Block 1

FOLK LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE: RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

UNIT 1
An Introduction to Folklore 7

UNIT 2
Thematic and Narrative Concerns of Indian Folk Literature 21

UNIT 3
Indian Folklore: Forms, Patterns and Variations 37

UNIT 4
Theoretical Approaches to Folklore 49
**EXPERT COMMITTEE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy</td>
<td>Eminent Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padmashree Prof. Manoj Das</td>
<td>Eminent Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Indranath Choudhury</td>
<td>Eminent Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. K. Satchidanandan</td>
<td>Eminent Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. T.S. Satyanath, Formerly Professor</td>
<td>Dept. of MIL and LS, University of Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Satyakam</td>
<td>Director (SOH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Anju Sahgal Gupta</td>
<td>English Faculty, SOH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Neera Singh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Malati Mathur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Nandini Sahu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Pema E Samdup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Mridula Rashmi Kindo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Parmod Kumar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Malathy A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE COORDINATOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Nandini Sahu</td>
<td>Professor English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Humanities, IGNOU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BLOCK PREPARATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Nandini Sahu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Vibha Sharma</td>
<td>Associate Professor of English, AMU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Durbadal Bhattacharya</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Department of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LPU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE EDITORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. Nandini Sahu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Banibrata Mahanta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SECRETARIAL ASSISTANCE:**

Mr. Sandeep K. Tokas, C.O. (SOH)

**PRINT PRODUCTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. C.N. Pandey</td>
<td>Section Officer (Publication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOH, IGNOU, New Delhi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

June, 2018

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2018

ISBN : 978-93-87960-54-1

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Further information on Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University’s office at Maidan Garhi. New Delhi-110 068 or visit University’s website http://www.ignou.ac.in

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi by Prof. Satyakam, Director, School of Humanities.

Cover Design by : ADA Graphic

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :
In this MEG Elective Course *Indian Folk Literature*, we deal with the study of folklore and the alternative modernities associated with it, uniquely examining how folk, classical and modern literatures go hand in hand to enrich each other. We authenticate this by taking well-knit examples from the oral and written literatures of different regions of India, amalgamating them with comparative studies from world literatures. The course experiments with a flexible view of folk, removing the notions of folk as part of marginal literature. The modern literary texts that have made explicit use of the folk traditions to make it available to the readers today are also treated at par with the folk texts that have only the oral tradition, called the ‘pure folk’. The course examines the nature, concept and function of folk — both oral and written — in modern Indian literature.

The study of folklore has emerged to be an area of critical concern in contemporary literary research and pedagogy as a key feature of marginal studies. It has been widely used by the academics, planners, researchers and critics to study the origin of a group who are deprived of the term ‘mainstream’. Though the magnitudes of social segregation, non-involvement in the mainstream associations or lack of freedom in self-expression have been termed as the rudiments of the rural masses, it is slowly being acknowledged locally as well as globally that they have a rich cultural heritage attached to their roots, with rich literature, music, songs, dance, theatre, art, cuisine, ornaments, medicines and unique life styles — and this has caught the attention of modern researchers of folklore. Folklore studies, indeed, is a complex and collective process and has continuity with the past and connection with the present living.

Researching in the area of folklore and culture studies confronts a lot of disputes. The foremost challenge is the inevitable question— what is ‘pure folk’? What is the difference between culture studies and cultural studies? What is the difference between folklore and myth? Can modern literature using the folk elements be called a part of folk literature? This area of study needs a pragmatic depth and sensitive understanding of the issues related to folklore and culture studies. Moreover, it also needs a perfect equilibrium between the compassion and understanding of the students about the lives of the folks who are a section of the society kept away from the mainstream since time immemorial with a plea that their literature cannot be / need not be a part of the mainstream literature, because once we document the oral literature, once the orality is lost, it no more remains ‘folklore’. Anyway, it is a welcome fact that most modern folklorists and researchers strongly support the view that to push folk to only a period of oral literatures is to treat it as marginal literature. And that folk is not something out there in a museum, to be seen and appreciated from a distance. Rather, it is a part and parcel of our modern and post-modern literatures, inspiring and influencing our modern literatures in a way that our classical literatures have done. With this flexible view of folk and with this open-armed gesture towards folk literature, we have designed this course, MEG-16, *Indian Folk Literature*. The units closely examine how folk literature, classical literature and modern literature exchange hands to enrich each other.

A question arises as to who are the ‘folk’? *Folk* is synonymous with a people or a way of life. This term is defined succinctly in Webster’s *New Collegiate Dictionary* (8th edition) as: “The great proportion of the members of a people that determines the group character and that tends to preserve its characteristic form of civilization and its customs, arts and crafts, legends, traditions, and superstitions from generation
to generation.” Folk literature is the lore of unlettered people transmitted by word of mouth. In a lecture, eminent littérateur U. R. Ananthamurthy said “The spoken word is kept alive by the lowest of the low. Proverbs are like Vedas for the poor” (IGNOU Silver Jubilee Lecture Series). Like written literature, it consists of prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, drama, rituals, proverbs and riddles. Until about 4000 BC, all literatures were basically folk literatures due to their orality. Writing developed in the years between 4000 and 3000 BC, both in Egypt and the Mesopotamian civilization at Sumer. Thereafter, the written literature spread rapidly from Asia, North Africa and the Mediterranean lands to rest of the world. Customs and beliefs, ritualistic behaviour, dances, folk music and other non-literary manifestations form part of the larger study of ethnology. These distinctions are of concern to the folklorists. The term ‘folklore’ was first coined by William Thoms, a British antiquarian, in 1846. The study of folk materials was being carried on under labels such as ‘Popular Antiquities’ or ‘Popular Literature’. Therefore, he suggested ‘a good Saxon Compound Folklore—the lore of the people.’ Besides, in the work of Grimm Brothers, particularly German philologist Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) who published the first volume of the Kinderschernen (translated as Grimms’ Fairy Tales), the scholarly and scientific study on folklore was initiated.

In order to trace the growth of folklore studies, we must focus on the scholarly works from Asia, particularly India, like Kathasaritsagar, Panchatantra, Mahabharata, Ramayana and Jatakas which were written even before the Grimms’ Fairy Tales. A German scholar Theodor Benfey even claimed in his introduction to Panchatantra (1859) that India, the seat of an ancient, highly developed civilization (which spread to Europe later on), was the home of the master tales subsequently found in the Grimms’ collection.

Some of the western schools of thought that are engaged in research and pedagogy on folklore studies are:

- Mythological School
- Migrational/Benfey’s School
- Anthropological School
- Historical-Geographical/’Finnish’ School
- Psychoanalytical School
- Structural School
  a) Syntagmatic/Propp’s Morphological School
  b) Paradigmatic/Levi Straussian School
- Thompsonian Concept of Motif/Classificatory analysis tale-types
- Functional School
- Historical Reconstructional theory
- Ideological theory
- Oral Formulaic theory
- Cross-Cultural theory
- Folk-Cultural theory
- Mass-Cultural theory
- Contextual theory
- Hemispheric theory
The units in this course cover most of these theories while interpreting folk literatures of different regions of India. In India, we always talk of Margi and Desi, Vaidic and Laukik, i.e., classical and folk traditions, which are theoretically named as the Great and Little Traditions. But in the Indian context, the loka and shastra (folk and elite) contrast is contrary to the western contrast between the Great and Little Tradition. India does not believe that non-literate cultures are ‘knowledge blanks’ which need to be filled in with the modern knowledge of different disciplines and dominant cultures. In reality, traditional Indian mind thinks that loka or desi and shastra or margi contrast represent two different expressions of the same tradition and not of different traditions. In this way, classical Sanskrit literature describes, on one side, the core regions, Dakshina-patha, Kuru-Panchala, Madhyadesa, Gandhara and on the other peripheries like Naga, Shabara, Dasa and Kirata to share the making of Indian literature. The main narrative view point of Indian literature consists of a classical core trinity. But there is no denial of the fact that the periphery in Indian literature is very vital and hence in Banabhatta’s Kadambari or Bharavi’s Kiratarjuniam, the periphery always comes and speaks in classical texts. For example, in classical literature, Shiva appears as Shabara in Kiratarjuniam. Bana has a Chandala girl as an important character woven in his story. The focus of classical regional trinity was to create something vital with the help of the periphery, and in the process, both the geographical region and the social sense were brought into focus, but by keeping it outside the framework of the caste system in society. These two literary expressions of core and periphery are always taken together in Indian literary context but of course not as a monolithic unity but as diverse structures complementing each other.

The complementariness of loka and shastra (folk and elite) is very deep and intricate in Indian context. Orality or folk is never marginalized in India; it is always an alternative tradition and alternative is not to be understood as “the opposite”. Alternative modernity doesn’t mean in contrast to modernity. If you want to draw a white line, you need dark colour as background, but it is a mistake to say white is the opposite of black or grey or blue. We have to make use of black or grey or any dark colour to bring out white in all its distinction. Thus, in India the glory of the mainstream literature rests not by marginalizing but by accepting oral or folk as its complementary. The loka and shastra (folk and elite) are complementary and they enable us to understand the range and the entirety of Indian aesthetic tradition and negotiate the whole issue of marginality in the context of shastra.

This course basically deals with all these problematics of folkloristic and focuses on the modern Indian literature and talks how it is different from pre-modern Indian literature, analyses the relation between language and literature. It examines the nature, concept and function of folk in modern Indian literature. This course would be of immense value for the literature students, teachers, researchers, folklorists, anthropologists, experts of social psychology, marginal studies and developmental studies, culture critics, linguists and policy planners.

Wish you happy reading!!

References (for the Course Introduction and Block Introductions)

This block deals with the different theoretical approaches to the study of folklore. Of the several approaches to folklore such as historical, anthropological, psychological and literary, this block explores the literary tradition of folk literature and the theoretical debates thereof. The most important issue in this block is to remember that several issues of what pass as folklore today are revised versions of what they were in their lost original – a projection of the primeval and the pre-rational. Indian folk forms, patterns and variations are vividly discussed in the units. Folklore is a faculty that has often been enriched by intuition and a direct cognition of truth. If we could resurrect that, we could discover flickers of wisdom that were once spontaneous with an ancient race.
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 folksongs 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 racialist 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
Primordial 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 folktale 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).
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.
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); Zeverchand 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.
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

20
UNIT 2  THEMATIC AND NARRATIVE CONCERNS OF INDIAN FOLK LITERATURE

Structure
2.0 Objectives
2.1 Introduction
2.2 Thematic Concern in Folk Literature
2.3 Narrative Concern in Folk Literature
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.5 References and Further Readings
2.6 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit on Indian folk literature, you will be able to
• get an idea of what is folk literature;
• know the significant texts of Indian folk literature;
• understand the thematic concerns in folk literature; and
• appreciate the narrative concerns in folk literature.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Folk literature forms a vast corpus of legends, stories, fables, fairy-tales, religious tales and mythological tales present in oral as well as written practice of a culture, language and people. In fact folk literature has been considered synonymous with oral literature. Jawaharlal Handoo defines oral literature while synonymising it with folk literature: “Oral literature called verbal art or expressive literatures are spoken, sung, and voiced forms of traditional utterances. Traditionally this has been known as folk literature as well”. (Web)

Folk literature represents limitless literary pursuits that keep evolving, progressing, adapting and reorienting along with the dynamism of time and need of the people who create, possess and further folklore generation after generation. Folk literature is characterised by the people it belongs to. Therefore it will not be wrong to call it people’s literature. Folk literature emerges out of people’s desires, aspirations, creativity and aesthetic impulse and it is closely related to people’s lives and experiences, efforts to resolve the conflicts, struggles to better the life, emotional and intellectual journeys, reason and rationality, issues of existence and conservation as well as preservation of nature. Complexity wrapped in simplicity and innocence rooted in the integrity to uphold humanity is the hallmark of the wide range of human experiences and the narrative that folk literature comprises. Permeability in the cultural boundaries acts as a replenishing process for the folk literature since borrowing and sharing are healthily required and practised in the world of folklore.

In India folk literature has been progressive, revolutionary and rich in terms of themes, narratives and issues like most of the folk literatures of the world. In fact
Indian texts are inspiration to the folk literatures all over the world. According to Handoo,

No country in the Eastern civilization offers the students of folkloristics an excellent opportunity to trace the links of unity amidst clustered diversity as does India... India, as is well known, occupies a special place in the history of world folklore. The marvellous Indic tale has contributed in shaping the theoretical growth of folkloristics itself. For instance, Max Muller’s works on Indian myths and Theodore Benfey’s translation of the famous Panchatantra gave rise to the theory of Indian origin of the fairy tale... the richness and variety of Indian folktales has the potential of inspiring such theories. This also reminds us of the importance of oral traditions that still flourish on this sub-continent.

(Web)

India has a unique culture of the oldest written tradition which interestingly has been a source to oral tradition and folklore. Following texts are not only the compendia of mythological, religious, spiritual wisdom in written form but also the resource texts to the folklore comprising folk literature, oral tradition and folk performance:

- Ramayana
- Mahabharata
- Puranas
- Upanishads
- Panchtantra
- Narayana Pandit’s Hitopadesa
- Gunadhya’s Brihatkatha
- Somadeva’s Kathasaritsagara
- Dasveta Panchavimsatika
- Sukasaptati
- Jataka Tales

These texts have originated over the last few millennia. Most of these are originally written in Sanskrit but the influence, inspiration and adaptations of these texts are present in all the languages of the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

### 2.2 THEMATIC CONCERN IN FOLK LITERATURE

Folk literature displays a close proximity with the socio-cultural undercurrents and ebb and flow of life like any other literature. This is a generalised feature of all literatures but for folk literature this is an exclusive requirement. The world of folk literature has never been based on publication business with its multi-layered processes of making a successful text; rather it has always sustained on its capability to provide people with a medium of expression which smoothly tells their story and enriches itself with every fresh narration. The instinct to listen to a story and tell a story is not exclusively a child’s trait. This instinct characterizes the nature of all humans irrespective of age. Therefore when it comes to people’s literature i.e. folk literature, then the story-telling becomes the central tenet. The creative manifestations of this universal instinct in the form of folk literature are celebrated all over India through stories and legends told, adapted, improvised and innovated with an amalgam...
of real incidents, personal experiences, cultural appropriations, historical and contemporary relevance. As Raja Rao says in his Foreword to *Kanthapura*:

> There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich sthala-purana, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this peepal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow-stone, or the Mahatma himself, or one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell. (5)

The stories in the aforementioned classical Indian texts have been told and retold innumerable times. A folk text grows on being ‘told’ even if the original story comes from a book. For generation after generation the stories and tales are passed on by word of mouth as part of the oral tradition. Oral tradition and folk literature go hand in hand and it is difficult to imagine the existence of one without the other. Each retelling adds new dimensions to the text. Often similar stories or instances are found being told in different culture-specific narratives in different parts of India. For example some stories of Birbal, Tenali Raman, Mullah Nasruddin often have similar basic structures but are narrated with the rootedness in the milieu of the listeners. The three legendary figures are popular among the masses for the wit and humour with which they would handle the most complex situations and problems. Not only this, their wit and humour provided an amiable orientation to their preaching and teaching which these characters are often portrayed to be involved in for the sake of truth and justice. Many of their stories are replete with episodes on beggar, donkey, thief and priest. Thus, the stories that are attributed to them are often structured around this system of resolving issues and one finds similar situations with relevant cultural differences. This kind of similarity is not a weakness, rather it is a virtue in folk literature since in order to attain the closest connect with the listeners, folk literature often turns to most popular materials on life present in the popular discourse. The telling makes it unique and fresh. The retelling of every folk text leads to creation of a new text. This feature also qualifies the themes and narratives of folk literature. The themes are part of the practice of folk literature which is structured to balance the telling and aesthetics with fine narrative features and idiomatic language.

The themes in the folk literature are inspired by universal truths, lessons, and values related to people’s lives and actions. Often folk tales are oriented in advocating reason and rationality over superstitions and blind-faith. It is significant to note that notwithstanding the lack of formalised system of theoretical and modernised literary paradigms, folk literature gets shaped out with a liberal worldview. On an apparent level, the texts may appear to be handling the dated stuff like not having children, kings without heirs, superstitions related to various socio-cultural issues but on the whole the folk literary spirits uphold the positive and liberal shades of humanity. For example one of the medieval Jain tales, ‘Prince Charming’, questions the importance of physical beauty over the inner or spiritual self. This story brings into light the futility of the corporeal exquisiteness and accentuates the ethereal self. The story goes thus:

> There was a prince who was besotted with his own beauty. If any traveller came to the palace he would ask him: “Have you ever seen anyone as handsome as me?” No one ever had. One day an obsequious traveller said to him: “I don’t think there
could be anyone in the whole world as good-looking as you. I don’t think even a
god could be as handsome.”

This made the prince very happy and he went around telling everyone that he was
more handsome than any god. One day he had two visitors who identified themselves
as gods.

“We have come to see if you are as handsome as you claim,” they explained.

“Aren’t I?” he asked.

“We visited you earlier in the day when you were asleep,” said one of the gods.

“You were more handsome then.”

“How could my looks decline within a few hours?” said the prince. He turned to his
servants.

“Did I look better in the morning?” he enquired.

“You looked the same,” said his servants.

“We are gods,” said one of the visitors. “We can see what your servants cannot.
Their vision is imperfect and we’ll prove it to you. Bring a bowl of water.”

A bowl of water was brought. The god asked the servants to study it closely and
then leave the room. When they were gone, he removed half a spoonful of water
from the bowl. Then the servants were called back in.

“Is there any change in the bowl of water?” asked the god.

“None,” said the servants. “They cannot see that the water has diminished,” said
the god, “just as they cannot see that your beauty has deteriorated.”

The prince was shaken. He thought: “My beauty is diminishing by the day. It is
short-lived. Why am I besotted by something so fleeting? I should concern myself
with that which is eternal.”

He never again looked into a mirror and in course of time renounced his throne and
became a monk. (Web)

2.3 NARRATIVE CONCERN OF FOLK LITERATURE

Personification is a popular feature in folk literature. In keeping with the spirits of
pagan traditions and various nature-related myths and legends, folk literature
maintains a general worldview of “vasudhaivkutumbkam”: a Sanskrit phrase which
means whole world is a family. The world as a family includes animals and plants
too as members. Therefore in folk literature the protagonists and characters are
equally represented and portrayed through human beings, animals and plants. This
sharing of the life’s and world’s concerns within one big family affirms an inherent
truism that the world is incomplete without the existence of all kinds of living
beings and thus it strengthens cause of preservation and conservation of the nature.
The story “The Mighty”, a short yet comprehensive story about a huge tree and a
willow provides us with an inlight into how these inanimate objects are given human
attributes. These objects are made into characters that stand with two distinct
opinions:

At the edge of a forest, stood a big tree. Its branches spread out majestically and so
did its roots. It shielded people from the sun under its shady leaves, and provided
Thematic and Narrative Concerns of Indian Folk Literature

shelter to countless birds and other small creatures in its branches. It buzzed with activity all the time. At the foot of the tree grew a little plant. The plant was willowy and delicate, and tended to keel over at the touch of the slightest breeze. One day, the two neighbours were having a little chat.

“Well, little one,” said the tree to the plant, “Why do you not plant your feet deeply in the ground, and raise your head boldly in the air as I do?”

“I see no need to do so,” whispered the plant with a smile. “Actually, I think I may be safer this way.”

“Safer!” sneered the tree. “Are you suggesting that you’re safer than I am? Do you know how deep my roots are buried, how thick and strong my trunk is? Even if two men hold hands they would not be able to surround my trunk. Who could possibly pluck me by the roots or bow my head to the ground?”

And the tree turned away from the plant in a great huff. But the tree was to regret its words very soon. One evening a great hurricane arose in the region. It hurled the trees off their roots and almost completely destroyed the forest. It uprooted the neem tree and hurled it away with great force. When the storm had passed, the villagers living nearby surveyed the damage. Mighty trees that had once almost touched the sky, were now reduced to stumps or worse. The forest was littered with their carcasses. But there was one exception. The little plant. The plant had been tossed and turned under the fury of the hurricane, and bent completely. But when the hurricane ended, it sighed and stood upright again. No trace remained of its mighty neighbour though. (Web)

Irony makes folk literature interesting because it provides unexpected, surprising and amusing contradictions. Irony is mostly manifested in the wit and humour of the characters who turn the situation in their favour to attain justice and uphold moral values. The narratives also gain strength through irony since the telling of folk tales and stories gets facilitated to build up to an unexpected conclusion which keeps the listeners attentive and alert with their wits. Stories of Mullah Nasruddin are known for wit and irony. The story which might appear simple ends on a baffling note. One such story is “The Crowded Home”:

One day, Mulla Nasruddin was talking to his neighbour. The neighbour was looking so miserable that Nasruddin asked him what was bothering him. The man started to complain about the lack of space in his house and said, “It is such a small house, Mulla. And me, my wife, my three children and my mother-in-law, all have to live together in the same little cottage. It is very cramped and there is hardly any space to move around.” He asked Nasruddin for some advice on how to deal with this problem.


The man was really very troubled and wanted to find a solution to his problem. He decided to give the Mulla’s advice a try. So the man went home and brought all the chickens into the house. Next day, he went to meet Nasruddin again. He said, “Mulla, I followed your advice and took the chickens into the house. But it did not solve anything. In fact, it has made matters worse. My house is even more cramped now.
“I see,” said Nasruddin. “Now take your donkey and keep it inside your house. The man did not think much of this idea but Nasruddin managed to convince him to do it.

The next day, the man came to Nasruddin, looking very distressed, and said, “Now, it’s six humans, ten chickens and a donkey inside my house. It is so crowded that one can hardly move.” Nasruddin replied, “You own a goat too, don’t you?” “Yes, I do,” said the man. “Great,” Nasruddin said. “Take it inside the house too.” The man objected, “How is that going to solve anything?” but Nasruddin once again convinced him to do as he had said.

The next day, the man walked up to Nasruddin in a state of anger and distress and said, “Your plan has made our lives miserable. The house is now so crowded that we are finding it difficult to even breathe. My family is upset and everyone is complaining about the lack of space.”

“Don’t get so upset, friend,” said Nasruddin. “Go back home and take all the animals back outside.” The man did as he was told.

Next day, when the man came across Nasruddin, he was beaming. He said, “I must thank you, Mulla! Your plan has worked wonders. Now that all the animals are outside, there is enough space in the house for all the family members. Everyone is happy and content with the house now.” (Web)

**Hyperbole** is commonly present in folk literature. The stories of human and other animate characters often portray larger than life deeds and events involving the virtuous who outshines all vices. It creates a world of make-beliefs in the situations where realistic portrayals may lead to curtailed imagination. For the young readers and impressionable minds the use of hyperbole creates awe and lasting impression which eventually secures their memory a place for that piece of folklore. The same piece is passed on to next listener through a recollection from the memory which has captured strength of the fantasy generated by the hyperbolic elements in the story. Thus it helps in the sustenance of folk literature. For example the following Tamil folktale ‘Transformation’ depicts how the crows came into existence:

A frog was once so enamoured of the cuckoo’s sweet voice that he begged the bird to teach him to sing.

“My only ambition in life is to be able to sing like you,” croaked the frog, hope bulging in his eyes.

The cuckoo was not immune to flattery and he agreed to take on the frog as his pupil. Day after day, he sat on a bough overhanging the pond and instructed the frog:

“Saa, ree, gaa...,” the cuckoo would trill melodiously.

“Saa, ree, gaa...,” the cuckoo would trill melodiously.

“Saa, ree, gaa...,” would croak the frog, trying hard to soften his harsh voice.

A week passed and then two. The cuckoo persevered, though all his pupils emitted by way of song was only a series of croaks in different notes. Soon, the cuckoo began hearing his pupil in his dreams. He would wake up shivering and a feeble croak would escape his beak. One day, the cuckoo’s nightmare turned into reality. In the midst of a lesson, his once-lovely voice emerged as a guttural croak. He stopped and as his stunned pupil watched, tried again. All that came out was a ear-splitting “Caaw...caaww...!” Which is how crows came into being. (Web)
Folk literature belongs to people; therefore it gets carved out in the system of people’s languages which are often dialects. Use of cultural terms, local idioms, proverbs and colloquial expressions characterise folk literature. The stories of Akbar and Birbal explicate the use of dialects. These stories, which are known for Birbal’s quick-wit, also provide ample examples of this kind usage. The title of the story “I Am Your Servant, Huzoor” highlights this fact through the usage of the word ‘huzoor’ (a person of high rank or Sir). But this should be noted that the use of English word ‘Sir’ cannot truly define the stature of Akbar, the emperor, in the following story:

Once, Akbar and Birbal happened to pass through some cabbage fields while riding on their horses. Looking at the cabbages, Akbar said to Birbal, “What a delicious vegetable the cabbage is! I like it very much.” Birbal immediately seconded Akbar’s opinion and said, “Huzoor, You have a royal taste in vegetables as well. The cabbage is the king of the vegetables. It ideally befits your status…. ” (Web)

Another example depicts the caste-system, a societal division which is an important aspect of the Indian society. The Rajasthani folktale titled “Witness” brings out the stereotypical traits of a ‘baniya’, an astute businessman, and a strong-headed yet foolish ‘thakur’. The story also foregrounds the uninhibited use of caste-indicative words as the names and titles of the characters, like baniya and thakur. Such harsh truisms should not be interpreted as insensitivity towards the caste and class of the people; rather such narratives capture people’s behaviours and discourse in true light. In real life prejudices attached to people’s class, caste, community, religion and gender are inherent in people’s discourse. These may be innocuous in most of the usages but also lead to stereotypical projection of people’s identity and behaviour leading to unreasonable and irrational beliefs. The following story exemplifies these:

A Thakur borrowed a large sum of money from a Bania and despite repeated reminders failed to repay it. One day, the Bania went to the Thakur’s house when he was entertaining guests and demanded the money. The Thakur, embarrassed, promised to come to his place the next day with the money. But he had no intention of repaying the loan. Instead, he wanted to take revenge against the Bania for humiliating him in front of his guests. So one evening, he waylaid the man on a deserted stretch of road.

“No one can insult me and get away with it!” he said, drawing out his sword.

The Bania thought fast.

“I was expecting you would do something like this,” he said. “I’ve left a letter with my wife. If I do not return home by nightfall, she will take the letter to the Rana. The letter details the business transaction between us and the steps I took to recover the money. It also expresses the fear that you might do me some harm.”

The Thakur lowered his sword. He knew that the Bania could be bluffing but he did not want to take a chance. The Rana was known to be harsh on defaulters and murderers.

“I’ll spare your worthless life,” he said, finally”, but I’ll chop off your nose. That’ll teach you a lesson you’ll never forget.”

“If I write off your loan, will you forgive me?” asked the Bania.

“I might”, said the Thakur, guardedly, “but you must give me a receipt to say I’ve paid you in full. I don’t trust you.”
“I’ll make out a receipt right away,” said the Bania, hastily opening his bundle of books. “But we’ll require a witness.”

“No witness!” cried the Thakur. “Just give me a receipt to say that I’ve paid you in full.”

“The receipt has no value unless there is a witness,” said the Bania. “Why don’t we make that old banyan tree a witness?”

The Thakur reasoned that there could be no harm in making a banyan tree a witness. It could not reveal the circumstances in which the receipt was made. So he agreed. They stood under the banyan tree, and the Bania wrote out the receipt and gave it to the other man. The Thakur pocketed it and went away, very pleased with himself.

But the very next day, he received a summons from the Rana. When he went to the Rana’s palace he found the Bania there.

“Did you borrow money from this man?” asked the Rana.

“I did,” said the Thakur.

“Why haven’t you repaid it?”

“But I have,” said the Thakur and triumphantly taking out the receipt from his pocket, handed it over to the Rana.

“So your witness was a banyan tree,” said the Rana, looking at the receipt.

“Yes,” said the Thakur, “there was nobody else there.”

“So you admit accosting him in a deserted spot?”

“No, no,” said the Thakur, panicking. “I...I... just happened to meet him there.”

“Anyway this receipt is useless,” said the Rana. “It does not carry this man’s signature, only the witness’s.”

“What!” gasped the Thakur, taking the paper from the Rana’s hand. He stared at it and turned pale. Instead of putting his signature at the bottom, the Bania had scribbled: “Banyan Tree”. (Web)

**Allusion to mythology, historical events, cultural beliefs and myths** is a dominant trait of folk literature. Allusions increase the familiarity and build on the associations that the people have with them. In fact one of the major sources for folktales has been mythology, irrespective of the religion and sect; the traditional stories have been inspired time and again by the mythological figures. One such example could be taken from the following Bengali folktale “Half Hungry”:

Bidhata, god of destiny comes into direct contact with a man, Niloy, who tries to change his destiny, but his challenge is in vain.

When Niloy was born, his father had a dream in which Bidhata, the god who writes the destinies of men, appeared to him.

“Your son,” said the god, “will never be able to fully satisfy his hunger. Train him to be satisfied with a minimum of food.”

His father tried but Niloy never succeeded in overcoming his love for food, and when he couldn’t get enough of it, it made him miserable. The years passed. Niloy
married and raised a family, but poverty dogged his footsteps, and there was not a day when he could say he had had enough to eat. He always went to bed half hungry. One day he was invited to the wedding of a rich man’s daughter. It made him feel that perhaps his luck had changed.

“There will certainly be a lot of food at the wedding,” he thought. “I’ll eat to my heart’s content.”

There was certainly a lot of food at the wedding, but when he had eaten just a little, a heavy decorative piece under which he was sitting fell on him, rendering him unconscious. When he had recovered, all the food was over. His host, wanting to make up for the distress caused to him, invited him to lunch the next day. When he presented himself at the house the next afternoon, his host instructed his servants to take good care of him and to see that he was well fed. Bidhata, god of destinies, was alarmed when he saw the servants piling food on the banana leaf from which Niloy was eating. He quickly took the form of a tiny frog and hopped onto the leaf, hoping that Niloy would be so filled with disgust that he would lose his appetite. What the god did not know was that his victim was extremely short-sighted. Niloy scooped up the frog along with a ball of rice and swallowed it. The god was trapped. His only consolation was that Niloy had begun to feel uneasy after swallowing him and had stopped eating. Bidhata called out to Niloy while he was returning home and explained his predicament.

“Spit me out,” he entreated.

“Spit you out!” exclaimed the man when he had got over the shock of hearing a voice from his stomach and that too of a god. “You have troubled me all my life. Do you think I will let you go so easily!!”

“My duty is to write the destinies of men,” said the god. “I derive no pleasure from their tribulations.”

“Be that as it may,” said Niloy. “I will not let you go until you promise to end my state of perpetual hunger.”

“I cannot alter anyone’s destiny,” said Bidhata, “but if you become my devotee and worship me in an appropriate manner you will have my blessings.”

“One can achieve great things with divine blessings,” thought Niloy. He forced himself to bring up the food he had eaten, and the frog came out in the process. As Bidhata assumed his true form, Niloy said to him: “Now tell me, what is the appropriate way to worship you?”

“In your case,” replied Bidhata, “the only way you can worship me is by never fully satisfying your hunger. Remain hungry all the time.” (Web)

Religious allusions are interwoven and often the stories are narrated with the gods being the protagonists. The humaneness in the persona of gods and goddesses creates inversion to the hyperbolic deeds of humans thus the follies and struggles of the gods and goddesses bring them closer to the humans. For example, we can read the following story “How the Ketaki fell from Grace”:

Once while Vishnu and Brahma were quarrelling about which of them was superior to the other, Shiva, in the form of a column of light, appeared beside them. The column seemed to have no beginning or end, stretching upwards and downwards as far as the eye could see. The two gods decided that whoever found the top or the
bottom of the column first would be deemed to be superior to the other. So they set out, Vishnu in the form of a boar, and Brahma in the form of a swan. Vishnu descended for aeons together, but could not find the base of the column, and finally gave up the search. Brahma, soaring upwards, was equally unsuccessful in reaching the top. He saw a ketaki flower wafting down, and catching it, returned to the starting point where Vishnu was waiting for him. Then followed a spot of duplicity. Brahma, claiming success, waved the flower, which he said he had found at the summit, in Vishnu’s face. Vishnu doubted his claim. He asked the ketaki if what Brahma said was true. The flower said it was. The barefaced lie infuriated Shiva, and he cursed the flower (another version says the flower refused to substantiate Brahma’s claim and that it was Brahma who cursed it). The ketaki, till then considered the best among flowers, lost its importance and was never again offered in worship except on Mahashivratri when it makes a shy appearance. (Web)

Court-wits have always been an inevitable part of Indian folktales. From the stories of Birbal to Tenali Raman they have always made their presence felt. One of the seminal aspects of these court-wits is their place in history and how historical events are inter-woven into their narratives. “Tenali Raman in the Delhi Durbar” is an interesting episode of Tenali’s presence in Babur’s court:

When Krishna Deva Raya used to rule in Vijaynagar, Babur ruled Delhi. Babur wanted to meet Tenali Raman as he had heard a great deal about Tenali’s quick wit. Babur’s messenger arrived in Krishna Deva Raya’s court one day. He said, “Greetings, King Krishna Deva Raya. Emperor Babur wishes Tenali Raman would visit Delhi.” Krishna Deva Raya replied, “So be it.” Tenali Raman reached Delhi and settled in the guesthouse. Meanwhile, Babur spoke with his courtiers in court. He had a plan. “No one will laugh at Tenali Raman’s jokes tomorrow! I want to see how he will make us laugh then.” The courtiers chorused, “Yes, Your Majesty.” The next day, Tenali Raman arrived in the court. Tenali Raman started to narrate one of his jokes. “Once there was a …” The courtiers cut him off by yawning profusely. On the sixteenth day, Tenali Raman stopped going to the court. Tenali Raman thought to himself, “Let me follow Babur to see where he goes everyday.” He wore such clothes that no one would be able to see his face. Babur and his minister would walk by the Yamuna every morning. Babur said, while giving gold coins to beggars, “There you go! Make good use of them.” Tenali Raman thought of a plan. The next day, Tenali Raman disguised himself as an old man. He also had a spade and mango sapling. Tenali Raman thought, “Let me wait for the king here.” Seeing the king approach, Tenali began planting the sapling. Babur said, “You’re old, you won’t be alive when this tree bears fruit. Why are you planting it?” Tenali Raman said, “Your Majesty, I tasted the fruits of trees my forefathers planted. Similarly, my grandchildren will enjoy the fruit of this tree.” Babar exclaimed, “That is a noble thought!” Wanting to reward the old man, Babar took a bag and and said, “Here, take this bag of gold coins.” Tenali Raman replied, “Thank you, Your Majesty. You have given me the fruit of planting this sapling before it has grown.” Babur, pleased with this answer too, said, “Well done, again. Take this second bag of gold coins.” Tenali Raman said, “A tree gives fruit once a year, but I am getting the fruit of my labour twice, Your Majesty!” Babur again appreciated this clever reply. He said, “Bravo! This third bag of gold coins is also yours.” Babur’s minister whispered to him, “Your Majesty, at this rate you will give all your wealth to him. Let’s go.” Babur, laughing, agreed. Tenali Raman took off his fake beard and called out to them as they were going, “Your Majesty, please look at me.” Babur was astounded at Tenali Raman’s intelligence. He said, “Tenali Raman, you are truly a great wit! Come back to court for more rewards.” Tenali Raman went back to Babur’s court and entertained him for many days. Finally, he returned home. Krishna Deva Raya said, “You have
brought glory to the kingdom, Tenali!” Tenali Raman flashed back, “Your Majesty, then I deserve a reward from you too!” Krishna Deva Raya said, laughing, “Yes, indeed. Here are 10,000 gold coins.” Tenali Raman replied, “Thank you, Your Majesty! (Web)

• Characterization
Characters are generally flat with either very good or very bad qualities pronounced distinctively. The hero is usually young, honourable, courageous, unselfish, and caring and the heroine is young, fair, kind, charitable, and caring. The stories of Akbar and Birbal and Tenali Raman serve the similar function. The stories like ‘The Princess and the Water Sprite’ present a hero who is not only obedient and humble but courageous and sacrificial.

• Setting
The setting of action is often not elaborately described. Expressions like ‘simple cottage’, ‘magic kingdom’ suffice to present the locale of the culture. It may sometimes be not at all mentioned but is simply assumed. Time is mostly in the past set within the history of the particular culture and place. Expressions like “Once upon a time” provide fantastic airs and set the story on the go. “They lived happily ever after” provides closure to the tales and stories. Stories from Panchatantra, like “The Fox and the Cream Biscuit” elucidate such aspects of the setting:

Once there was a poor man who lived in a village. He had a very beautiful daughter. There was a dense forest near the village in which there lived a fox. The fox wanted to marry the poor man’s daughter. One day, the fox dressed himself like a man and went to the girl’s father. He said, “Sir, I want to marry your daughter. Will you give her in marriage to me?” The girl’s father was pleased and gave his consent. Soon, the girl and the fox were married. But the girl’s father never got to know that his son-in-law was a fox.

The fox started living in the girl’s house. He enjoyed good food and was leading a life of luxury. Then, one day, the girl’s father told the fox that he should now take the girl to his own house. The fox had no house of his own. But he could not say this to his father-in-law. So, he took the girl and started walking.

After a lot of time had passed, the girl asked the fox, “Has your house come yet?” The fox replied, “No, we have to cross one more river.” They kept walking. After they had walked quite a distance, the girl asked again, “Has your house come again?” But the fox again gave the same reply, “No, we have to cross one more river.”

A few days went by in the same way. Finally, the girl understood that her husband had no home. By this time, she had also found out that he was not a man but a fox. She said to him, “Let us go back to my house. We can live there in peace and comfort.” The fox agreed readily and they started walking back to the girl’s house. On reaching, the girl secretly told her father all about the fox. The girl’s father was filled with rage. He called a few of his friends and with their help he beat up the fox badly and chased him away. (Web)

• Plot
Plot is usually simple though interesting in folk literature. The plots are stimulating as well as instructive. Action begins right in the opening generally following explicit and simple patterns. The plot moves fast and keeps the listeners’ attentive. Conflicts are by and large resolved through larger than life actions and acts of compassion displayed in the situation associated to good and bad/evil. This could be explained
Folk Literature and Language: Research and Pedagogy

by reading the famous Jataka Tales. The stories like the following moralise without being monotonous:

A wealthy man requested an old scholar to wean his son away from his bad habits.

The scholar took the youth for a stroll through a garden. Stopping suddenly he asked the boy to pull out a tiny plant growing there. The youth held the plant between his thumb and forefinger and pulled it out. The old man then asked him to pull out a slightly bigger plant. The youth pulled hard and the plant came out, roots and all.

“Now pull out that one,” said the old man pointing to a bush. The boy had to use all his strength to pull it out.

“Now take this one out,” said the old man, indicating a guava tree. The youth grasped the trunk and tried to pull it out. But it would not budge.

“I... It’s impossible,” said the boy, panting with the effort.

“So it is with bad habits”, said the sage. “When they are young it is easy to pull them out but when they take hold they cannot be uprooted.” The session with the old man changed the boy’s life. (Web)

• Style

The descriptions in tales and stories are not verbose, rather to the point, with minimal detailing. Use of magic, supernatural beings (animals and humans) and objects like mirror, houses, pens etc., spells, enchantments, magical transformations, character transformed by a spell which only love or labour can break, ugly person possessed in a spell and after getting rid converting into a beautiful prince and princess are often resorted to in folk literature to knit out interesting tales which offer the listeners an escape into a world of fantasy which the modern day entertainments offer through animations and special effects. The following Indian folktale “The Power of Rumour” displays the similar narrative dimension:

“What would happen to me if the earth were to break up?” wondered the hare. Suddenly, there was a ‘thud’ followed by a rumbling sound.

“It’s happened,” thought the hare, “the earth’s breaking up!”

He jumped up and ran.

“Why are you running?” asked a hare who crossed his path.

“The earth’s breaking up!” shouted the hare. “You’d better run too.”

The second hare ran so fast he overtook the first.

“The earth’s breaking up, the earth’s breaking up!” he shouted to other hares he passed. Soon thousands of hares were scampering through the forest. Other animals got caught up in the panic. The word spread from mouth to mouth, and soon everyone knew: the earth was breaking up. Other animals got caught up in the panic. The word spread from mouth to mouth, and soon everyone knew: the earth was breaking up. It was not long before the whole jungle was on the move. Reptiles, insects, birds and four-footed animals fled in wild disorder, and their cries of terror filled the air. A lion standing on a hillock, saw the animals coming and wondered what was going on. He hastened down and positioning himself in front of the horde called for it to stop. His commanding presence stemmed the rising tide of panic among the animals. “The earth is breaking up!” shrieked a parrot, alighting on a rock near him. “Who says so?”

“I heard it from the monkeys.”

The monkeys said they had heard it from the tigers, who said their informants were the elephants, who gave the buffaloes as their source. When the hares were finally implicated they pointed one to another until the one who had started it all was identified. “What makes you think the earth is breaking up?” the lion asked him. “I heard it cracking with my own ears, sire,” squeaked the hare, trembling in fear. The lion investigated the sound the hare had heard and found that it had been caused by a large coconut falling from a tree. It had landed on a pile of rocks, causing a minor landslide. “Go back to your homes,” said the lion to the animals who had been running away, and who were now looking very foolish. “The earth’s safe. Next time, check a rumour before acting on it.” (Web)

- **Point of View and Tone**

Point of view in folk literature is generally represented through third person narration. Tone of the narrative is often directed to foreground the preference of good over bad/evil. Through the tone and language human strengths, weaknesses and limitations are reflected upon. The Reader is led to new insights and understandings. The following story “An Ascetic Returns Home” sums up the aforementioned points:

A young ascetic sitting in meditation under a tree was splattered by the droppings of a bird.

He looked up angrily at the culprit and such was the intensity of his wrath that the bird was reduced to ash. His concentration disturbed, the ascetic got up and went in search of food. He knocked at the door of a house but there was no answer. He knocked again and the lady of the house shouted that she was coming. Presently she came out with food and seeing that he was annoyed at having to wait so long, smiled and said: “Please don’t try to burn me with your angry glance like you did that bird. My dharma as a housewife is first to take care of the needs of my family before attending to the needs of others.” The ascetic realised that she was no ordinary woman and was ashamed of himself. He asked her to teach him what dharma was. She said he should see Dharma Vyadha. The ascetic went in search of Dharma Vyadha expecting to find a venerable sage but the man turned out to be a meat-seller. Dharma Vyadha made him wait while he served his customers. When the ascetic showed signs of impatience, the meat-seller smiled and said: “Just as the woman’s first duty was to her family; my first duty is to my customers.” So the ascetic waited. When the last of his customers had gone, the meat seller turned to the ascetic and invited him home. When they reached Dharma Vyadha’s house the ascetic was again made to wait while his host lovingly attended to his parents. It was quite some time before the meat-seller could return to his guest but the young man showed no trace of anger. A transformation had come over him. “Now I know what dharma is,” he said, rising and bowing to the meat-seller. Giving up the path of asceticism he returned home and begged forgiveness of his parents for having deserted them in their old age. “I seek your blessings,” he said, “to give me strength to do my dharma.” (Web)

### 2.4 LET US SUM UP

Folk literature is an example of the continuously changing nature of literary pursuits, that adapt according to the needs of time and space. Folk literature is characterised by the people it belongs to; therefore it will not be wrong to call it people’s literature. Folk literature emerges out of people’s desires, aspirations, creativity and aesthetic
impulse and is therefore closely related to people’s lives and experiences. Folk literature displays a close proximity with the socio-cultural undercurrents and ebb and flow of life like any other literature. In India folk literature has been progressive, revolutionary and rich in terms of themes, narratives and issues like most of the folk literatures of the world. In fact Indian texts are inspirations to the folk literatures all over the world. India has a unique culture of the oldest written tradition which interestingly has been a source to oral tradition and folklore.

2.5 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS


Claus, Peter J., Jawaharlal Handoo and D. P. Pattanayak (Eds.). Indian Folklore. Vol. II. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages. Print.


—. ed. Folklore in Modern India. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages. Mysore. Print.


Web Resources:


Thematic and Narrative Concerns of Indian Folk Literature

“How the Ketaki fell from Grace”

“I am your Servant”.
(http://mocomi.com/fun/stories/akbar-birbal/i-am-your-servant,Huzoor/) Accessed on October 17th 2015

“Prince Charming”.

“The Crowded Home.”

“The Delhi Durbar”

“The Mighty”
(http://www.pitara.com/fiction-for-kids/folktales/the-mighty/) Accessed on October 17th 2015


“Witness”

“The Fox and the Cream Biscuit”

“The Power of Rumour”

2.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Note: Your answers should be in about 200 words.

1) What are the major thematic concerns in folk literature?

....................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................

2) Make a list of folk literary texts which depict various themes listed by you in your answer to the previous question.

....................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................
3) How will you define and characterise folk literature?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

4) Which Indian texts are significantly associated with folk literature?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

5) How does the device of personification accentuate the story?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

6) Explore some stories and list them to substantiate the notion of “vasudhaivkutumbkam” as a component in folk literature.
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

7) How does the use of irony help in engaging the listener in the folk tales?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

8) What is the significance of hyperbole as a literary device in folk literature? Give some examples.
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

9) How does the use of dialect highlight the essence of folk literature?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

10) What is the impact of the use of allusion in folk literature?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

11) Why are the characters generally flat or stock in folk literature?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

12) Why do you think the plot is often kept plausible?
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................

13) Discuss the importance of point of view as a narrative technique in a folktale.
.....................................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................................
UNIT 3  INDIAN FOLKLORE: FORMS, PATTERNS AND VARIATIONS

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Indian Folklore Forms
3.3 Folk Drama and Theatre
3.4 Community Songs and Dances
3.5 Let Us Sum Up
3.6 References and Further Readings
3.7 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- different forms and patterns of Indian folklore;
- different forms and variations of folk drama and theatre; and
- different forms and variations of folksongs and dances.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Folklore, in modern usage, is an academic discipline, the subject matter of which comprises the sum total of traditionally derived and orally or imitatively transmitted literature, material culture, and customs of subcultures within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies; comparative study among wholly or mainly non-literate societies belongs to the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology. In popular usage, the term folklore is sometimes restricted to the oral literature tradition.

Folklore studies began in the early 19th century. The first folklorists concentrated exclusively upon rural peasants, preferably uneducated, and a few other groups relatively untouched by modern ways of life (e.g. gypsies). Their aim was to trace preserved archaic customs and beliefs to their remote origins in order to trace the mental history of mankind. In Germany, Jacob Grimm used folklore to illuminate Germanic religion of the Dark Ages. In Britain, Sir Edward Taylor, Andrew Lang, and others combined data from anthropology and folklore to “reconstruct” the beliefs and rituals of prehistoric man. The best-known work of this type is Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890).

Large collections of material were amassed in the course of these efforts. Inspired by the Grimm Brothers, whose first collection of fairy tales appeared in 1812, scholars all over Europe began recording and publishing oral literature of many genres: fairy tales and other types of folktales, ballads and other songs, oral epics, folk plays, riddles, proverbs, etc. Similar work was undertaken for music, dance, and traditional arts and crafts; many archives and museums were founded (Doniger 354). Often the underlying impulse was nationalistic; since the folklore of a group reinforced its sense of ethnic identity, it figured prominently in many struggles for political independence and national unity.
As the scholarship of folklore developed, an important advance was the classification of material for comparative analysis. Standards of identification were devised, notably for ballads (by F. J. Child) and for the plots and component motifs of folktales and myths (by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson). Using these, Finnish scholars, led by Kaarle Krohn, developed the “historical-geographical” method of research, in which every known variant of a particular tale, ballad, riddle, or other item was classified as to place and date of collection in order to study distribution patterns and reconstruct “original” forms (Doniger 355). This method, more statistical and less speculative than that of the anthropological folklorists, dominated the field throughout the first half of the 20th century.

After World War II new trends emerged, particularly in the United States. Interest was no longer confined to rural communities, since it was recognized that cities too contained definable groups whose characteristic arts, customs, and values marked their identity. Although some Marxist scholars continued to regard folklore as belonging solely to the working classes, in other circles the concept lost its restrictions of class and even of educational level; any group that expressed its inner cohesion by maintaining shared traditions qualified as “folk,” whether the linking factor be occupation, language, place of residence, age, religion, or ethnic origin. Emphasis also shifted from the past to the present, from the search for origins to the investigation of present meaning and function. Change and adaptation within tradition were no longer necessarily regarded as corruptive.

In the view of “contextual” and “performance” analysis in the late 20th century, a particular story, song, drama, or custom constitutes more than a mere instance to be recorded and compared with others of the same category (Doniger 355). Rather, each phenomenon is regarded as an event arising from the interaction between an individual and his social group, which fulfils some function and satisfies some need for both performer and audience. In this functionalist, sociological view, such an event can be understood only within its total context. The performer’s biography and personality, his role in the community, his repertoire and artistry, the role of the audience, and the occasion on which the performance occurs – all contribute to its folkloric meaning.

### 3.2 INDIAN FOLKLORE FORMS

India is a country where the elements of folklore exist in abundance in the form of folk performing art and non performing art, folk practices, folk literature etc. Going into the literary meaning of folklore, we identify folk and lore as two distinct aspects. The **folk** identifies with the specific community whether it is tribal or non-tribal and **lore** specifies the collective knowledge or wisdom on a particular subject. Lore is also often associated with myth. Myth is an important mode of human communication, teaching, knowledge and learning. There is clear intimacy between folklore and culture. Since folklore is intimately associated with the culture we have to first look at the culture. It has been stipulated by scholars that folklore depends mainly on oral traditions and there are little margins for their recreation or change in developing society. However, when we look at the developing societies of today, we observe that, although the basic genesis of folklore may not change but its manifestation and interpretations may see perceptible or imperceptible changes.

In this chapter we are discussing folklore as a concept, its definition, forms, patterns and variations. William Thomas in 1846 coined the term folklore in English to replace popular antiquities and popular literature. The manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs and so on were part of folklore as viewed by Thomas.
There are 21 definitions given by different scholars of the term “folklore”, the number serving to explain the vastness of the debate and discussion on the word itself (M. Islam 2).

A. Taylor, an eminent American folklorist, has defined folklore as follows:

... the material that is handed on by traditional either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folktales riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words. It may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences or knots, hot cross buns or Easter eggs, traditional ornamentation like the Walls of Troy or traditional symbols like the Swastika. It may be traditional procedure like throwing salt over one’s shoulders or knocking on wood. It may be traditional belief like the notion that elder one is good for the ailments of eye. All of these are folklores. (12)

M. Islam says that folklore is the outcome of the human mind imbibed with creative feelings. Since ancient time two faculties of human mind have been responsible for the creation, preservation and transmission of folklore. These are creative ideas and urges of aesthetic and artistic impulse. The lore or traditional learning was inspired by these two to help creation of folklore (M. Islam 13). The Oxford Dictionary looks at culture as the intellectual side of civilization. If culture is product of the intellectual faculty of man, folklore is the result of his creativity and impulsive love for beauty and knowledge. In one he finds his intellect and sense of refinement released; in the other, creative ideas are expressed and shaped and his aesthetic impulse takes a form.

These forms may be in words, a part of language (the language may be either oral or written), action through gestures or movements as in the performing arts, lines and forms as in non performing arts and crafts. Knowledge is basically the exploration. Application of that exploration in a procedural manner becomes technical knowledge and folk science. Man nourishes culture through folklore. Folklore is therefore a product of culture, a component part of culture. Since folklore finds its expression through culture, therefore, the study of folklore cannot be fruitful and perfect without the study of its culture (M. Islam 14).

There are different thoughts and identities of folklore in Indian, European and American psyche. Indian folklore identity is different from American and European folklore. Therefore, the American or European paradigm may not fit into the Indian thought and concept. India as part of East earlier used European or American conceptual frameworks. These frameworks not only diminish the conceptual construction of Indic thought, they also directed thinkers and scholars to work with the given mode of thought. India is a vast country and part of the great eastern culture, where folklore does not need a decided form, instead it should have a conceptual framework that incorporates its indigenous diversities and specificities. Though, after careful examination, it is observed that the scientific approach to define folklore by American scholars fit well into studying the vast Indian folklore, but there is still a vast magnitude of emerging trends of folklore in the Indian subcontinent, their merging and blending into the urban metropolises and maintaining a distinct identity of functional perpetuation.

Folklore constitutes a major part of culture, specifically of a folk culture. Culture cannot be divided on the basis of specified or unspecified. Scholars who have signified folklore as folk literature have termed it as verbal art (Bascom 283-90). Expression of verbal art is reflected in songs or literature but folk painting, craft or
dance are not verbal in that sense of accuracy. Yet they are very much elements of folklore. Marginally judging upon folk medicine, folk science and folk games or folk technology, we may say that they are folklore in spite of not being part of verbal or visual art. Folklore does not therefore remain in the domain of the village dwellers and has moved to the cities as well. Traditional folk science and knowledge-based technology is the first aspect of folklore. The other aspects are folklore literature, folk practices and folk arts (M. Islam 7-11).

Folk science and technology is a prominent domain of folklore. There are many myths and practices that are knowledge-based. Practices associated with such myths prevent diseases, illnesses, and natural calamities. These knowledge-based myths also give clear indications of the management of nature, including water management, nurturing of nature etc. Folk science also contains knowledge for cures through use of herbal plants and minerals, as well as for using body parts in different postures and adopting breathing regulations and variations to cure organ ailments. For example, yogic science and acupressure are important folk sciences which have sustained themselves for centuries. Technologies devised for use of natural materials for producing dyes, fertilizers, insecticides, bridge building and furniture accessories, etc. are the part of folk technology.

There is a closely integrated relationship between the oral and the written literature. When we look at Indian folk literature, we find that serious efforts are now being made to pen down oral literature. We can also observe that with the passage of time, elements of written literature, particularly the puranic literature, were transmitted into the oral literature. The point of discussion here is that classical literature like Ramayana and Mahabharata were traditionally written in the classical language Sanskrit. However, to make them understandable, local languages and dialects were used as the spoken elements to explain this classical literature to the larger population. Enactment of folk dances based on themes of Mahabharata and Ramayana and other puranic stories is a case in point.

Folk literature may or may not be realistic literature, sometimes it may be an amalgamation of reality and myth. Local knowledge systems and beliefs get merged into mainstream literature to evolve into a folkloric version, which is depicted through oral narration in conjunction with folk art and folk practices.

Folk art or Artistic Folklore is the broad category of the artistic depiction of a myth or folklore. There are two subcategories of this type: the performing folk art and the non-performing folk art. When a myth is translated into a pictorial and is associated with a written/oral narrative, it establishes a wider link with performing and non-performing reality. Structurally this artistic depiction may be through performance or through creation of forms.

Performing arts are broadly those art forms where the human body is used to enact a written or oral literature. Folk performing arts include music, dance, drama, rhyming, theatre etc. Volumes may be written on each of these styles of arts forms. Since we are documenting these styles and art forms, we go further with our classification. There is a very close-knit relationship between folk performing arts and non-performing arts. The visual aspect of performing arts lies in the body movements of the performer or the singing talent of the folk singer. In such performances, in order to depict a character more authentically or loudly several other aids are incorporated. These include modification in physical ambience of the performance area; the costume and the body makeup of the performer, several accompanying musical instruments for the singer or the performer. In Chau dance
of Odisha, the performance is augmented by the use of masks and costumes, and the theme of performance centers around mythological narrations such as Mahishasuramardini (killing of a demon by the goddess Durga). The body movements of the performer are in conjunction with lyrics and the beat of drums. Another folk performance is the Gotipua dance from Odisha, where young boys dressed as girls perform stylized dance movements based on Gitagovinda. There are specific art and craft activities associated with these performances, which are used to alter the human body into the body of the character in the folk narration. Puppetry, another form of folk performance, has the total replacement of the human body with handcrafted forms termed as puppets, generally made of wood. Sometimes leather is also used as a material for making these puppets. These puppets are artistically painted.

The narrator/singer and the listener are interested only in the action and nothing more. The environment in which a folk artist lives and works is not reproduced in narrative art. For the folk singer or performer his house, his barnyard with its stable and cattle shed, his field, his garden, his meadow, as well as the people around him including his family, do not exist as the object of art. True, small features, details that reflect the real life of the artist are interspersed here and there, but the narrator does not attempt to represent this reality. (Propp 21)

The anthropomorphic presentation of Indian deities has brought an interesting character to the Indian performer; he imitates the character depicted in the myth in the performance. For example, the character of Ravana is depicted with ten heads. On stage, the artist is generally seen wearing a mask with ten heads. Animal masks are also important aids to performers. Baul singers of West Bengal do not personify a specific character but have their own characteristic attire which identifies them.

Folk non-performing arts include folk painting, sculptures, making of a variety of arts and crafts for several materials, and body ornamentation through painting or tailoring. The costumes devised by communities for their specific identities have a large constituent of the folk element. Arts and crafts have always been the activities linked to the material culture of the communities, whether tribal or folk or traditional communities living in the cities and towns. In the domain of folk art there is marginal or minimal difference between the folk art and folk craft forms. Generally the two dimensional depiction of a myth is termed as the folk art form, whereas three-dimensional depiction is categorized as folk craft. Manifestation of a myth may be both through a painting or any material such as clay, metal, grass etc. to give a three-dimensional form. Sometimes the ritualistic practices associated with a particular myth may also be simultaneously depicted in the painted form and a three dimensional form. Briefly we may say that folk art is generally associated with the painted forms, which may be on the floor, wall, or any other surface that may be flat and is used as a canvas. Sometimes the paintings are also done on the three dimensional surfaces such as a terracotta pitcher. The painted pot shards are available from the prehistoric period. The practice of the painted pitcher continues even today. Folk craft is the wider depiction of folk art in utility, decorative or ritualistic items.

Folk generally means ordinary and non-literate people like villagers, labourers, tribal people from backward communities etc. Some time ago folk was related to the primitive. Today when we discuss folklore with reference to development and dynamism of society, folklore needs to be re-designated. It is true that folklore emerges within a group of people living together or belonging to a particular caste related occupation or else having a common cultural/regional identity irrespective
of the fact whether they live in a city, town or a village. The social identity of each
group by way of life, language tradition, and livelihood is patterned in a clearly
identified manner. Thus in the wake of large migrations from remote villages, whether
tribal or non-tribal, to the urban metropolises like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata,
Bengaluru etc., small cultural pockets are created in these metropolises. These
metropolises are then the constituents of people who have migrated from one
particular geographical area, who share the same language, culture, mechanism of
livelihood and living conditions. Their way of life and traditional heritage are bound
by a common identity. Even in urban metropolises, these groups express their folklore
traditions through manifested verbal art, rituals, materials etc. They exhibit their
folk culture and language in a slightly more sophisticated style, bringing in changes,
wherever necessary in the given situation.

### 3.3 FOLK DRAMA AND THEATRE

During the age of the Buddha and Mahavira, drama was a means of communicating
the principles of their respective religions. Short skits and long plays were enacted
to preach and educate the masses. Music and dance also played a vital role in
increasing the appeal of drama.

Drama developed in two types — the classic drama, which had intricacies of theme
and subtle nuances of dramatic traits, and folk theatre, which was of spontaneous
and extempore nature. Local dialect was used in folk theatre and hence many types
of folk theatres developed in different provinces. Acting with accompaniment of
music and dance was the popular practice. Different names were given to the forms
of folk theatre in different provinces:

1. **Bengal:** *Jatra, Kirtania Natak*
2. **Bihar:** *Bidesia*
3. **Rajasthan:** *Raas, Jhumar, Dhola Maru*
4. **Uttar Pradesh:** *Raas, Nautanki, Svaang, Bhaand*
5. **Gujarat:** *Bhawaii*
6. **Maharashtra:** *Larite, Tamasha*
7. **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka:** *Kathakali, Yakshagana* (Satpathy 283).

Instruments like *dhol, kartal, manjira, khanjira* were some of the props used in folk
theatre. The medieval period was rich in music and dance but theatre did not get
much prominence. Wajid Ali Shah, a great patron of art was also an important
patron of drama. He encouraged artists to participate in theatre and supported them.
In the southern region, folk theatre which used local dialects was more popular.

The advent of the British in the country changed the character of society. In the
eighteenth century a theatre was established in Calcutta by an Englishman. A Russian
named Horasim Lebedev founded a Bengali theatre which marked the beginning of
modern Indian theatre in India. English drama, especially by Shakespeare, influenced
Indian drama. The stages evolved by educated Indians were different from traditional
open air theatre. The stages now had rolling curtains and change of scenes. A Parsi
company founded in Bombay showed that theatre could be used for commercial
purposes. Dramas began to depict tragedies, comedies and the complexities of urban
life. Dramas were now written in different regional languages. Side by side, folk
theatre like *jatra, nautanki, khyal* (Rajasthani folk), and *naach* also flourished.
Another aspect which influenced performing arts was the adaptation of folk forms
to classical forms. Connoisseurs in different fields made their respective arts a medium for serving the cause of the masses. So they adapted the popular folk arts to reach out to people. A similar situation appeared in the case of writing of drama. *Vidyasundar*, a popular drama of the medieval period, was influenced by *jatra*. *Geetagovinda*, an exemplary work by the great poet Jayadev, weaved stories of Krishna in *kirtania natak* and *jatra* style.

**Practice of Traditional Folk Theatre**

The significant role of folk theatre in educating and entertaining its audience is a widely acknowledged fact today. It has been a vital means of communication during ancient times owing to its interpersonal and interactive appeal. Issues like adult education, environment, child labour, population control, the abuse of women and the problem of dowry have been skilfully dealt with through folk theatre. It represents traditional themes enacted in the form of dramatic representation of myths, legends, beliefs and tradition of a particular community. Various forms of this distinct theatrical medium exist in the world representing various cultures and nationalities and their rich heritage. India has a 5000 year long and rich tradition in theatre. The emergence of Indian folk theatre is traced back to Bharata’s *Natya Shastra* (2000 BC to 4th Century AD), one of the earliest and most elaborate treatises on dramaturgy in the world (Sharma n.p.).

Indian theatre can be divided into three kinds: classical or Sanskrit theatre, traditional or folk theatre, and modern theatre. The Sanskrit language splintered into vernaculars and took root in the form of regional languages after the tenth century. Sanskrit drama too was replaced by the growing folk theatre which emerged forcefully in different regions, using the language of the region where it emerged, during the fifteenth-sixteenth century. For themes, it looked at the Sanskrit epics and the *Puranas*, historical tales, folk stories of romance, valour and biographical accounts of local heroes.

The various folk theatre forms are *Nautanki, Ramlila and Raslila* from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab, *Swang* from Haryana, *Jatra* from West Bengal and Odisha, *Therukuttu* from Tamilnadu, *Bayalata* from Karnataka, *Kalapam* from Andhra Pradesh, *Teeyam* and *Kakkarissi Natakam* from Kerala, *Tamaha* from Maharashtra, *Bhavai* from Gujarat and Rajasthan, *Nupipaala* from Manipur, and *Chhau* from Sikkim, besides *Siamsa Tire* from Ireland and *Cheo* from Vietnam, all of which feature a wide range of make-up, song, dance, mime, improvised repartee, slapstick or stylized acting and even acrobatics (IBP USA 103).

The *Bayalata* of Karnataka is based on mythological plays. The themes are religious and the plays begin with an invocation of the divine. The five types of *Bayalata* are – *Dasarata, Sannatas, Doddastes, Parijata* and *Yakshagana*. The *Dasarata* is performed by a group of ‘dasas’ (mela) men and women. Every ‘mela’ has at least one leading lady who is a highly talented singer and dancer. She interprets the emotions with vivid gestures providing the audience immense entertainment, information and humour by enacting the themes of Radha and Krishna.

*Sannata* or the small play has a full length story that lasts for about six hours. The troupes perform in villages – on weddings, birth of a male child, religious festivals and even to appease the rain gods in times of drought. The *Sannata* is divided into three kinds – the *Vaishnava* (in which Radha and Krishna are invoked); the *Shaiva* (Shiva and Parvati are invoked); and the social plays that begin with the ‘Kathabija’ (the core of the story) being outlined, and the story is then woven around it (IBP USA 103).
In contrast to the other types of plays like Yakshagana, Doddatta Puppet plays and Sannata bring the folk theatre to the social plane. It reflects the native intelligence, wit and sharp response of the villagers. Like the Sannata, the Parijata is also an opera where the actor summarizes and explains the song. The essential character in the Parijata is the Bhagavata who plays the dual role of narrator and clown. But before the characters appear on stage there is an invocation by the Bhagavata – an invocation of Ganesha. This is followed by the prelude – the story of Radha and Krishna. The main story is based on the myth of the romance of Krishna and Rukmani-Satyabhama.

Like the Parijata, the Doddatta begins with an invocation to Ganesha. The Sarathi offers prayers to the deity before the story begins. The composition of the play is a mixture of verse and prose. The performances are on an elaborate scale with rich costumes, wide stage, a number of characters and a lot of sound and fury with all the male characters shouting “shabaash!” The Doddatta does not have the facility for display of delicate emotion.

In Parijata and Yakshagana a single narrator (Sutradhar) controls the story whereas the other has a chorus of four or five narrators aided by a ‘Vidhushaka’ or a clown who adds the local colour.

Folk theatres have existed since centuries and their relevance has not dimmed in any way in the present age. This continuing attraction and effectiveness is proven by the fact that many of the contemporary dramatists make use of the style and techniques of folk theatre in their plays. Karnad is the first Indian dramatist to reflect really typical Indian characteristic in his plays, as he has consciously resisted the influence of the Western theatre, which fails to take cognizance of the Indian milieu in its entirety (Dhanavel 98).

Traditional Indian theatre is very popular among village folk. Generally, the subject of these traditional folk theatre are mythology-based, sourced mostly from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and from the Puranas (Awasthi 53). These traditional folk dramas are written in a very simple manner which is convenient to perform on stage. There is flexibility in the usage of music, song, rhythm, dance, and even in costume. They use these as per their availability. Sometimes, if actors happen to forget a verse or a dialogue, they skip those verses and continue their performance. On the request of the audience, the artists may also repeat certain verses, dialogues or songs during the performance. Only traditional folk theatre is capable of being so accommodative. Modern Indian prosenium theatre is devoid of such spontaneity (Awasthi 54).

The integral elements of all these different folk forms are identical even though the areas differ. The music of traditional theatre is dynamic. In some of the traditional theatres, the music is very systematic. The practice of these traditional folk theatre of different areas is the same. However, only a few forms are practised today. People have started forgetting the traditional folk forms. Folk forms in certain areas of India such as Tamasha in Maharashtra, Jatra in Bengal, Rasleela and a few other forms are still in vogue but many forms are gradually vanishing from the scene for want of patronage and infrastructural facilities and because of the poor conditions of the artists.

3.4 COMMUNITY SONGS AND DANCES

India had a band of religious teachers and gurus, leading people to the path of pious living and high thinking. Their teachings were made palatable through artistic
renderings such as community singing, dancing and devotional songs. These artistic activities and ways of living were a very healthy counterbalance to destructive and immoral ways of living.

Community singing such as kirtans, bhajans and hari kathas were effective factors in bringing people nearer, irrespective of their class, creed and colour. The numerous folk entertainments such as ‘Bahurupi Kala’, ‘snake charming’, ‘Terahtal’, ‘Dummy horse dancing’, ‘Nat acrobatics’, etc. were so popular that no Indian home, either in rural or in urban areas, was left without a performance of these at least once a year. All Indian ceremonies, marriages and festivals were full of dances and songs. All religious and community centres were associated with some sort of artistic expression as a means of spiritual development and understanding of complex human nature. These art forms were practiced in relationship with life and for the achievement of Artha, Dharma, Kama and Moksha – that is for the growth of a complete human being. They helped us to love each other and live and let others live peacefully and harmoniously. These joyful activities were also useful in developing a relaxed mental attitude for a healthy body and a happy mind.

**Puppetry (Kathputli)**

Puppetry is perhaps the most outstanding traditional medium which requires patronage and trial. In Indian traditional puppet art, as envisaged in Odissi, puppets were principally meant to highlight the achievements of our ancestors and all those distinguished personalities who had contributed to the growth of the human society. The puppets were carved in most fantastic and interesting figures. Their limitations and deficiencies in the sizes, action, movements and autonomy have a science of their own and are governed by principles based on experience and study on the part of the Indian traditional puppeteer. But “most traditional puppeteers belong to the socially deprived sections, such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a fact that is indicative of the low esteem the society has for them” (Ghosh & Banerjee 163)

The heavy stress on stylization and symbolization in Indian puppetry is to make the emotional appeal of the puppet powerful and lasting. That is why a puppet character, while in action, has more impact on the audience than a human character. Another factor that contributes to the effectiveness of the puppet is its independent personality unlike a human actor. The puppet character is exclusively made and designed for a particular role, but in case of a human actor he has only to be dressed and made up to play that role. A puppet therefore, always has a powerful impact and is used not only for entertainment but also for all educational work in the schools and for the society.

Puppetry, therefore, is a very powerful medium of education as well as entertainment and provides tremendous opportunities to those who wish to use the same as an independent art form. Puppetry is quite different from a human drama. It has its own dramaturgy, its own technique of play production and play writing.

The tradition of Pats is now predominantly found in Bengal, but it is believed that it was a much more wide spread tradition in pre-modern India. Pats or Bengal scroll paintings is an art form which mainly relies on the narratives of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Manasa Mangal (the legend of the snake goddess), stories from Puranas, Krishna-Radha legends or folklore. The scrolls are performed by the patuas by singing and narrating the paintings on the panel. Some of the patuas are Hindu, others are Muslim; some of them even carry names which bear imprints of both religions. Thus the tradition of Pats in Bengal is not merely a tradition of folk painting and singing, it also celebrates the syncretic faith and practices in the country.
Folk Dance Forms

Indian folk dances and the dances of small forest and hill communities are simple dances, and are performed as a part of some community celebration or observance. These dances are performed for every possible occasion: to celebrate the arrival of seasons, the birth of a child, weddings and festivals, social activities such as hunting and food gathering.

There is a large body of non-classical dance forms. The only thing common among these dance forms is their rural origins. Most of them are extremely simple with a minimum of steps or movements. But they are very vigorous and energetic — they burst with verve and vitality. Men and women perform some dances separately, while in some performances they dance together. On most occasions, the dancers themselves sing their songs, while they are accompanied by artists on the instruments. Each form of dance has a specific costume. Most costumes are flamboyant with extensive jewellery. While there are numerous ancient folk and tribal dances, many are constantly being improved. The skill and the imagination of the dances influence the performance.

Along with classical dance forms, folk dance also flourished. In most of the regions the local dance form became very popular. Manipuri dance, Santhal dance, chhau, ras, gidda, bhangra, garba are some of the folk dances that have flourished in India. They are equally popular and have extreme acumen and innovation. Practically every region of our country has developed their rich tradition of folk dances. For example, the Bihu dance of Assam, Mask dance of Ladakh, Wangla of Meghalaya, Bhutia or Lepcha dance of Sikkim. Similarly we also have some dances which are called martial dances like Chholia of Uttranchal, Kalaripaittu of Kerala, Thang-taa of Manipur among the more famous ones.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

India remains one of the world’s richest sources of folktales. Not merely folktales but all forms of oral traditions — proverbs, aphorisms, anecdotes, rumours, songs, impromptu folk street plays — mirror the culture and values of the land in which they occur. They have also helped in binding vastly differing mores and customs of even a single given place. India is one place where the speech of even the most illiterate farmer is filled with lofty thoughts and metaphors.

By preserving and adopting many a tale and numerous songs and plays peppered with the proverbs and aphorisms of the region, Indian literature has played a huge role in binding together vast cultures in an unseen way. The role of Indian Literature in maintaining and fostering cultural unity and identity in the vast land such as India cannot be diminished.

Indian folk literature holds out a strong and loud message for other parts of the world where these art forms have disappeared thick and fast in consonance with rapid industrialization and globalization. Folk literature and folk art forms are not merely carriers of culture or philosophical poems, but rather the expressions of strong self-reflections and deep insights accrued therein. Simple life, self-reflection and treading the path of the righteous contained in traditions. Again, folk traditions are not merely platforms for holding high moral ground having no relevance to the present day reality.

The folklore of India is distinguished from classical Sanskrit literary traditions by its colourful local bias. Stories and oral epics glorify local heroes and places and are expressed in local languages and dialects. Folklore is created and enjoyed by the lower castes and classes who often use it to champion their values and to raise
themselves above their social circumstances. Indian folklore has a religious character and may be associated with sacred rites or festivals. Folklore heroes are frequently deified and worshiped in their communities. Collections of Indian folktales have circulated in written form throughout the Indo-European world for centuries and have inspired numerous translations and derivations. India has a rich tradition of folk painting and the decorative arts which is appreciated and enjoyed all over the world today. Ramanujan rightly pointed out in his celebrated essay that there is dire need to develop a profound understanding about the complex relationship amongst the Great and Little traditions and how they can at times challenge our religious and social dogmas.

3.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS


3.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

**Note:** Your answers should be in about 200 words.

1) Name a few folklorists who pioneered folk studies.
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

2) What primarily triggered the requirement to constitute folk studies in Europe?
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

3) What do you understand by the term ‘folklore’?
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

4) How do you think the study of folklore changed after World War II?
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

5) How is *Chhau* different from *Gotipua*?
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

6) Write a short note on *Pats*.
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

7) Write a short note on *Bayalata*.
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

8) Explain how puppetry is different from human drama?
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

9) Name few folk forms of theatre practiced across the country.
   ....................................................................................................................
   ....................................................................................................................

10) What are the characteristics of folk dance?
    ....................................................................................................................
     ....................................................................................................................
UNIT 4  THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO FOLKLORE

Structure
4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
4.2 Evolutionist Theory
4.3 Diffusionist Theory
4.4 Primordialist Theory
4.5 Modernist/Constructionist Theory
4.6 Dialectical Theory
4.7 Folklore: A Counter-Discourse
4.8 Hegemony of the Written Discourse
4.9 The Sway of the Palace Paradigm
4.10 The Palace Paradigm and the Epic Discourse
4.11 The Critique of the Concept
4.12 Sanskritization
        4.12.1 Brahminization vs. Sanskritization
        4.12.2 Sanskritization and Westernization
4.13 Critical Assessment
4.14 Let Us Sum Up
4.15 References and Further Readings
4.16 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

• understand that folk identities are dynamic in nature;
• see the connection between folklore and some common discourses;
• acquire clear idea about the way popular discourse of insurgency has made way into our folklore;
• understand the idea of ‘Counter-Discourse’;
• explain how this dynamism is the result of those very processes that constitute an identity;
• understand how different theories have attempted to analyse and theorise the processes that underlie this dynamism in identity formation of a folk;
• explain what ‘Palace Paradigm’ is;
• understand the differences between written and oral traditions;
• explain how culture is produced in a society;
• explain the relation between the concept of Palace Paradigm and performing arts;
• understand what ‘Sanskritization’ is;
• explain the strengths and weaknesses of the concept of Sanskritization; and
• know what the application is of the concept to understand Indian culture.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will discuss some of the theories that have tried to explain how folk identities are formed and how they change. It is a well known historical fact that even as identity provides an individual with a sense of belonging and stability, at the same time identities change over a period of time. In a sense this dynamism is inherent in the very processes of constitution of identity. Every identity has a temporal and a societal matrix. Both these matrices impart an inherent dynamism to identity.

Let us take the temporal matrix first. The acknowledgement of the sense of time in the very constitution of identity imparts a possibility of dynamism in identity, where identity could display the traits of both being tenacious and unchanging and also volatile and capable of very rapid change.

The same possibility of continuity and change is imparted by the societal matrix of identity. It is stated that community links an individual or a subject to a community, yet the boundaries of this community are not permanently sealed. On the contrary, most theoreticians accept that the boundaries of societies may be not only relative but also “permeable” in the sense that people may cross into another society (i.e. another ethnic group), and finally, the members of an ethnic group need not share all the characteristics deemed as defining of the group (a polythetic “family resemblance” is sufficient). Identity creates problems of both adhesion and dissent, of belonging and repudiation or innovation.

Evidently, both the temporal and societal matrix of identity allow for dynamism in the very process of their constitution. In this unit we will focus primarily on how various theories take account of transformation of identity. We will deal briefly with some of the important theoretical schools such as, the evolutionist, the diffusionist, the primordialist, the modernists/ constructionist, and finally the Marxist.

4.2 EVOLUTIONIST THEORY

Let us then begin with the evolutionist theory. This school of thought seeks to understand how human societies progress through various evolutionary stages, for instance from a ‘lower’ to a ‘higher’ stage. However, unlike the other theories of transformation, this school of thought borrows most significantly from sciences, especially biology. Adherents of this theory advocate that societies dispersed the world over exhibit the process of evolution from ‘savagery’ to ‘civilization’. They seek to answer the question that why so many independent projects of evolution follow a remarkably similar path of evolution i.e. from savagery to civilization? They derive the answer to this question from biology and argue that this striking similarity in patterns of evolution is based on the fact that human beings the world over share the same psychic structure.

One of the most famous adherents of this school of thought was E. B. Tylor. E.B. Tylor was a cultural evolutionist who believed that diffusion was involved in the process of humankind’s cultural evolution from savagery to civilization. He promoted the idea that culture probably originated independently more than once, owing to the psychic similarity of men the world over, but that actual historical development involved numerous instances of cultural diffusion, or inheritance from a common
tradition. He traced diffused traits side by side with a deep conviction that there had been a general uniformity in evolutionary stages.

Formulated thus, this school of thought imposes a very rigid and monist pattern of evolution for human societies, cultures and identities. In this sense, since all human beings share the same psychic structure they are destined to follow the same stages of evolution till they complete the developmental process from savagery to civilization. In other words, it imposes, teleology of development on societal evolution, where every society is destined to develop from savagery to civilization. Consequently, as per the tenets of this theory, we can take account of only instances of development of human society, culture and identity. Unfortunately, human societies, cultures and identities do not follow such a unidirectional pattern of change and transformation. There is a plethora of historical evidence where human societies, cultures, etc. do not progress but decline. This theory is incapable of explaining these processes of stagnation or decline.

4.3 DIFFUSIONIST THEORY

Diffusionist theory is distinct from the evolutionist theory in very important respects, two of which are especially significant. First, in understanding society and societal transformations, it does not emphasise on biological or genetic traits, instead it emphasises on cultural traits. While analysing transformation of societies, cultures and identities, the emphasis of this line of research is to understand and explain how dominant cultural forms are “imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed” (Modernisation of Indian Tradition, 18). The second important difference with the evolutionists is that unlike them the diffusionists do not believe that change occurs primarily due to the independent origination of culture probably more than once. Instead they forward social structural explanations, which made the process of diffusion a more feasible cause of transformation than the process of innovation. They understand transformation of cultural traits in terms of two historical processes, diffusion and modification.

We have already discussed the view of Boas, who was one of the most prominent intellectuals of this school of thought. However, on the question of socio-cultural change, the contributions of American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan are equally significant. Lewis Henry Morgan claimed that diffusionism was one of the mechanisms by which the substantial uniformity of socio-cultural evolution was made possible. Lewis Henry Morgan infuriated his British contemporaries when his research demonstrated that social change involved both independent invention and diffusion. He agreed with British socio-cultural anthropologists that human progress was due to independent innovation, but his work on kinship terminology showed that diffusion occurred among geographically dispersed people.

In other words, this school postulates that transformation occurs due to the diffusion of influences and traits from more developed centres to those which are less developed. Given this explanation, all transformative changes in human history ought to emanate from culturally advanced centres. However, human transformation has rarely followed such linear process of change. History is littered with examples where impulse for change came from relatively less developed centres. For instance the emergence of a feudal society, culture and identity was not the result of influences and traits emanating from Rome that was the most advanced culture of the period; on the contrary it emerged due to the imposition of values, practices, traits and norms of the tribal society that overran the Roman empire. Similarly capitalism did not emerge in the advanced cultural centres such as China, Italy or even southern
England, instead it emerged in backward and rural northern England. In short, processes of transformation are never linear, instead they are always uneven. However, it is this unevenness in the processes of transformation that the diffussionist theory can not explain.

### 4.4 PRIMORDIALIST THEORY

Primordialist theory differs with some of the core assumptions and conclusions of the diffusionist theory. It is pertinent to point out here that the diffusionist theorists argue that owing to contact, trade, warfare etc. inventions and traits created in the advanced centres of culture get diffused to less developed centres whereby substantial uniformity of socio-cultural evolution is made possible. Primordialist theorists deny that this process of uniformity takes place. On the contrary they point out that ethnic boundaries persist despite interchange and intermingling, and cultural differences persist despite interethic contact and interdependence. They argue that ethnic groups are not groups formed on the basis of a shared culture, rather the formation of groups are on the basis of cultural differences. According to the primordialists, any process of change or transformation is never carried out in an abstract space; on the contrary it happens in a space that is already inscribed by ethnic identities. In fact they go on to argue that ethnicity preludes and underpins all processes of change of a pre-modern identity under the processes of contemporary times.

How are these ethnic boundaries created? What are the internal processes of constitution of an ethnic identity? In this section we are more interested in tackling how the primordialist theoreticians analyse the processes by which pre-modern ethnic identities relate with modern processes and determine the process of change and transformation. Just as Frederick Barth’s contribution was seminal in elaborating the concept of ethnic boundaries and the determination of the processes through which in everyday situation an individual relates with and makes sense of outside world, the contributions of Anthony B. Smith are extremely important in elaborating the processes through which ethnic identities determine the course of transformation in modern times.

In his influential book *Theories of Nationalism*, Anthony D. Smith states:

>“It is ... (the) prior socialisation into traditional image and ethnic, and into the whole network of social relations which have been gradually built up around these convictions and prescriptions, that makes the confrontation between the modern ‘scientific state’ and the old cosmic outlook so serious. It is a total dilemma — in the mind and in daily action a difficult and painful choice is continually posed.” (88)

It is this confrontation, as it were, of the two worlds that make it possible to account for not only the continuation but re-emergence of xenophobic ‘non-traditional’ identity even in the ‘modernising’ potential of nationalism.

The primordialist theorists ascribe an extreme potency to tradition and pre-modern ethnicity. Since these theoreticians argue that the members of human groups have an ‘innate’ propensity to distinguish between insiders and outsiders, to delineate social boundaries and to develop stereotypes about ‘the other’, it follows that the theory subscribes to the view that tradition and ethnicity are the causes of the construction and changes in identity. However, this is not always the case. Ernest Gellner has recounted how the identity of the Estonians does not seek any traditional root. Even in our country people belonging to the state of Bihar are identified as
Biharis, yet no such identity existed prior to the 20th century. Primordialist theoreticians fail to take account of these aspects of construction and transformation of identities.

### 4.5 MODERNIST/CONSTRUCTIONIST THEORY

Modernist/constructionist theoreticians conceptualise formation and transformation of identities in a way that is diametrically opposite to that of the primordialist theoreticians. While primordialist theoreticians ascribe absolute potency to the traditionally available ethnicity, the modernist theoreticians ascribe absolute generative power to the modern processes in the formation and transformation of identities. Thus, we witness that whereas the primordialist theoreticians emphasise upon the etic aspects of identity, the modernist theoreticians emphasise upon the emic aspects of identity. It is to be emphasised that the modernist theoreticians do not necessarily deny that elements and traits of traditional identities may survive processes of change. However, they go on to argue that these traits and elements enter into a absolutely new relationship with other elements under the demands of the present conjuncture whereby the forms and functions of these elements and traits undergo a fundamental change.

How does the present rework identities? There are two significant explanations forwarded by the modernist theoreticians. It had been pointed out that Abner Cohen takes up the political aspects of the reconfiguration of identity while Epstein takes up the emotive aspects of the reconfiguration of identity. However, inspite of these differences both the scholars give primacy to the present in explaining the reconfiguration of identity. Given the significance of these two scholars in study of identities it will be worthwhile to briefly present how they take account of the formation and transformation of identities under the actions of modern processes.

According to Abner Cohen, under specific circumstances, ethnic communities undergo a process that he terms as *retribalisation*. Abner Cohen defines retribalisation as:

> “a process by which a group from one ethnic category, whose members are involved in a struggle for power and privilege with the members of a group from another ethnic category, within the framework of a formal political system, manipulate some customs, values, myths, symbols and ceremonials from their cultural tradition in order to articulate an informal political organisation which is used as a weapon in that struggle.” (*The Anthropology of Globalization* 88)

Epstein explains this reconfiguration from the emotive standpoint. He regards the search for, and psychological need for, a sound, secure and more or less bounded social identity as fundamental, and connects this need – under particular historical circumstances – to the formation of ethnic identities. This stable and secure basis is threatened in periods of dramatic and rapid change. This change robs communities of security and the present appears before them as disconnected fragments of life. In such a scenario ethnicity as reconfigured past is an attempt to make whole the disconnected fragments of life made available by the present. Epstein views this emotive aspect of kinship as deriving from a sense of collective history, and from identification between generations.

The biggest drawback of this school is that it is extremely doubtful as to whether the past will make itself available as a completely plastic material amicable to manipulation in any direction. This failure to take account of the specific weight of the past lends a certain artificiality to the theory which reduced formation and transformation of identities to a realm of manipulation and conspiracies.
Dialectical theory views the process of formation and transformation of identity as a necessarily complex process. Furthermore it argues that no identity is homogeneous. It states that every identity far from being homogenous is necessarily complex and internally ruptured. Though the objective to study identities in their complexity seeks to understand them in historically and socially relevant ways, it is not so easy to achieve.

Theoretical studies on identity are dominated by rival claims of primordialism and constructionism. Constructionists argue that all identity, whether that of large entities such as nation or that of a community are adaptations to the process of modernisation. Contrary to this, a rival group of theoreticians emphasises on primordial roots of every identity. Some amongst them, however, emphasise primordial social and cultural roots of identity while others take recourse to genetics and biological determinism. There are a wide variety of theoretical positions and the debate between them is cacophonous. The constructionists reduce the textures of identity to an uninterrupted and homogenous process of functional adjustments to the impact of process of modernity, while the primordialists reduce the textures of identity as nothing but ephemeral elaboration of a primordial root. Thus, even though the rival groups disagree on the causal process of identity formation, the modernists reduce it to the teleology of present and the primordialists reduce it to the teleology of past/origin. Both agree that identities are essentially homogeneous and tend towards stability.

We have already discussed the uneven process of dialectical exchange between the past and the present in the formation and transformation of identity. This dialectical exchange is grounded on the contours of struggles that articulation of local with the transnational process and institutions unleashes. Construction of an identity follows the parameters of resistance or alternative mobilisation required to adequately address the extent of process and agencies of exploitation. The shifting contours and fault lines of struggle and exploitation ensure that formation and transformation of identities never follow linear and predictable processes. Instead the process of formation and transformation of identities is marked by unevenness. Let us take the argument further and demonstrate that this same struggle ensures the identity constituted by it is never homogeneous, on the contrary it is internally ruptured. We will demonstrate this by summarising the findings of a published study on Naga identity.

For a researcher, Naga identity presents two significant quandaries that seek explanation. Quandary number one is that for the peoples being studied it has often been the case that a pan-identity (here Naga) has co-existed with particularistic identities such as the tribal identity of Angami, Konyak, etc. Both these identities have a specific weight and a historical anchorage. Thus, even while a particular tribe acknowledges being a part of the larger pan-identity of Naga, it does not amount to the dissolution of the specific identity of the tribe. Quandary number two is that the relationship between the pan-identity and the particularistic identity is not always that which holds between a building block to an architectural edifice, what to speak of that of a drop of water. On the contrary the relationship amongst the particular identities and between them and the pan-identity are at times fractious whereby they become building blocks to competing and rival discourses. How does one take account of these quandaries?
Relationship between pan-Naga identity and particularistic identities continues to pose a problem. The resolution to this by V. Elwin and G. Kabui leads to the erosion of historical materiality of particular identities. On the other hand, the resolution sought by Dr. Horam compromises the materiality of the pan-Naga identity. By projecting the pan-Naga identity as simply an aggregation of tribes identifying themselves as Naga, he ignores the specific process and basis that sustains pan-Naga identity. Relation between the two forms of identity appears as a Gordian knot to these scholars since their work is based on the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. Consequently they see the two forms of identity as a pre-given anthropological/sociological datum. Then, they seek to unravel the anthropological or sociological principles on which the two identities ought to relate.

Anthropological and sociological reductionism preclude these scholars from observing that one of the fundamental processes that determine the existent (as opposed to the desirable) relationship is derived not from anthropological or sociological logic but from a deeply fractious political process and discourse. This results in a peculiar situation whereby anthropologists and sociologists might be correct in arguing that the relationship between pan-Naga identity and the particularistic tribal and regional identity ought to be governed by anthropological or sociological logic. Yet asymmetrical political structure and fractious political processes that it unleashes may (and in the case of the Nagas it has) result in the inscription of the two forms of identity in contending political discourses.

The fact of existence of related but distinct form of identities viz. the pan-Naga identity and the particularistic tribal and regional identities have made them significant ingredients of two competing political agenda — that of Naga nationalism and Indian nationalism. Elements who perceive themselves as Naga nationalist have since the inception of this ideology made the existent pan-Naga identity as a potent ingredient of their political discourse to achieve hegemony over the political consciousness of the Nagas. Claims of uniqueness, distinctiveness and common roots of the Naga ‘nation’ are the specific traits of this discourse.

The older colonial and current Indian nationalist discourse privileges the particularistic identity. The state’s political initiatives and policy measures have always reflected this privileging of particularistic identity. Particularistic identity is privileged to unravel the claim of political rivals to being the representative voice of the Nagas and/or erode the cohesiveness of the pan-Naga identity. Such inscription of the pan-Naga identity as well as the particularistic tribal and regional identities in political discourses opens up an entirely new angle. Thus, while the pan-Naga identity and the particularistic tribal identity have sociological and anthropological basis, their inscription in political discourse determines the relation between the two.

Thus, dialectical theory gives primacy to the historically determined processes of exploitation and struggle as the main elements in the formation and transformation of identities.

4.7 FOLKLORE: A COUNTER-DISCOURSE

Judicial discourse of the ruling powers are so designed as to support the political establishment. The language of legal structures in a society perpetuates and supports existing power structures. This was especially so during colonial rule in India. This means that the definition of what was illegal or criminal would necessarily be a reflection of colonial policies. Certain communities traditionally living on the fringes
of society or living a nomadic lifestyle came to be defined as ‘criminal’ by colonial authorities. The imposition of such titles and the ensuing curtailment of the social rights of certain communities gave rise to a lot of confusion and resentment. This colonial definition of ‘crime’ and ‘criminality’ has been questioned in folklore. An instance of this can be seen in the Chauri Chaura incident which happened during the Indian struggle for Independence. The judicial discourse of colonialism would sell off Chauri Chaura as ‘a series of criminal acts rather than a violent instance of mass peasant politics’ (Baxi 260). Similarly the mass uprising of 1857 was established by the judicial discourse of colonialism as an event of ‘mutiny’ and criminal act/s instead of a ‘movement’. The common folk engaged furtively, covertly, or defiantly in a sort of counter-discourse to this discourse of power as their folk forms celebrated and valorized the so-called ‘criminal acts’.

The peasant’s own perception of ‘criminality’ or ‘violence’ can be the reverse of that held by his enemies and the establishment. The establishment perceives all violation of law or defiance of law as ‘crime’. On the other hand the rebellious peasants can perceive the same acts as gestures of social protest and therefore valorize them as honourable and just acts of protest. This we have seen in the Robin Hood ballads of pre-industrial England which used to enjoy great popularity among poor villagers. The popular local tales about Banjara Singh, who operated around the Chambal ravines, ring with reverence for a man who was merciless to the rich and benevolent to the poor. Sympathy and admiration for the outlaw are visible in similar stories about Goreya Baba. Goreya Baba was originally the chief of a robber gang who came from Delhi to Bihar. Goreya had many encounters with the police and landed gentry. Finally he was killed near Sherpur (district Patna) and a shrine was built there. A mound of earth came to represent Goreya and gradually Goreya worship spread through Bihar. Eventually he became a “popular godling” with the Dushads. After deification there was an interesting image shift. The Dushadhs in Champaran district of Bihar came to worship Goreya “mainly for the exorcism of the malignant spirits who have taken possession of some persons and also by lepers for recovery” (Roychowdhury 42). Thus the affirmation of community identity which may be in opposition to official definitions of the criminality or criminal or outlaw nature of that community can be called ‘Counter-Discourse’.

### 4.8 Hegemony of the Written Discourse

In this section, we will try to understand what written discourse is and the role that it plays in shaping culture in a society. Closely related to the palace-oriented historical discourse is the preponderant role of the written document as the sole authentic source of historical facts. As the written discourse had been the exclusive preserve of the few literate elites even in the not so distant past, it is their worldview and interests that determined the tone of the historical discourse. These literate few, on the other hand, had mostly been under the patronage of either kings or other members of the ruling class. Naturally, they assumed the role of advocates of the ruling class. The voice of the vast majority of marginal, illiterate, powerless masses hardly found any space in the framework of their writing. Instead of being a poly-vocal system, history became a mouthpiece of the ruling elites. History-writing did not only distort the real story of mankind but also became a powerful discourse casting human civilizations and their future in a particular mould. Thus, Handoo contends that history became a monolithic concept and a discourse of subversion with a strong philosophical foundation of its own. Civilizations came to be recognized by this concept of discourse and by this philosophy of monolithism. The discourse of Palace Paradigm became the discourse of civilizations. The strength of a culture and a
civilization began to be judged only in terms of stone structures – palaces, forts, stone bridges, prisons – and discussion of all these in big books. This metaphor was also extended to wars, conquests, bloodshed, colonization and slavery.

In the Indian context, it is difficult to trace the exact time since when written discourse became the sole arbiter of ‘knowledge’ and began to be associated with power. However, according to Handoo, it seems that the pre-eminence of the written discourse and the knowledge, power and a strong patriarchal value system – all ran parallel to the emergence of feudalism in India. (Handoo 2006: 24) The palace being the epicentre of the feudal system, it became the ideal of all social discourses and came to shape the collective consciousness of the people. The privileged section of the society including the educated elites, rich traders, and so on who could not have managed a comfortable lifestyle without coming under the sway of the heavy wings of the palace understandably became advocates of the palace paradigm. Handoo, however, says that it is also possible that this powerful section of society might not have been conscious of the hazards of this paradigm and the discourse it generated because of its strong civilizing effect. The latter made the discourse of Palace Paradigm appear the most normal and obvious thing which was beyond any question. This civilizing effect was all the more effective because of its deliberate integration with religion. (ibid: 25)

The suppressive character of the written discourse in the Indian context, Handoo argues, is most evident in case of Indian literature. He points out that India has a very ancient tradition of written literary works; yet there is no clear evidence that this mighty tradition of literary activity ever, even by mistake, addressed the problems of the common masses of the land. Except the literature emerging out of the Bhakti movement of the medieval period, Indian literature remained imprisoned in the confines of the Palace Paradigm till the beginning of the 20th century. (Handoo 2006: 25)

This discourse, Handoo alleges, did not allow the ordinary, collective and shared discourse to develop in its own terms. In fact, there was pressure on it to either go out of circulation completely or merge with the powerful high discourse by restructuring itself to suit the hegemonic designs of the dominant written discourse. On the other hand, Handoo contends that folklore, more particularly folk literature, in spite of these pressures, seems to have become the centre of the ordinary discourse in India. It continued to represent the collective sharing and concern for ordinary human conditions while the palace-centric written discourse became an instrument of power and exploitation. The latter, in due course, developed such complex linguistic, stylistic and semantic markers that interpretation became inevitable, which in turn developed as a means of exerting power on the marginal people who could not understand, share or benefit from such markers.

### 4.9 THE SWAY OF THE PALACE PARADIGM

In the previous section we focussed on the role of written texts in shaping culture. In this section, we will highlight the relation between written texts/discourse and palace as the centre of production of culture. It is not that only the written discourse and the historical space come under the sway of the palace paradigm. Most of the social behaviour and cultural expressions of the feudal society in India yielded to the latter. For example, the Indian classical music, dance and drama, cuisine, costume, philosophical discourse, language, religion, and literary folklore which enjoyed a much wider social base were influenced by the discourse of Palace Paradigm to a considerable extent. It was only natural, Handoo argues, that the civilizing power
of oral discourse such as fairy tales and animal tales which have significant influence on the people, especially the children, in shaping their social attitude and behaviour, was recognized and were therefore assimilated into the so-called ‘high art’ conforming to the ideology of the ruling elites and then frozen into an ideology of subversion. (Handoo 2006: 26)

Handoo argues that the literary fairy tales, like many other genres, was essentially designed for children both to divert as amusement and instruct ideologically as a means to mould the inner nature of young people. In fact, here amusement has to be seen as a direct creation of ideology. With the same end, literary animal tale was also redesigned and was used for generating religious discourse, ethics and politics of the palace paradigm. Handoo illustrates his contention with examples drawn from the tales of the Jataka and the Panchatantra. In these tales, the world of animals is consciously modeled on human society. An imaginary world peopled with animal actors is constructed. This imaginary world of the animal tale is differentiated from the real world by a simple device of inverting the characteristics of its animal inhabitants in relation to their real-world counterparts. In the process, the “large animals such as the elephant, apparently powerful and wise, are portrayed as weak and foolish while small creatures that seem of little account are bestowed in these tales with wisdom and courage. It becomes possible, by reversing the play of metaphor, to imagine a differently constructed human society.” (Handoo 2006: 27)

Handoo points out that such literary animal tales were used for training children and young princes in the art of kingship and diplomacy in the palaces of India. The Buddhists and the Jains also used this genre of folktale for religious discourses. He contends that “through the medium of inversion…children and adults are taught to recognize certain basic truths of life and existence. And in this way perhaps the impossible was made possible, at least temporarily.” (Handoo 2006: 27)

Handoo states that the above-mentioned metaphor is present everywhere. Even in the modern world, the symbolism of the animal tale is very popular among children and has been extended to suit new situations. He cites examples of the heroes of modern popular culture such as Donald Duck and Spiderman who appear to be the extensions of traditional symbolism. (ibid: 27)

This affair of role play and symbolic inversion is witnessed in other genres too. Handoo examines this in the case of Holi, a folk festival, celebrated widely in various parts of India, especially in north India. A festival of colours, Holi coincides with the harvest time. The festival is celebrated with dance, music, feast, fasting, and other festivities. The structure and performance of this festival suggests that just like the animal tale, Holi makes an attempt at symbolic inversion of the rigid barriers of social structure, kinship roles, and powers of hierarchy, howsoever temporary. Colour as a marker of race, community, gender, status, etc often provides symbolic social sanction to the maintenance of different social hierarchies and kinship roles. Yet it is with the same colour that these hierarchies and roles are reversed symbolically. In Holi, everybody irrespective of age, caste, economic status, and gender are free to hug and apply colour on each other’s face as a way of greetings. This is simply not possible in regular, normal times. As coloured faces blur identity of the people, forbidden behaviours occur freely and a collective catharsis is reached in the form of doing funny things. Similarly, obscene and vulgar language becomes the normal language of discourse during the festival. Handoo contends that both the above-mentioned genres of folklore, the animal tale and Holi and similar festivals, are using the discourse of reverse role play in a symbolic attempt to overcome the anxieties created by the hegemony of the palace paradigm.
One may point out here that similar role reversal is experienced in the carnivals of the western societies. The entire feudal order is turned upside down in the carnivals. Eminent Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin develops his concept of ‘carnivalesque’ from the carnivals. In the carnivals, the existing social hierarchies, the customs and etiquettes associated with these hierarchies, the taken-for-granted truths – all are profaned and overturned by the suppressed voices of day-to-day life. In the process, fools become wise, kings become beggars, and so on. Besides, there occurs a wholesale intermingling of opposites like fact and fantasy, heaven and hell, and so on. Bakhtin coined the term ‘carnivalesque’ to refer to that literary mode which subverts the ideologies and the institutions of the dominant order through shocking wit and absurdity. [Bakhtin 1929(1984); 1965(1984)]

4.10 THE PALACE PARADIGM AND THE EPIC DISCOURSE

We will now focus on the Indian epics in our attempt to understand what Palace Paradigm is. It has been recognized that both ballads and epics as strong genres develop mainly among politically marginal people. However, Handoo holds that the Indian literary epic, just like the fairy tale, was assimilated into the discourse of the Palace Paradigm and used as a civilizing instrument for the royals and the elites besides glorifying the kings and their kingships. An epic always has a long and powerful narrative recited with music. It also is studded with elements from myth, history and religion. With all these attributes an epic becomes a fine source of amusement irrespective of time and space. Handoo says, “(M)ore than any other literary genre, epics present the story of the kings without any symbolic disguise. The question is not that these epics offer the historical discourse of the feudal society and … the past of humankind; the real issue is that these epic metaphors have penetrated into the subconscious structures of the Indian society … in such a forceful manner that these have, it would seem, the same medieval effect in modern times.” (2006: 29)

For example, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the famous Indian epics, recount the stories of the Kshatriyas, the traditional warriors and royal caste. Yet even folk epics which abound throughout regions and communities having nothing to do with either the Kshatriyas or kingship, were highly influenced by the famous pan-Indian epic structures. Thus, “these great stories of bloodshed, palace feuds, wars and conquests, abduction of women, concubines, treasure hunts and sibling rivalries seem to have set standards and ideals of a feudal society that resulted in setting role models for men and women that are thriving even now and directing the behaviour of the Indian society.” To illustrate this, Handoo points out the fact that “most of the literary epics are raised on male bias. Epic poets are men singing the glory of other men, armed men, to be precise. …(O)ut of the thirty eight basic themes upon which most epic narratives of the world are based, only nine are associated with women. The ideals of the epic world obviously do not have much to share with women, nor do the women enjoy the heroic values. There is little they can do there other than getting abducted or rescued, or pawned, or molested, or humiliated in some way or the other.” (2006: 29)

Handoo further points out the fact that the practice of burning alive of the widows (sati) of the dead warriors is basically a palace practice, perhaps the outcome of a historical need of the royalty and the feudal elites which was glorified in the epic discourse so much so that it became a civilizing force for the womenfolk of the Indian society. According to Handoo, the Indian women have a special relationship
with fire throughout their lives as house keeper, food maker and food-provider. Besides fire also acts as an instrument of survival, power and purification and also of ultimate self-destruction (agni pariksha, sati, and dowry death = bride burning) for them even today seems to reinforce the relationship of this epic metaphor with the Palace Paradigm and its relevance in modern Indian society.

Further, Handoo claims that the models of violence in the Indian, particularly male, collective subconscious are rooted in epic metaphors. All epics, mentioned earlier are epitomes of the palace discourse, are constructed around themes of violence and war. In this regard, Handoo contests the thesis that Indo-Aryan epics such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata or the Iliad are raised on violence while many non-Aryan epics such as the Cilappatikaram (a South Indian epic) is highly representative of non-violence. On the contrary, he argues that if the Indo-Aryan epics are “full of war, bloodshed, sibling rivalry, abduction of women, disputes over land and property, etc, and that such things establish these epics as epics of violence, then the Cillapatrikaram too is full of extramarital relations, prostitution, theft, disputes, murder, death, suicides, fire and destruction. This non-Aryan epic also by and large seems to share the basic characteristics of the Indo-European epic repertoire…The point here is to define violence in the context of an epic and also realize its relationship with the culture and its paradigms that created the epic in the first place. Murder/death in war and murder/death in the palace are definition violent acts and share the semantics of violence equally.” (Handoo 2006: 30).

Handoo makes an interesting observation while he states that unlike in other cultures such as Christianity or Islam, most of the hero-gods in the Indian epics are essentially rooted in royalty or feudal order…These hero-gods, more often than not, indulge purposefully in defining or redefining the philosophical dimensions of kingship, sometimes ideal kingship and the discourse of religion that they practice through the epic metaphors. Handoo points out that the impact of these epic metaphors and the palace discourse extend to the political ideology of modern India, too. Thus, padayatra, Ramarajya, and other loaded epic metaphors that fill the political vocabulary of modern India’s social and political ideology explain the historical connections between the epics and the contemporary political discourse.

Even a cursory observation of some more such terms would illustrate this. The terminologies such as rajkiya (literally means royal, but is used to mean official matters at present), raj marg (lit. royal street, but is used to mean high ways in the present parlance), raj bhavan (lit. royal abode, now used for the residence of state governors) conspicuously testify to the existing sway of the palace paradigm. Handoo mentions an interesting point when he states how a god, a king, and a Kshatriya is implied by the same term thakur (literally, it means both god and the kshatriya caste) in Hindi. Here, god seems to be realized through the metaphor of maharaj (literally a king of kings) or thakur and vice-versa. Expressions such as ‘kripa karo maharaj’ (have mercy, o’ king of kings/god) and ‘thakur ke gun gaun’ (praising the god/a king/ a landlord) are used interchangeably to pay tribute to both god and kings and powerful landlords. (Handoo 2006: 34)

4.11 THE CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT

In the previous sections, we have introduced you to the concept of Palace Paradigm and the various perspectives that see culture as centred on the significance of palace, i.e. elites, in society. In this section, we shall highlight some of the major critiques or drawbacks of the concept of palace paradigm. There is no doubt that the ‘palace paradigm’ approach delineates a number of interesting facts about the nature of our cultural artifacts and the ideologies inherent therein. However, many of the concerns
Theoretical Approaches to Folklore

raised by it have been addressed by other interpretations of Indian culture too. It is true that the kings and powerful feudal lords set the standards of socio-cultural behaviour of the Indian masses. Yet there are many customs and cultural artifacts which cannot be said to have emerged from the discourse surrounding the palace. The tribal art forms of the northeast that Handoo mentions, for example, did not have a palace origin. Similarly, there are many folk forms (which range from folktales and folksongs, etc. to riddles and witchcraft) which often demonstrated anti-palace orientation.

Not only that, anti-palace ideology has been evident in many written literature as well. It is a different matter that many such written documents questioning the dominant discourse have been destroyed by the ruling classes. Thus, it is clear that the palace was not the only centre for cultural production and dissemination.

Further, ‘palace paradigm’ speaks only of the manifestations of a feudal order which is projected as a rather static, monolithic concept. It does not delve into the dynamics of the feudal socio-economic structure and the conflicts within it, a study of which perhaps would have provided better understanding of its influence on the cultural domain of the Indian society.

The claims of the approach often appear overarching. The approach offers a partial explanation of the process of cultural production and their dissemination in India.

4.12 SANSKRITIZATION

4.12.1 Brahminization vs. Sanskritization

We have discussed what Palace Paradigm is and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the concept. Now let discuss what Sanskritization is. Sanskritization is found to be identified with imitation of the Brahminical customs and manners by the lower castes. Srinivas presumed the Brahmins to be the sole model of emulation for the sanskritizing groups. However, he abandoned the term for ‘Sanskritization’ on account of a number of reasons and defined Sanskritization as a process that refers to “the process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, ‘twice-born’ caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community.” (Srinivas 1966/77: 6)

The reasons which persuaded Srinivas to redefine the above process of caste mobility may be briefly discussed as below:

Firstly, Srinivas found that “Brahminization is subsumed under the wider process of Sanskritization.” (1962/1989: 42) However, he also points out that the two may be at variance with each other at times. For example, though Sanskritization necessitates renunciation of certain habits and customs on the part of the sanskritizing groups such as drinking liquor, eating beef and pork, etc, the Brahmins in the Vedic period drank soma, an alcoholic drink, ate beef, and offered blood sacrifices which were given up in post-Vedic times. Though the Brahmins today, by and large, are vegetarians, there are non-vegetarian Brahmins too. The Assamese, Bengali, Kashmiri, Maithili, Odia and Saraswat Brahmins eat non-vegetarian food. The Brahmins are characterized by many other regional variations suggesting that they cannot be treated as a homogeneous group with respect to their habits and customs. Therefore, if the term Brahminization was used it would have been necessary to specify which particular Brahmin group was meant. Moreover, as the Brahmins are
also undergoing various changes over time in the cultural domain it would have been further necessary to specify at which particular period of its history a particular Brahmin group is referred to as a model for Sanskritization.

Secondly, the agents of Sanskritization are not always the Brahmans. In fact, there was prohibition on the non-twice-born castes from following the customs and rites of the Brahmans, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Brahmans were responsible for this. On the other hand, there were non-Brahmin agents of Sanskritization. The Lingayats of South India, for example, have been a powerful force for Sanskritization of several low castes of Karnataka. Though founded by a Brahmin named Basava in the 12th century, the Lingayat movement was anti-Brahminical in tone and spirit drawing a large number of followers from the lower castes. In fact, the Lingayats of Mysore claim equality with Brahmans, and the more orthodox of them do not accept food cooked or handled by Brahmans. (Srinivas 1962/89: 43)

There are many such examples. What comes out clearly from the above is that Sanskritization as a process of social mobility cannot be explained only with the help of the Brahminical model. There can be other models (Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) as well depending on the context. In fact, Srinivas also highlights the fact that the Brahmin claim to supremacy was contested by the Kshatriyas on various occasions. (1966/77: 23-4)

Srinivas also cites anthropologists D. F. Pocock and Milton Singer to justify his contention. Pocock pointed out to the existence of a Kshatriya model of Sanskritization. Singer states that there exist not one or two models of Sanskritization but three if not four. (Srinivas 1966/77: 8). Srinivas quotes Singer:

> “The local version (of Sanskritik Hinduism) may use the four varna labels—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra—but the defining content of these labels varies with locality and needs to be empirically determined for any particular locality. It has also been discovered that the relative prestige and rank of these different varnas tend to vary with locality, time and group. In many areas, e.g., the kingly or martial, life-style has a rank equal with or sometimes higher than that of the Brahmin. Groups in these areas who wish to improve their status do so by adopting some of the stigmata of the Rajput life-style, i.e., by “Rajputizing” their way of life (Sinha). Even the life-styles of the merchant and peasant have been taken as models in localities where these groups are dominant.” (Srinivas: Ibid)

Yogendra Singh theorizes this situation when he states that there are two levels of meanings which are implicit in the concept of Sanskritization. These two levels may be described as ‘historical specific’ and ‘contextual specific’ connotations of Sanskritization. He says, “(I)n historical specific sense, Sanskritization refers to those processes in Indian history which led to changes in the status of various castes, its leadership or its cultural patterns in different periods of history. It is indicative of an endogenous source of social change in the broad historical spectrum of India. In contextual specific sense, however, Sanskritization denotes contemporaneous processes of cultural imitation of upper castes by lower castes or subcastes, in different parts of India. The nature of Sanskritization of this type is by no means uniform as the content of cultural norms or customs being imitated may vary from Sanskritic or Hindu traditional forms to the tribal and even Islamic patterns.” (1996: 6-7)

The contextual process of Sanskritization is illustrated by various studies undertaken in different contexts throughout India. These studies show that at many places the
lower castes imitate the customs of other non-Brahmin castes as mentioned above. In some exceptional cases, even the higher castes have been found imitating the tribal ways which may be described as the process of ‘tribalization’. In some other contexts, even Muslim cultural model is found to be emulated by both the upper as well as lower castes.

4.12.2 Sanskritization and Westernization

In this section, we will focus on the comparison between Sanskritization and Westernization. Like Sanskritization, Westernization is another concept propounded by Srinivas. Westernization refers to changes brought about as a consequence of the contact with western culture, particularly the British. Though there have been other western groups such as the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the French to India and have influenced Indian society and culture, none had the same scale of influence as the British, precisely because of the fact that the latter had ruled almost all over India for a period of two hundred years. Their rule produced radical and lasting changes in Indian society and culture. They brought with them new technology, institutions, knowledge, beliefs, and values which often went against the traditional Indian institutions, values and practices. For example, the British judicial system based on the principle of equality went directly against the traditional system of law based on status and hierarchy.

Thus, apparently the process of Westernization appears to be diametrically opposite to that of Sanskritization. However, a closer look gives a totally different picture. As Srinivas says, “(T)he spread of Sanskrit theological ideas increased under British rule. The development of communications carried Sanskritization to areas previously inaccessible, and the spread of literacy carried it to groups very low in the caste hierarchy. Western technology – railways, the internal combustion engine, press, radio, and plane – have aided the spread of Sanskritization.” (1962/89: 48-9) He cites the example of the tradition of harikatha (a religious discourse where a priest reads and explains a religious story to his audience. (Harikathas may be held at any time, but important Hindu festivals are considered especially suitable for the purpose). The reach of the harikathas have spread much wider with the introduction of microphone for the narrator. Indian films have been also playing a very crucial role in the popularization of the stories from the epics and the puranas. In the more modern context, the television has played an extraordinary role in the spread of the Sanskrit stories to the nook and corner of the country.

Besides, it is seen that the castes which took the lead in undergoing Westernization were mostly from the upper echelons, particularly the Brahmins, of the traditional hierarchy. Even a cursory observation at the composition of the Indian officers, social reformers, educationists, lawyers, army men, traders, etc. right from the early colonial period, testify to the fact as to how the upper castes, that is, the more Sanskritized castes, were frontrunners in seizing the opportunities offered by the colonial administration. It is also true, however, that in certain cases it appeared that the Brahmins were handicapped by some customs in the race for Westernization. For example, the Brahminic customs such as vegetarianism and teetotalism were in sharp contradiction with the English habits of eating beef and pork, drinking whisky and so on. Nevertheless, that the Brahmins were the most westernized caste group in India is beyond doubt and they have been able to perpetuate their traditional hegemony.

Thus, Srinivas contends, “the assumption of a simple and direct opposition between the two (Sanskritization and Westernization) and of the ultimate triumph of
Westernization, I find too simple a hypothesis...considering the great complexity of the processes involved.” (1962/89: 61) While in some cases, they were in conflict with each other, in others they complemented each other.

However, as to whether Sanskritization of a lower caste or tribe is an essential preliminary to Westernization, Srinivas says that though he finds empirical evidence of this being true, he is quick to add that such empirical evidence is limited to some non-Brahmin castes of Mysore and does not refer to any logical necessity for Sanskritization occurring prior to Westernization.

It is possible that Westernization may occur without the intermediate process of Sanskritization. (1962/89: 60) Indeed, rapid industrialization has made it possible a process which has been conspicuous in the post-independence period. Social movements among the backward castes have been anti-Brahmin in their overtones right from the very beginning. After independence, the constitutional provisions along with various affirmative actions initiated by the government in various spheres (social, economic and political) have also created conditions and opportunities for the lower castes and tribes to bypass the process of Sanskritization.

### 4.13 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Let us now critically examine the concept of Sanskritization. Sanskritization has been a very dominant perspective in explaining social changes in the Indian society. However, the changes that it addresses are confined to the domain of culture to the exclusion of other much more significant political and economic processes. Sanskritization offers only a partial explanation to the social changes in Indian society. However, Srinivas himself is apt to point this out when he states, “(T)o describe the social changes occurring in modern India in terms of Sanskritization and Westernization is to describe it primarily in cultural and not structural terms.”(1962/89: 55)

Besides, Sanskritization is concerned mainly with social mobility within the Hindu society while the Indian society is a heterogeneous complex of many sects and religions. The emergence of some of these sects and religions were directly related to the objective of freedom from the oppression of the traditional caste system. In recent times, the social movements among the backward castes and tribes have sought social mobility, as mentioned above, outside the framework of the caste society. They are no longer keen to go through the process of Sanskritization. Even if they come under the influence of it, it is not acknowledged by them and they do not look for the recognition from others for higher status. In fact, the recent times have witnessed a strong tendency among many castes to demand lower caste status to get the benefits of the policy of affirmative action (popularly known as ‘reservation’) reserved for the lower castes and tribes in the spheres of education, employment and electoral politics. With this same end, some castes which previously enjoyed relatively higher status in the caste hierarchy are now demanding tribal status. In such a situation, there is hardly any case for the tribal groups to change their existing status to caste.

It is clear that the significance of a higher ritual status that Sanskritization facilitated in the erstwhile feudal society does not seem to hold good in the politico-economic order of post-independence India. The symbolic status which caste mobility promised in the feudal society has lost much of its meaning today as the new Indian constitution facilitates social mobility among the backward groups by their educational,
economic, and political empowerment through access to various opportunities and resources of the state.

Further, it is true that Sanskritization has resulted in changes in the status of castes but it has not led to changes of the caste system. That is, whatever change in mobility of a caste has occurred, it has occurred within the framework of the caste system. Sanskritization has not led to any change in the system. As Srinivas himself says, “the mobility characteristic of caste in the traditional period resulted only in positional changes for particular castes or sections of castes, and did not lead to a structural change. That is while individual castes moved up or down, the structure remained the same.”(Srinivas 89)

Nevertheless, the concept of Sanskritization has been very influential in the explanation of social change in India. Despite various limitations it has provided a lot of insight into the complexities of the traditional Indian society and as against the widely prevalent stereotypical view of the Indian caste system being a static system offered a fresh perspective by highlighting the dynamism within it.

4.14 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed some of the major theories that try to explain why identities change over time or across space. We have discussed the evolutionist model which argues that the change in identity can generally be seen in terms of progress from early to developed stages of civilization. Then we discussed the diffusionist model that argue change as a result of contact between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ cultures resulting in the latter assuming traits of the former. In our discussion of the primordialist theory, we showed how the theory considers change to be based on inherent and intrinsic traits that any community is constituted with. The discussion on modernist/constructionist theory tried to explain how the theory emphasises the role of the present factors, mostly political, rather than any factor from the past as crucial to understand why change of identity takes place. In the last theory that we took up for discussion, the dialectical theory, we discussed how the theory emphasises the role of both the past and the present and its specific interactions in given historical circumstances as the way to understand why identities change and why and how new identities come into existence.

From the early studies of folklore which were focused upon tracing the archaic customs of a society to later studies involving nationalistic aims and goals of reinforcing ethnic identities, the study of folklore has a varied spectrum of approaches. In recent decades, attention has moved to understanding the meanings behind the narration or performance of folklore. These meanings may be different from apparent meanings and there may be deeper subversive elements in them. This whole process of understanding performances and narration according to various theoretical contexts is an element of viewing folklore as discourse. Discourse involves grounds on which social relations between individuals can be negotiated. This means that all forms of communication and social behaviours can be seen as a discourse. The discourses operative in folklore can be seen sometimes, though not always, as counter-discourse to a prevalent mainstream discourse. These are products of the entire community and not of an individual. Folklore contains countless micro-narratives in contrast to the grand/macro-narratives of history, and can open doors into new horizons in discourse studies.

Folklore offers narratives about past, present and about the land and people. These are micro-narratives reflecting different discourses. The discourses of insurgency
Folk Literature and Language: Research and Pedagogy

as recorded in oral or folk memory, contain forms such as tales, rumours, folksongs, etc. which give images of the enemy and information on events in history. Discourse is complemented by counter-discourse. In any society, law and legality support existing power structures. Definitions of crime and criminality may marginalize entire communities or individuals living at the fringes. In this context the figure of the outlaw can sometimes acquire a heroic status and though he may be an outlaw in legal terms, he may be a hero of the people, remembered in tales and cults. Crimes generated by poverty and social inequalities can also be read as acts of rebellion. This sort of perception and its expression can be called a counter-discourse.

The discourse of prominent religious establishments in any society is contested by the counter-discourses of folk-cults. This can be seen in the instances of the Bauls and the Satnampanth to name a few. The opposition of these two cults to organized religion and caste definitions and their support of the individual seeker form the core of their counter-discourse. Close to this is the idea of counter-belief. This term refers to beliefs held by communities in their daily lives which may be at odds with religious values that are officially embraced by that society. Belief in ghosts, spirits, faith-healers, etc. are elements of counter-belief. Viewing folklore as discourse is a process involving varied opinions and theoretical frameworks. This offers interesting points of analyses for folk narratives and performances with a view to understanding how communities affirm themselves in various contexts. As discourse involves the study of all forms of communication and social behavior, folklore as discourse encompasses a large number of approaches.

Thus in this unit, we are thoroughly acquainted with different theories and discourses vis-a-vis the study of folklore and culture.

4.15 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS


4.16 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

**Note:** Your answers should be in about 400 words.

1) What are the main tenets of evolutionist theory?

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

2) What are the main tenets of diffusionist theory on identity and transformation?

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

3) What are the main tenets of the Primordialist Theory of identity and transformation?

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

4) What are the main tenets of modernist/constructionist theory of identity and its transformation?

   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What are the main tenets of dialectical theory of identity and its transformation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How, according to J. Handoo, written discourse in India has historically been hegemonic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is the role of Palace Paradigm in Indian culture formation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>What is the main critique of the concept of palace paradigm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do you find any difference between Sanskritization and Westernization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Critically examine the concept of Sanskritization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>