UNIT 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO FOLKLORE

Structure
1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction and Definition of Folklore
1.2 Early Philology and the Grimm Brothers
1.3 W. J. Thoms and the Word ‘Folklore’
1.4 Folklore and Ideology
1.5 Different Academic Approaches
   1.5.1 Mythological School
   1.5.2 Diffusion/Migration Theory
   1.5.3 Anthropological Perspectives
   1.5.4 Historical-Geographical School
   1.5.5 Psychoanalytical School
   1.5.6 Oral-Formulaic Theory
   1.5.7 Structural School
   1.5.8 Contextual Theory
1.6 Growth of Folklore Studies in India
   1.6.1 The Missionary Period
   1.6.2 The Nationalist Period
   1.6.3 The Academic Period
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 References and Further Readings
1.9 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- understand the beginning and growth of folklore studies, in India in particular, and in the other parts of the world in general;
- explain the ideological contexts for the study of, and interest in, folklore studies; and
- explain the diversity of perceptions about folklore in different places and at different times.

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF FOLKLORE

In this unit, we will discuss in detail that although folklore materials such as tales, songs etc. are as old as human society, the systematic study of these materials in the spirit of modern academics is of relatively recent origin. The beginning of modern folklore studies can be traced back to nineteenth century Europe, especially Germany, when scholars and intellectuals started taking serious interests in the collection and study of the folklore materials in various forms such as folk tales, folk songs, traditional customs, etc. that existed in their surroundings. However, it is important to know that such interests in folklore resources, initially in Europe and later on in
other parts of the world, were triggered by diverse motivations that arose out of different social, political and historical contexts.

Unlike the cases of other disciplines such as history and natural sciences, the growth and development of folklore studies as an academic discipline had to pass through considerable differences and confusions. Such differences were primarily regarding the meaning of the term ‘folklore’ itself, as the same term, i.e. ‘folklore’, was used to mean both the study and the materials of the subject. Besides that, different countries followed different practices to label a diverse set of cultural resources as folklore materials. In some parts of Europe and South America, the term ‘folklore’ was used to mean the so-called unsophisticated peasant culture, the community performances of music, dance and festival. In the United States, on the other hand, folklore was understood as the relics of the past, that included, ballads, tales and superstitions.

Because of the very nature of folklore materials, they have been the subjects of study of scholars from various disciplines, such as literary studies, anthropology, psychology, history etc. While this had enriched folklore studies with theoretical and methodological contributions from multiple disciplines, it also caused folklore studies to remain annexed to any one of these subjects in the institutional setups. Folklore studies could emerge as independent academic departments in universities and colleges only in the twentieth century.

**Definition of Folklore**

Folklore has always been associated with simple, ignorant people as compared to the high classical arts, which are seen as being the so called elite. It is strongly associated with the rural peasant folk. It is said to be different from the literate elite. Folk has always survived along with the elite group, yet it has been treated as very different from it.

According to Dundes, “The term folk can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is— it could be a common occupation, language, or religion— but what is important is that a group is formed for whatever reason it calls its own.” (http://muse.jhu.edu)

Folk culture cannot be demarcated through geographical notions or by literary reasons alone. It can belong to people of similar race, gender, religion or occupation. It can cut across geographical boundaries and have close human to human interaction. It can also be shaped by technology and modern society. For example net surfers all across the world can have their own kind of folk culture that distinguishes them from others. Folk always implies some kind of collectivity as it is a shared experience, common to more than one person. Even though it may be created by one individual, a folk culture cannot become one unless it is shared and is collective. It is not necessary that all the folk members should know one another. They can be distant and not connected in any manner. Folk does not necessarily imply rural or lower class. There can be a strong urban literate folk. Television, computers, telephone – all have impacted folk genres such as jokes, songs, stories, myths. It has become a great tool in the transmission and the generation of new folk cultures.

Folk culture is alive and vibrant. In the 19th century folklore was considered to be a dead culture; however it would be wrong to assume so. It is deeply connected with a vibrant, ever changing cultural tradition of any region. It can change its meaning and significance over time, but the essence remains the same. For example, certain jokes and proverbs have no longer any social significance; however they still will
belong to folk culture. To many, folklore implies some kind of falsity and fantasy. Folk tales and stories are sometimes considered to be based on incorrect facts and myths. While it is true for some genres of folklore like tales and stories, it would be wrong to imply that all forms of folk culture have the notions of falsehood inherent in it. It is very much based on the material life of the people and some forms like theatre and performance are very much based on tangible truths.

Folk culture comprises learned habits, beliefs, rituals, institutions and expressions of a people. However this is not strictly limited to oral habits and could include material culture as well. This is closely associated with the notions of a folk society which is a group of individuals who are organized around some common interest. Both folk culture and folk society go together. As described earlier, the notions of folk culture have greatly changed. The initial ideas of folk culture were based on ideal, romantic ideas and saw the folk culture as that of the rural and common people. It was also linked up with nationalism. However folk culture truly encompasses all.

Definitions of scholars of folklore range and differ. According to Klintberg, it stands for, “traditional cultural forms that are communicated between individuals through words and actions and tend to exist in variation” (https://clfs.wisc.edu). Scholars have long believed that folklore is communicated orally through informal methods or means. They believe that since folklore is largely verbal, it can differ greatly with every instance of communication. However, informal means of communication should not be seen as the sole method as it can be transmitted through a variety of methods and numerous ways. Both print and visual media communicate folk ideas. Well known artists have communicated their thoughts through their artistic creations such as theatre, dance or paintings. For example, the very famous playwright Girish Karnad has explored folk motifs in his play Hayavadana.

Folklore is deeply connected with tradition. As tradition involves change and continuity, cultural symbols, items and icons of folklore all undergo a process of change. Folklore is in a continuous process of flux and is inherently dynamic. Folklore is deeply connected to the social life and its processes of change and alterations. Hence this is an artistic process that is both creative and imaginative and in a state of flux and change. Folklore often has an inherent inconsistency in it. Often we see that certain principles and standards held by the people are challenged. On the other hand, folklore maintains set and standard cultural values. This can be seen in folk songs where values such as love between the mother and child, family bonding, patriotism, unity between man and nature etc. are constantly upheld. Folklore can bind people together like in the case of songs or separate them as in the case of humiliating jokes. Contrasts are inherent in folklore.

Folklore can be global or local, national or international, personal or public. For example, folktales of the hero rescuing a princess from the clutches of evil are universal but tales from the region of Rajasthan, like that of Dhola Maru, are local in nature. Folklore is deeply connected with aesthetics and the appreciation of beauty, for example art and folk crafts. This is defined by the folklorists in the sense of style and artistry. Some scholars do not consider jokes, riddles or everyday art objects like clay pots and fabrics as being creative or aesthetic. However, art objects, everyday idioms, speech patterns and verbal utterances are artistic patterns of communication.

Folklore also remains deeply authentic and reliable. This is in contrast to high culture where authenticity rests with the individual and this also determines originality. In folklore, on the other hand, authorship is anonymous. However in folklore, the continuity of tradition proves to its authenticity.
As defined earlier, folklore is deeply connected to the social process and its functioning. It cannot exist on its own and needs to work within the context of society and community. Family life, economic structure, education, aesthetic and cultural values, religion and political set up of any society are important. The interaction of the individual and his interaction in the social, cultural economic and political set up play a pivotal role.

Some scholars believe that family defines folklore. They see this social organization as being the primary one that brings forth the entire process of folklore, be it communication, preservation of culture or conservation of cultural symbols. Patterns of belief, behaviour, art, rituals, institutions and expressions are mediated through the family. We can add to this by saying that folk culture represents the representation and the reaffirmation of the total identity of a particular group, whether it is a family, community or nation.

Folk life is always viewed in contrast to the elite which are seen as being civilized, urban or high. Some believe that folk culture belongs to a small technologically backward group. Folk culture is much broader and this can be seen in urban settings as well, like in the instances of migrant labourers in big cities of India or petty shop keepers in metros. Folk constitutes of group of persons that have some common features which allow for cohesion. A group can be large or small, or in other words primary or secondary. This can be differentiated on the basis of some criteria that include size, purpose, duration, patterns of communication, type of social control and the amount of involvement of the individual in the group. Typically, a primary group can be small and the interaction between community members are face to face and often direct. By contrast a secondary group is larger and may be long lasting.

Experts have defined folk in several ways:
1) Folklore is deeply connected to the nation.
2) It is said to belong to the lower levels of the social hierarchy.
3) It is said to be old fashioned as compared to the complexities of modern civilization.
4) It is believed that it belongs to large societies with a large population.
5) Folk is said to be a social group connected through a common tradition and a particular feeling of communication.

From the above discussions, it can be defined that Folklore is a broad category that can be said to be the culture of any group that is communicated through verbal or expressive literature, behaviours visible through material life (including customs, rituals) and performances and public displays of the individual.

1.2 EARLY PHILOLOGY AND THE GRIMM BROTHERS

We may begin here with the question – what is philology? Philology is the study of the historical development of languages. Philological enquiries mostly sought for the root or origin of languages and etymologies of different words in a language. In 19th century Germany, it was Jacob Grimm (1785 – 1863) who emerged to be the most prominent activist in this field, who extensively collected German folklore materials for the purpose of his study of the roots of German language. For his quest for the origin of the German language, he collected and studied a great deal of
German words, folk narratives such as myths and tales. Eventually he not only brought out the monumental German dictionary but also compiled, with his brother Wilhelm Grimm (1786 – 1859), some very important books, such as *Deutsche Mythologie* (a seminal collection of German myths) and *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales, popularly known as Grimm’s Fairy Tales) which imparted decisive influences in the study and publishing of folklore materials in later times.

One thing to be noted regarding the works of Grimm brothers is that their engagement with the materials of folklore was not as that of the folklorists of present times. They took interest in folkloric resources as the means to trace the root of German language, and also to collect “everything that is German” – a drive triggered by the romantic nationalist feeling which had been initiated by previous German scholars like Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). Such romantic nationalist spirit in Germany and other parts of the Europe arose in the context of the emerging forces of industrialization that began to sweep away the traditional landscapes. The traditional cultural resources of the peasant communities were regarded by the intellectuals as the precious remnants of the glorious past. However, in their course of work which was primarily a linguistic investigation, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm paved the way for the collection, methodology of study and publishing of folkloric materials. Influence of Jacob Grimm upon the European folklorists in subsequent times was enormous. His entire conceptual framework, which employed diachronic study of German oral poetry and narratives, had a direct influence on the emergence of a theoretical perspective called “mythological school” in later times.

### 1.3 W. J. THOMS AND THE WORD ‘FOLKLORE’

Let us now focus on the role of W. J. Thoms in folklore studies. It was the British antiquarian William John Thoms who coined the word ‘folklore’ in 1846. Prior to that, materials of folklore, in English, were referred randomly as ‘popular antiquities’ or ‘popular literature’. In Germany, such resources were called as *volkskunde*. W. J. Thoms, under the pseudonym of Ambrose Merton, wrote a letter to a journal titled *The Athenaeum* proposing that the singular word ‘folklore’ should be used in English to denote the “the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs”
and other materials “of the olden time.” He argued that the word ‘folklore’, being the composite of ‘folk’ (people) and ‘lore’ (knowledge), would be a good Anglo-Saxon compound instead of all other somewhat cumbersome terms. His letter was published in the August of 1846 and his proposal was soon accepted widely.

There are a number of significant aspects to be noted regarding Thoms’ introducing of the word folklore. Firstly, he associated the notion of folklore with a nationalistic sentiment which was the primary motivation behind his approach to the issue. His English nationalistic sentiment can be felt through his phrases such as “good Saxon compound” for the word folklore. Secondly, he did not give any formal definition of folklore though his letter reflects what he understood. It was a past-oriented view where Thoms saw folklore as to mean the cultural relics of the bygone times.

By introducing the word ‘folklore’, W. J. Thoms made the novel contribution of fixing the label for the resources and their study, which led to the establishment of an international discipline known as folklore, folklore studies or folkloristics. However, it is to be noted that the tasks of collection and study of folklore had begun much before Thoms coined the word.

### 1.4 FOLKLORE AND IDEOLOGY

What is the relation between folklore and ideology? We will see that political ideological motivation has been intricately connected with the beginning and growth of folklore studies in different parts of the world. The driving force behind the works of Grimm brothers in Germany was the romantic nationalist spirit that was initiated in German intellectual circles by Herder in 18th-19th century. The items of folklore, understood as the remnants of the past generations, were always charged with a kind of collective pride and national glory. Besides that, as folklore was initially understood as the lore of the unsophisticated peasant societies, they appeared to be purer assets of humanity, and closer-to-the-nature, for many urban elite intellectuals. Because of this, folklore materials enjoyed conscious care during the age of romanticism.

Besides Germany, political and ideological motivations behind the attention to folklore, in varied degrees, were seen in Norway, Finland, Ireland, Soviet Russia and India. In Germany, during Hitler’s regime, folklore resources were used with extreme Nazi racist propaganda. In Soviet Russia, folklore was used “as a powerful tool to advance communism” (Dorson 1982: 17). In such highly overt political drives, folklore was not only utilized but also created anew to meet specific socio-political goals of people. This defied the prevailing notion of folklore as static items received from the past. “Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time it is also the vigorous voice of the present”, as stated by the Russian scholar Y. M. Sokolov. In India, the massive body of folklore materials in many racial and linguistic communities was studied and published in nationalistic spirit by the intellectuals and literary scholars of early twentieth century. During the Indian freedom struggle, folklore symbols were effectively deployed for the construction of identity.

### 1.5 DIFFERENT ACADEMIC APPROACHES

#### 1.5.1 Mythological School

After the works of the Jacob Grimm, the first theoretical perspective in study and analysis of folklore was put forward by Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), a profound German philologist, Indologist and a great Sanskrit scholar. Max Müller
drew on linguistic viewpoint to explain not only the meaning of myths but also the process of myth-creation. Being an authority on comparative religion, Max Müller strengthened the comparative methodology and diachronic approach of Jacob Grimm to formulate what was known as the mythological school of folklore studies. His theory attempted to explain the phenomenon of myth-creation as the result of the semantic changes in language. He used the phrase “malady of language” (disease of language) to mean this change in language – which is a phenomenon where words and terms used by the primitive men at a particular stage of one language lose their original meanings at a later phase of the language and at the hands of later generations. Myths are created, according to Max Müller, as the explanatory narratives of such words and expressions by the later generations. This Mythological approach, which was championed mostly by Max Müller, and few other scholars too, however, were abandoned in later times as its reconstruction of the prototype myth was proved to be too hypothetical. However, Mythological theory is to be credited for being the first of its kind to attempt theoretical interpretation of folkloric forms such as myths. Also, the work of Max Müller was highly productive in shaping the methodology in the study of folklore.

1.5.2 Diffusion/Migration Theory

Theodor Benfey (1809 – 1881) was another German philologist and Orientalist who is best known for compiling the great Sanskrit-English Dictionary. However, he made novel contribution to the theoretical and intellectual development of folklore studies through his translation of Indian anthology – the *Panchatantra* into German language, with a highly comprehensive introduction. Benfey deciphered fascinating similarities between Sanskrit tales of ancient India and the tales of Europe. He opined that such similarities were not necessarily due to genetic relationship of people as thought by Max Müller. Rather, Benfey put forward the idea that folktales can and do travel across territories. He believed that it was ancient India where all the folktales were originally produced, which later ‘migrated’ to Europe and other parts of the world through various means of cultural contacts between peoples. Further, Benfey also attempted to construct the exact routes through which such folktales migrated from India to the rest of the world. This idea of monogenesis or atomistic origin of folk tales and other folk forms can be seen as the central theme of the works of philologists since Jacob Grimm and Max Müller. Benfey’s theory and methods influenced the Historical-Geographical methods in Finland.

1.5.3 Anthropological Perspectives

The rise in anthropological scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in England and America, brought out a strong anthropological perspective in the study of folklore. In fact, anthropology and folklore studies as academic fields share almost the same types of subject matters with differences only in perspectives and emphases. Folklorists, typically, have been studying the orally and verbally transmitted cultural resources more than the other types of resources, though modern folkloristics do encompass the study of peoples’ customs, material cultural resources and art forms. However, this special attribution to oral tradition is not a feature in the works of anthropologists who study the material and non-material aspects of culture from functionalist viewpoints, and see the cultural norms and values as predictable and theorizable patterns of human behaviour. Some of the foremost scholars of classical anthropology drew heavily upon the folkloric resources which they collected through exhaustive fieldworks in distant places and diverse communities. The names which can be mentioned in this line are E. B. Tylor (1832 – 1917) and Andrew Lang (1844 – 1912) in England, Franz Boas (1858 – 1942), Ruth Benedict (1887 – 1948), M. J. Herskovits (1895 – 1963) in the United States. E. B. Tylor in his famous book
Primitive Culture advocated that folklore, understood as the customs and beliefs of the peasant societies, could be worth studying in reconstructing the collective human activities of primitive times. Tylor and his follower Andrew Lang explained the similarities between cultural traits and practices amongst communities living in different geographical locations through the new concept of anthropological evolution of mankind. In sharp contrast to the idea of monogenesis and atomistic origin maintained by Max Müller and Theodor Benfey, this anthropological school put forward the notion of polygenesis and multiple origins of cultural and folkloric traits. According to this notion, a cultural trait or an item of folklore could have independently originated at two or more places unrelated to each other, either at the same time or at different times, but at similar stages of human progress. It was believed that evolution of mankind followed a singular universal path of progress everywhere, with three absolutely identical stages – savagery, barbarism and civilization.

1.5.4 Historical-Geographical School

Theodor Benfey’s hypothesis, as mentioned earlier, invoked a rigorous methodology in Finland to study the origin and migration of folklore items. This technical method, which was initially experimented in the study of the Finnish national epic Kalevala, was based on the notion that as folk forms travel from place to place, they undergo changes in form and content, yet retaining their basic recognizable features. Thus it was believed that not only the original forms of folklore items could be reconstructed but the exact route of migration of those items also could be traced through comparative exercise. It was known as Finnish Method or Historical-Geographical Method because of its research along historical (original form) and geographical (route of migration) scales. The major exponents of this method were Kaarle Krohn, C.W. Von Sydow, Archer Taylor, Stith Thompson and Axel Olrik. Besides the precision techniques of comparative analysis of folklore data, a major development that arose out of this Historical-Geographical method was the scientific way of breaking down folklore forms, such as folktales, into identifiable traits for cross-comparative analysis. Further, development of this practice led in later times to the concept of motif in folklore texts, on which the American folklorist Stith Thompson compiles The Motif Index of Folk Literature.

1.5.5 Psychoanalytical School

The works of the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) on the unconscious self were highly influential in twentieth century academics. For his exploration of the human mind, he extensively studied folklore materials and brought out the books like The Interpretation of Dreams (1899), Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905), and Totem and Taboo (1913). He, and many of his followers of psychoanalytical school, used to see the myths, dreams, jokes and tales as the symbolic expressions of the unconscious human mind. In his Interpretation of Dreams, Freud drew analogies between dreams and myths that dreams are the disguised reflection of the repressed desires of an individual in his or her subconscious mind whereas the myths are the symbolic expressions of the collective unconsciousness of a race or culture. C. G. Jung, another stalwart of the psychoanalytical school, deciphered symbols of sexual drive in myths and other folk narratives. The influence of Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis was enormous, both in academics and common public values of twentieth century. In folklore studies, it brought out radically new theoretical and methodological perspectives.
1.5.6 Oral-Formulaic Theory

In 1930, American literary scholar Milman Parry was working on the formulaic characters of the classical epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He extended his analysis of formulaic characteristics of classical epic to the Yugoslav oral poetry. His aim was to delineate the form of oral poetry and to compare it with the form of written verses. After Parry’s death in 1935, his method was taken up by Albert B. Lord who published his book under the title *The Singer of Tales* in 1935. With his seminal methodology, he closely observed the unlettered oral poetry being performed or sung without reading and writing. It was observed that the “epic singers memorize a set of formulas which enable them to carry on the traditional themes with reasonable accuracy and at the same time give them freedom to improvise new elements depending on the occasion without altering the form drastically” (Handoo 1989: 50). The work of Parry and Lord remained influential in succeeding folklore scholarships. Besides imparting useful perspectives on narrative composition of oral poetry, it also initiated the trend in folklore studies to take folklore forms as more than texts (the performance or singing dimension in their case of oral epics). An important thing is to be noted that during the time of Parry and Lord’s works, i.e. in the 1930s, the Russian formalist V. J. Propp was also working on similar lines, though Propp’s work was on folktales and not oral poetry. Both the works were attempts to decipher the characteristics of narrative composition of folklore forms.

1.5.7 Structural School

Structuralism is an approach in which any field or object of study is treated as a system of interrelated parts. It was a popular and widely accepted perspective in several academic fields of twentieth century. In folklore studies, the seed of structural analysis was planted by Vladimir J. Propp (1895 – 1970). The Russian formalist published his book *Morfologia Skazki* in Russian language in 1928, which was translated into English in 1958 as *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. In that remarkable book, Propp took an entirely new synchronic approach to the study of Russian folktales. Instead of the meanings of folktale, Propp analyzed their structural forms, component parts of the structures and the interrelation amongst them. Regarding the issue of the similarities of folktales of different places, he was interested neither in finding the origin of these similarities nor in random comparison and classification of the similar traits of tales. He showed that the vital components of a folktale are not its characters but certain actions of the characters, which are found to be constant in folktales of different places. The presence of such constant actions, which he called functions, are responsible for the similarities between different folktales.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908 - 30 October 2009), an extraordinarily versatile French anthropologist, led another structuralist approach for the study of folklore forms. Lévi-Strauss, who applied his structural formulations to explain myth, kinship and visual arts, followed complex interpretation schemes which he built on the concepts of Saussurean linguistics. Unlike Propp, Lévi-Strauss did not separate the form and content (meaning) of folklore texts. He treated myth as a higher and complex level of communication carrying mythic messages. These messages are logical formulations, to be found in somewhat codified binary oppositional schemes, which are constructed in cultures to overcome the contradictions of human understandings. Lévi-Strauss believed that a universal structural scheme could be possible to explain entire myths around to world.
1.5.8 Contextual Theory

Towards the late twentieth century, along with the radical changes and developments in the academic and intellectual fields, American scholars like Roger Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundes, Kenneth Goldstein and Robert Gorges began to take folklore items within multi-dimensional frameworks. In this new enlightened approach, the items of folklore began to be seen not merely as texts but as events, where the contexts of folk performances (like story-telling, singing, rituals and festivals, and conversations) were regarded as important as the texts. However, the root of such outlook can be seen in the works of Parry and Lord of oral-formulaic theory where attention was given to the contextual data of oral epic singing. The works of the contextualists involve comprehensive fieldwork for holistic recording of folklore events, in contrast to the text-oriented exercises of the earlier scholars, shifting the attention more to the field than to the library.

1.6 GROWTH OF FOLKLORE STUDIES IN INDIA

Let us now focus on the growth of folklore studies in India. Because of its bewildering richness in oral traditions, India enjoyed a special place in the international folklore scholarship. Its many racial and linguistic cultural traditions caught the attention of anthropologists and folklorists. The works of Max Müller and Theodore Benfey on Indian myths and folktales bear testimony to how Indian folklore resources contributed to the theoretical development of folklore studies. A characteristic feature of Indian culture and civilization has been the continuity of some of the oldest oral and written traditions of the world. The Vedas, great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Upanishads and Puranas, and bulky anthologies of folktales such as Hitopadesa, Brihatkatha, Kathasaritsagara, Betal-Pancavimsatika, Jataka Tales etc. do exemplify the vibrancy of oral and written traditional creativity in India since ancient times.

However, the study of folklore on Indian soil, in modern systematic ways, began only after the coming of the British. Jawaharlal Handoo, one of the foremost scholars of folklore studies from India, has divided the growth of folklore studies in India into three periods: the Missionary Period, the Nationalistic Period and the Academic Period.

1.6.1 The Missionary Period

The Christian missionaries, who started their mission of spreading Christianity in India since the early nineteenth century, were eventually the first batch of collectors and publishers of the first-hand resources of Indian traditional cultural lives in various regions. These missionaries, who visited the remotest corners of the country for preaching the Christian faith amongst the rural Indians, came in contact with the hitherto unexplored rural traditional settings of the diverse Indian communities. As J. Handoo noted, “These Anglo-Saxon fathers recorded all kinds of information – habits, manners, customs, oral traditions, rituals etc – about their subjects. They used some of this information in spreading the Christian faith and were successful in delivering their main message through the native symbols. Most of these writings were published and form a part of the great treasures of folklore we [the Indians] possess about our own past. Looked from this viewpoint, these works of missionaries are of great historical value to a student of Indian folklore” (Handoo 1989: 135).
An Introduction to Folklore

Though those publications of the missionaries were void of theoretical analysis of pure academics, their works were, and still are, valuable because of their highly informative contents. Some of such publications were Mary Frere’s *Old Deccan Days or Hindoo Fairy Legends Current in Southern India* (1886), A. J. Duboi’s *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (1897), J. Hinton Knowels’ *Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings Explained and Illustrated from the Rich and Interesting Folk-Lore of the Valley* (1885) and *Folk-Tales of Kashmir* (1893), Aurel Stein’s *Hatim’s Tales* (1937), Charles E. Grover’s *The Folk Songs of Southern India* (1894), John Lazarus’ *A Dictionary of Tamil Proverbs* (1894).

Parallel to the drives of the missionaries, some western philologists and orientalists took significant steps of establishing academic societies and starting important periodicals that contributed immensely in the intellectual attention of the Indian cultural resources during this time. The Asiatic Society was founded by William Jones in 1784; and journals like the *Indian Antiquary* and the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* gave spaces for “brief articles on oral narratives and other genres of folklore” (Handoo 1989: 134-5).

Besides the missionaries, the civil servants of the British administration in India were also engaged in this period in collection and study of Indian folklore materials. Though the motivation behind such works of the colonial administrators was primarily to gather helpful local information for effective administration, they too, like the missionaries, collected and studied various forms of Indian oral traditions in all parts of the country. Some of the works of this kind worth-mentioning are: Flora Annie Steel’s *Wide Awake Stories (Tales from Punjab Told by the People)* (1894); William C. Crooke’s *Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1894) and *Natives of Northern India* (1907); S. Mahalinga Natesa Shastri’s *Folklore in Southern India* (1884) and *Indian Folk-Tales* (1900); Robinson Edward Jewitt’s *Tales and Poems of South India* (1885); George A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1907); John F. A. McNair and Thomas Lambert Barlow’s *Oral Traditions from Indus: Comprised to Tales to Which are Added Explanatory Notes* (1908); E. M. Gordon’s *Indian Folk-Tales Being Side-light on the Village Life of Bilaspur; Central Provinces* (1908); Cecil Henry Bompa’s *Folklore of the Santhal Parganas* (1909); James Tod’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1920) etc.

These textual productions of the missionaries and civil servants brought the living Indian folklore of those times to the print. These books, periodicals and monographs still serve as valuable references for folkloristic and anthropological researchers in India.

1.6.2 The Nationalist Period

Towards the late nineteenth century, a sense of Indian nationalism began to grow under the leadership of newly emerging Indian intellectual groups who were enlightened with the western education and initiated a renewed nationalistic attitude towards their own societies and traditions. Also, the works of the missionaries and civil servants, who brought a bulk of textual production on Indian local traditions, indirectly contributed to a sense of nationalistic consciousness amongst the Indian intellectuals. Such sentiments got momentum along with the Indian freedom struggle, which began in 1857, to achieve independence from the British. Indian scholars and intellectuals began to search and establish their cultural roots by exploring their own culture and tradition.
Folk Literature and Language: Research and Pedagogy

Fig. 1.2: Material folklore evolving into a nationalistic symbol: Gandhi with the spinning wheel

Source: http://tamilaffairs.com/files/images/383286217_5e39a01028.jpg

Some of the major works of this period are: Lakshminath Bezbaruah’s *Burhi Ait Sashu* (1911); Dinesh Chandra Sen’s *Sati* (1917) and *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (1920); Zever Chand Meghani’s *Halardan* (1928), *Dadajini Vato* (1933), *Lok Sahitya* and *Kankavati* (1947); Suryakaran Parik and Narottam Swamy’s *Dhola Maru ra Doha* (1947), Ramnaresh Tripathi’s *Hamara Gram Sahitya* (1940); Devendra Satyarthi’s *Bela Phule Adhi Rat* (1948), *Dhart Gatt Hai* (1948), *Dhire Baho Ganga* (1948) and many many others. Besides straight collections and anthologies of folklore materials, many Indian creative writers brought literary productions, in the forms of novel, drama, poetry and short stories, that were either based on or highlighting the local folklore themes.

Besides the Indian scholars and authors, few western scholars also contributed significantly in the collection and study of Indian folklore during this time. Specially noteworthy is the work of Verrier Elwin whose important books were *Songs of the Forest: The Folk Poetry of the Gonds* (1935), *Folktales of Mahakosal* (1944), *Folksongs of Maikal Hills* (1944), *Folksongs of Chattisgarh* (1946), *Myths of Middle India* (1949), *Tribal Myths of Odisha* (1954) and *Myths of the Tribal Frontier Agency* (1958).

The treatment of the local folklore materials in India by the Indians during this time is significant in many ways. For the first time an Indian perspective began to work on the study of Indian folklore during this period. Prior to that, it was either the distant foreign indologists, or Christian missionaries or the colonial British administrators who put the data of Indian folklore with their non-Indian viewpoints. Secondly folkloric resources began to be associated with national unity and identity which was apparent all throughout the Indian freedom movement. The discourse of the *khadi* costumes and Mahatma Gandhi’s spinning wheel are the most visible examples of it. Folklore played the crucial role of the medium of spreading Indian national unity both in pre- and post-independence times.
1.6.3 The Academic Period

The academic period of Indian folklore studies, when one would see the formal study and research in institutionalized settings such as colleges and universities, began after the Indian independence in 1947. The necessary stimulus required for this was gained in the spirit of the nationalistic period. If the missionary period was marked with collection of raw data on Indian folklore and the nationalist period was filled with patriotic emotions, the academic period was featured with objectives of truth-finding about, and scientific analysis and preservation of, Indian folklore by the Indians.

As in the case of many other countries, study of folklore in Indian educational institutions remained initially annexed with the departments like anthropology, history and literary studies. In 1955, Gauhati University started a Folklore Archive which was later converted to the Department of Tribal Culture and Folklore Research – the first department of folklore in an Indian university. Many other Indian universities in later times opened their departments for offering M.A., M. Phil. and Ph. D. courses in folklore studies. IGNOU is one of the very few universities to offer academic programmes and courses on folklore studies, receiving overwhelming response from the learners. Besides governmental colleges and universities, non-governmental centres, like the National Folklore Support Centre, were also setup for promotion and dissemination of folklore scholarship in India. Interdisciplinary approach, international collaborations and applications of contemporary theories and perspectives in the field of humanities and social sciences mark the folklore studies in India of this period. Some of the notable folklore scholars of this time are Birinchi Kumar Baruah, A. K. Ramanujan, Jawaharlal Handoo, Praphulladatta Goswami, Birendranath Datta, Manoj Das, K Sachindanandan, Indranath Choudhury among many others.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed in detail the various stages in the development and growth of folklore studies across the world, as well as in India. We have tried to understand the various nationalist and ideological motivations that have been instrumental in the development of the discipline. We have highlighted the different biases that may creep into folklore analysis if precaution is not ensured regarding the role that ideology plays in folklore studies. In specific reference to India, we have highlighted the stages during the modern period that have shaped the study of folklore. The stages like missionary stage, nationalist stage and the academic stage have had peculiar features depending upon their historical specificities, bringing fresh insights into the study and understanding of folklore.

1.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS


(P.S. Major portions of this unit are borrowed from Course-1, Block-1, Unit-1 and Block-1, Unit-2, PGDFCS, written by Dr. Nandini Sahu, Dr. G. Nilakanthan and Dr. P. Dutta, with approval of SOITS School Board, Item no:13, SB 18.13.1 (Minutes of the 18th School Board of SOITS, 15th October, 2015)
1.9  CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Your answers should be in about 200 words.

1) Who were the Grimm brothers? What is their role in folklore studies?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

2) What is the contextual theory of folklore?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

3) What is the structural approach in folklore studies?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

4) Explain the academic period in the growth of folklore studies in India.
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

5) List the major contributors to folklore studies in India during the missionary period.
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................