EDITORIAL

It is our pleasure to announce that the production of the Bulletin will be taken over by our French colleagues from the CNRS at Meudon, starting with the next issue (No. 10), for a period of two years. The editorial board will include Pascale Dollfus, Cornelle Jest, Marie Leconte-Tilouine, Anne de Sales and Gérard Toffin, while the present editors will continue to be involved. The responsibility for editing and producing the Bulletin is thus beginning to rotate within Europe, as was originally planned. There is a good chance that after two years the Bulletin will be produced at SOAS in London. So we hope that it will develop to become a truly European publication.

After October 15, 1995, contributors are asked to send their manuscripts either directly to the following address:

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or, as usual, to the contributing editor of their country. Also, matters of subscription should be sent to Paris (see subscription information sheet enclosed).

Thanks to all who have filled in and returned the questionnaire which we sent with our subscription reminder. The response was basically positive, reconfirming our general policy. There were suggestions to extend the review section (which is in fact planned) and to introduce a letters section (so we do encourage you to send letters). Our French colleagues are planning further improvements, and we are confident that the Bulletin will grow steadily as a topical English language news bulletin and discussion forum for scholars working on the Himalayas.

REVIEW ARTICLE

Oral Epic Poetry in the Central Himalayas (Garhwal and Kumaon)

Claus Peter Zoller


Even though non-European literature is no longer dismissed as folklore, oral poetry still is widely treated as a special form of literature, as terms like "oral text" or "folk literature" illustrate. Oral poetry is generally associated with such expressions as "anonymuous," "traditional," "simple," and "authentic"; many regard it as a precursor to true literature, and thus a survival of something original. This promotes a sort of alienation from this poetic form, by treating it as somehow inferior to the printed word. It is then the task of scholars to mitigate the alienation thus created. I want here to introduce briefly a few approaches through which oral forms of poetry, in particular oral epics from the central Himalayas (Kumaon and Garhwal), are made "intelligible" to outsiders.

Oral poetry in the central Himalayas is still a dominant art form, although its existence is now threatened by the new media and by radical social change. The majority of books about oral poetry are modelled either on British folklore studies (the paradigm here is Himalayan Folklore, by Oakley and Gairola) or, in the case of Indian authors, on the systematics and terminology of the Sanskrit Kâvyâ Sâstras. Thus, both approaches generally do not use indigenous terminology and classification. The first oral epic I want to introduce, Mâlushâhi Râjulâ, is listed by Oakley and Gairola under the heading "Legends of Heroes," whereas it is classified by the Indian folklorist Câtak as a prapay gâthâ 'love song' (1973: 258),1 and by Meissner as a "ballad" (see below).

This epic is in fact the only one from the central Himalayas2 which has been "completely" transcribed and translated, by Meissner (1985). The