not. The reasons for this remain unclear, but what it does suggest is that even though there were common agendas at work across the empire, local and regional concerns often led to divergent approaches to similar phenomena, implying a certain amount of context sensitivity. When collectors did venture into the interpretive mode, two leitmotifs emerge across the spectrum: narratives as reflections of social and psychological realities, and oral tradition as a partial record of a community’s own history (90).

Lastly, the author concludes by looking at the ongoing impact that these early collectors have had on the globalization of folkloristics, and also how they fit into the political landscape of the time. On the latter point, she fairly argues that not all of the British collectors were complicit in the crimes of empire, for some clearly advocated the rights of subaltern masses, using folklore to empower the indigenes (121). Naithani then concludes by addressing the “schizophrenic split” (124) be-

tween “traditional” and “modern” in the postcolony, which has resulted in all sorts of cultural disjunctions due to the hybridity brought about by the fusion of indigenous and colonial epistemologies. In the end, I sympathize with much of what Naithani has to say, but by dichotomizing tradition and modernity too sharply, she misses how tradition works its way *through* modernity rather than *against* it, a point made quite forcefully by ANTONEN (2005).

Frank J. Korom
Boston University

REFERENCES

- ANTTONEN, Pertti J.
2005 *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- COCCHIARRA, Giuseppe
1952 *Storia del folklore in Europa*. Turin: Editore Boringhieri.
- ISLAM, Mazharul
1970 *A History of Folktale Collections in India and Pakistan*. Dhaka: Bangla Academy.
- SIDDIQUE, Ashraf
1979–1980 Bengali folklore collections and studies during the British period (1800–1947). *Bangla Academy Journal* 7: 1–207.
- TRAUTMANN, Thomas
1997 *Aryans and British India*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- VAN DER VEER, Peter
2001 *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Korea



Laurel Kendall, ed., *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity: Commodification, Tourism, and Performance*

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. 272 pages, 17 illus.
Cloth, US\$46.00; ISBN 978-0-8248-3393-0.

HAVING RECENTLY reviewed a conference volume of occasionally tenuous coherence, I will admit that the juxtaposition of early and late modernity in the title of *Consuming Korean Tradition* gave me pause. However, editor Laurel Kendall addresses potential trepidations head-on in a sharp introduction that demonstrates in exemplary fashion how pairing seemingly disparate periods can allow them to shed