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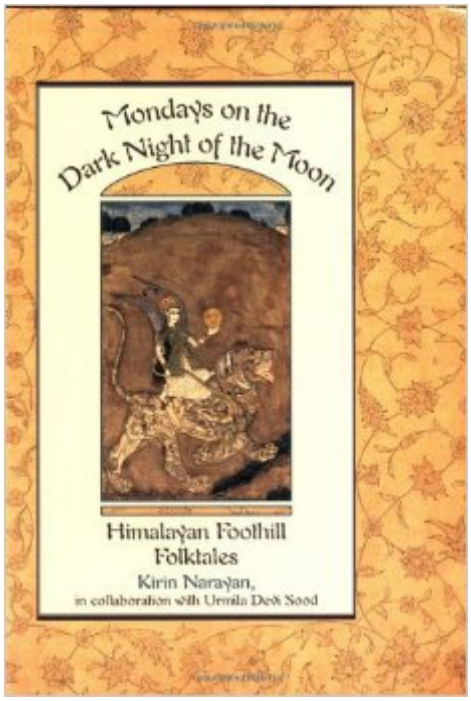
Mondays On The Dark Night Of The Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales (Exeter Studies In History)



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Synopsis

Oral tales establish relationships between storytellers and their listeners. Yet most printed collections of folktales contain only stories, stripped of the human contexts in which they are told. If storytellers are mentioned at all, they are rarely consulted about what meanings they see in their tales. In this innovative book, Indian-American anthropologist Kirin Narayan reproduces twenty-one folktales narrated in a mountain dialect by a middle-aged Indian village woman, Urmila Devi Sood, or "Urmilaji." The tales are set within the larger story of Kirin Narayan's research in the Himalayan foothill region of Kangra, and of her growing friendship with Urmilaji Sood. In turn, Urmilaji Sood supplements her tales with interpretations of the wisdom that she discerns in their plots. At a moment when the mass-media is flooding through rural India, Urmilaji Sood asserts the value of her tales which have been told and retold across generations. As she says, "Television can't teach you these things." These tales serve as both moral instruction and as beguiling entertainment. The first set of tales, focussing on women's domestic rituals, lays out guidelines for female devotion and virtue. Here are tales of a pious washerwoman who brings the dead to life, a female weevil observing fasts for a better rebirth, a barren woman who adopts a frog and lights ritual oil lamps, and a queen who remains with her husband through twelve arduous years of affliction. The women performing these rituals and listening to the accompanying stories are thought to bring good fortune to their marriages, and long life to their relatives. The second set of tales, associated with passing the time around the fire through long winter nights, are magical adventure tales. Urmilaji Sood tells of a matchmaker who marries a princess off to a lion, God splitting a boy claimed by two families into two selves, a prince's journey to the land of the demons, and a girl transformed into a bird by her stepmother. In an increasingly interconnected world, anthropologists' authority to depict and theorize about distant people's lives is under fire. Kirin Narayan seeks solutions to this crisis in anthropology by locating the exchange of knowledge in a respectful, affectionate collaboration. Through the medium of oral narratives, Urmilaji Sood describes her own life and lives around her, and through the medium of ethnography Kirin Narayan shows how broader conclusions emerge from specific, spirited interactions. Set evocatively amid the changing seasons in a Himalayan foothill village, this pathbreaking book draws a moving portrait of an accomplished woman storyteller. Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon offers a window into the joys and sorrows of women's changing lives in rural India, and reveals the significance of oral storytelling in nurturing human ties.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The stories told by Urmila Devi Sood in Kirin Narayan’sbook "Earth into Gold" are woven as richly as a goldbrocade wedding sari. Many of the themes are freshand Ms Narayan’s commentary fleshes out thenarative for those seeking a deeper meaning of thetales that have been told by generations of story tellersin the small village in the Himalayas where Urmilaji lives.I reccommend this book for readers who enjoy folk talesas well as for the more serious scholar. I would also nothesitate to read these stories to children, as an alternative toHans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm

This is a lovely and evocative book. The author brings us stories as an intimate of the women who tell them. Illuminating and graceful, the stories tell of life in a large sense, but the author shows us how their tellings grow out of particular lives and specific settings. As I read the stories, I felt that I came to know Urmilaji, too, and the hardships and pleasures of the Himalyan village in which she lives. I use this book often in teaching and my students love it. It helps them understand India in a subtle and pleasing way, and shows them how stories are rich with many meanings.

I had this book for my anthropology class (Kirin Narayan is a professor here at University of Wisconsin - Madison) and though more often than not I find assigned books to be boring, this one was the opposite and I read it more than once and kept it at the end of the year instead of selling it

back because I thought it was so great. Ms. Narayan visited our class one day and talked to us about how she had to learn Urmila Devi Sood's dialect before she could talk with her and record the folktales. I love the folktales in this book!! This is a great book to own!

When I ordered this book, I was expecting a collection of stories in seperate, neat little packages. Instead it seemed that a bunch of quirky little stories wiggled their way into a book about something entirely different. I think the stories themselves need some re-writing before they are fully presentable in English, but I also think that the book is about much more then a couple tall tales.

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