



Folktales from India (The Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library)

By A.K. Ramanujan

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Gods disguised as beggars and beasts; animals enacting Machiavellian intrigues: sagacious jesters and magical storytellers; wise counselors and foolish kings—all of these inhabit a fabular world, yet one firmly grounded in everyday life. Augmented by A. K. Ramanujan's definitive introduction and notes, this Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library edition combines over one hundred tales translated from twenty-two different languages. It is an indispensable guide to India's ageless folklore tradition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The 111 tales chosen by translator and poet Ramanujan illustrate the heterogeneity of Indian society and its oral folktale tradition. Ranging in length from a few paragraphs to 10 pages, the short narratives fall into seven basic categories: male-, female- or family-centered; concerning either fate or the supernatural; humorous; animal tales; and metafiction. The stories are arranged in "cycles or sessions"--11 groupings containing at least one example of each of the seven themes. Additionally, the associative nature of the tales within each cycle further reinforces the storyteller illusion. Unlike myths, folktales are profane rather than sacred. Thus there are tales wherein humans outwit either gods or fate itself, and where the poor mock the rich (and the caste system). Two recurring characters are the jesters Tenali Rama and Ghopal Bhar, tricksters akin to the Western harlequin. According to Ramanujan, entertainment rather than education is the primary purpose of the folktale, a goal achieved by these stories even when they are also didactic.

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From School Library Journal

YA-- This selection of oral tales from 21 Indian languages captures the rich variety of human emotions as revealed in the lives of people in that subcontinent. The charm of these tales is increased by Ramanujan's insightful introduction that enhances readers' understanding of the talking beasts, demons, heroes, strong-minded women, rogues, and gurus who populate these pages. Excellent for storytelling collections.

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From Library Journal

For this worthy addition to the Pantheon series, Ramanujan combed through 3000 oral tales, selecting and editing 111 examples from 20 languages that represent most of the regions of India. Rather than being taken from literary texts, these tales are told by actual tellers, mainly nonprofessional householders. Ramanujan divides this truly remarkable collection into 11 sections, each including at least one of the following: male-centered tales; women-centered tales; tales about families; tales about fate, gods, demons; humorous tales; animal tales; and stories about stories. The selections are thus "a metonymy, a part that speaks of and for something larger than itself." In their scope and simplicity, these wondrous tales not only exemplify the folklore of India but of the world. From the informative introduction to the explanatory notes, the entire book outstandingly demonstrates the enduring strength of Indian folklore tradition.

- Glenn O. Carey, Eastern Kentucky Univ., Richmond

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