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Article –Title:FOLKLORE AS A SOURCE OF LOCAL HISTORY

Folklore is a study of traditions, legends, myths, ballads and oral history. Every society had enriched so many folklores. The study of folklore is essentially a multidisciplinary study; because folklore is an integral part of the folk life. Anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary studies and linguistics all has to contribute to the study of folklore significantly. Folk literature is the only literature that surpasses the boundaries of time, since it has a live flow of continuity. Folklore today is inscribed with this sense of a break with the past, the very consciousness of a rupture gives it a quality that in its innocence it never new.

Folklore as a major discipline of social science, assumes great significance in the studies of popular culture, particularly the peasant culture. From generation to generation the peasant culture had been transmitted in its own way through colour, sound, ritual motif, song, fable and performance. These forms of transmission of ideas and pattern of culture collectively constitute the folklore of a society. Therefore in any society folklore is a vehicle of culture, tradition and heritage. It deals with the study of a folk

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Folklore can be described as traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practices that are passed on in large part through oral communication and example.² The information thus

transmitted expresses the shared ideas and values of a particular group. British antiquarian William Thomas is generally credited with coining the term "folklore" in 1846.³ As an academic discipline folklore shares methods, and insights with literature, anthropology, art, music, history, linguistics, philosophy, and mythology. Elliott Oring states that folklore is that part of culture that lives happily ever after.⁴ Folkloristic is the academic study of folklore.

Folklore is a part of culture that belongs to and is deeply influenced by the community. The community itself is deeply felt and lived through shared rituals and festivals, shared economic activities, social customs, and through repetition of the word, myth, fable and history. The little tradition that Redfield talk about is rooted in such communities, while the greater tradition is organised and maintained by the state or church, by cycles of trade and commerce, by intellectual and cultural institutions patronised by powerful social and political forces. Robert Redfield and countless other anthropologists and sociologists have been charmed by the harmonious interchange between the little tradition and the great.

Folk or traditional culture is that culture that is maintained and transmitted by word of mouth or by customary practice rather than by written or printed documents.⁵ Folklore expresses the ideas and values of a particular group. It is characteristically passed on orally or by example. It is anonymous, traditional, and follows prescribed formulae.

In oral tradition, information is passed on verbally from one generation to another. This may be transmitted in speech or song and may take the form of folktales, [songs](#), or chants. Because it is conveyed orally, it may change in the retelling and appear in a variety of versions. This is particularly noted in folktales and folksongs. Some American folksongs can be traced back to England or Ireland, brought by immigrants who adapted the lyrics in light of their new surroundings and experiences.⁶

Features

Folk society had its vast expanse on ignorance and its rank superstitions. But it also had a great fund of humane wisdom accumulating over the centuries. Another distinctive feature of folk culture is its profoundly regional character.⁷ The rise of the nation and national culture modifies this regional pattern. When capitalism triumphs and consolidates it replaces folk culture with the commercial popular culture, also known as 'mass culture.' Folklore cannot be studied properly without a just awareness of the folk life enlivening it. Carl Wilhelm von Sydow noted that folklore varies from region to region and suggested that this indicates the communities' adaptation to their own cultural environment.⁸

“All folklore participates in a distinctive, dynamic process. Constant change, variation within a tradition, whether intentional or inadvertent, is viewed here simply as a central fact of existence for folklore, and ...a defining feature that grows out of context, performance, attitude, cultural tastes, and the like.”⁹ Traditions which survive are those which have proved useful and suitable, even in a new environment.¹⁰

Among the most common types of narrative folklore are **folktales** (folk tales). A folktale is a story that forms part of an oral tradition, and does not have a single, identifiable author. The stories are passed down from one generation to the next, and over time become expanded and reshaped with each retelling. Folktales often reflect the values and customs of the culture from which they come. They have been used to teach character traits. The Buddhist story of "The Banyan Deer" illustrates concern for others.¹¹ The Ghanaian folktale "The Hungry Little Boy" teaches respect for the elderly.

Folktales are not connected to a specific time, place, or historical persons. The characters are usually ordinary people. Similar folktales are found in different cultures around the world. In Tamil country the *Ottan Kathai*, *Ramayyan Ammanai*, *Vengala Rajan Kathai* etc. assumed importance and needed to further enquiry and research.¹²

Fairy Tales

Fairy tales involving magical, fantastic or wonderful episodes, characters, events, or symbols. They are often populated by fairies, elves, trolls, dwarfs, giants, and other imaginary creatures. Fairy tales take place in timeless settings, as indicated by the beginning "Once upon a time". The main character is a person who triumphs over difficulties partly through the use of magic. Originally spoken stories, fairy tales became a distinct literary genre in late-seventeenth-century France.¹³ Cinderella is a well-known fairy tale.

Myths and Legends

Myths refer to deities and often concern creation stories. Legends are set in the past and tell of heroes and kings and deeds of valor. They are may be based on real people or actual events. They may also contain lists of succession in ruling houses. In this they function as a sort of verbal historical record. They may also incorporate local tales of ghosts, and buried treasure.¹⁴ Stories about Robin Hood are legends. *The story of Jahangir and Anarkaliis* popular folklore in the former territories of the Mughal Empire.

Folklore can be classified by ethnicity, region, religion, occupation, and many other categories. Folklore can be a reflection and expression of a group's concerns. Ethnic folklore is a significant indicator of a group's traditional values.¹⁵

Indian Folklore

Folklore in the different parts of India is a rich legacy for us. It is unfortunate that the study of the folklore in India is very recent origin. Indian life is characterised by rich heritage of myths, traditions and ballads or folklore. Each caste and community has its root on various traditions and legends. In every society there is a plenty of folklore materials available. Analysis of folkloristic expositions provides the rhythm of life of a particular folk life, which is the base of any artistic contemplation. The language, the proverbs, the idioms, the figures of speech, the symbols, and the images have distinct roots in the folkloristic composition. Even responses, reactions, thoughts and ideologies can trace their distant relations in folkloristic situations.

The folklore of India compasses the folklore of the nation of India and the Indian subcontinent. The subcontinent of India contains a wide diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Given this diversity, it is difficult to generalize widely about the folklore of India as a unit. Hinduism, the religion of the majority of the citizens of India, is a heterogeneous faith whose local manifestations are diverse. Folk religion in Hinduism may explain the rationale behind local religious practices, and contain local myths that explain the existence of local religious customs or the location of temples. These sorts of local variation have a higher status in Hinduism than comparable customs would have in religions such as Christianity or Islam. Some have claimed that the very concept of a "folklore of India" represents a colonial imposition that disparages the Hindu religion..

India possesses a large body of heroic ballads and epic poetry preserved in oral tradition, both in Sanskrit and the various vernacular languages of India. Other noteworthy collections of Indian traditional stories include the *Panchatantra*, a collection of traditional narratives made by Vishnu Sharma in the second century BC. The *Hitopadesha* of Narayana is a collection of anthropomorphic fabliaux, animal fables, in Sanskrit, compiled in the ninth century.

Indian folklorists during the last thirty years have substantially contributed to the study of folklore. Devendra Satyarthi, Krishna Dev Upadyhayaya, Prafulla Dutta Goswami, Kunja Bihari Dash, Ashutosh Bhattacharya and many more senior folklorists have contributed for the study of folklore. But it is during the 1970s that some folklorists studied in US universities and trained up themselves with the modern theories and methods of folklore research and set a new trend of folklore study in India. Especially, south Indian universities advocated for folklore as a discipline in the universities and hundreds of scholars trained up on folklore. AK Ramanujan was the noted folklorist to analyse folklore from Indian context.

Recently scholars such as Chitrasen Pasayat, M. D. Muthukumaraswamy, Vivek Rai, Jawaharlal Handoo, Birendranath Dutta, P. C. Pattanaik, B. Reddy, Sadhana Naithani, P. Subachary, Molly Kaushal, Shyam Sundar Mahapatra, Bhabagrahi Mishra and many new folklorists have contributed in their respective field for shaping folklore study as a strong discipline in representing the people's memory and people's voice. Recently the National Folklore Support Center in Chennai has taken the initiative to promote folklore in public domain and bridging the gap of academic domain and community domain.

Indian folk heroes in Sanskrit epics and history and also in freedom movement are well known to everyone. They have found a place in written literature. But in Indian cultural sub-system, Indian folk heroes are most popular. The castes and tribes of India have maintained their diversities of culture through their language and religion and customs. So in addition to national heroes, regional heroes and local folk and tribal heroes are alive in the collective memory of the people. Let's take examples of the Santals or the Gonds. The Santals have their culture hero "*Beer kherwal*" and "*Bidu Chandan*". Gonds have their folk hero "Chital Singh Chatri". Banjara

folk hero is "*Lakha Banjara*" or "*Raja Isalu*". But not only heroes, the heroines of Indian folklore have also significant contribution in shaping the culture of India.

The scientific study of Indian folklore was slow to begin: early collectors felt far freer to creatively reinterpret source material, and collected their material with a view to the picturesque rather than the representative. Folklorists of India can be broadly divided into three phases. Phase I were the British Administrators who collected the local knowledge and folklore to understand the subjects they want to rule. Next were the missionaries who wanted to acquire the language of the people to recreate their religious literature for evangelical purpose. Third phase was the post independent period in the country where many universities, institutes and individuals started studying the folklore. The purpose was to search the national identity through legends, myths, and epics. In course of time Academic institutions and universities in the country started opening departments on folklore in their respective regions, more in south India to maintain their cultural identity and also maintain language and culture.

Now National Folklore supports Center, Chennai since last ten years has created a space for the new scholars who are pursuing the study of folklore with their commitment. One important breakthrough in the field of folklore is that it is no more confined to the study in the four wall of academic domain; rather, it has again found its space within and among the folk to get their true meaning.

In South India also had so many folklores in connection with the origin of community, society, religion and culture. In Tamilnadu folklore contributed a rich heritage on its history. So many caste groups had different and interesting types of folklores. One of the major caste groups in Tamilnadu were the Nadars. Nadars have a subaltern group of people residing in southern part of India. Like other caste groups of India, Nadars have a caste history *Granda* or text called the

Valankaimalai, equivalent to the *Mahavamsa*. It is written by a sage, Eanathi Nayanar. Eanathi (Enadi) and Nayanar (Nainar) are the epithets for Nadars.¹⁶ This text was written originally in Tamil language relating to the history of Nadars. This text is a historical ballad available even today in the form of palm leaf record and kept in the grand old families of Nadar community

Kerala folklore

The folklore of Kerala includes elements from the traditional lifestyle of the people of Kerala. The traditional beliefs, customs, rituals etc. are reflected in the folk art and songs of Kerala. Kerala has a rich tradition of Folklore.¹⁷ Folklore in this region is a spontaneous expression of human behavior and thoughts. Generally speaking, Folklore could be defined as the lore of the common people who had been marginalized during the reign of feudal Kings. The Keralites have their culture and lore which were mostly part of agricultural. Sowing, planting of grains (seedling), clearing out the weeds, harvests etc. are the different stages of agriculture which have their typical rituals. Numerous songs and performing arts are accompanied with them. *Kanyar Kali, Padayani, Mudi yettu, Malavaiyattam, Theyyam, Kothamooriyattam, Nira, Puthari*, etc. are some of the ritual folklore of Kerala. Kerala could be divided into four cultural areas: Travancore – Cochin, Central Kerala, South Malabar and North Malabar. North Malabar has its own cultural identity.¹⁸ It was under the rule of Kolathiris, the Kings of Kolathunadu, and they codified the rituals, beliefs, taboos and folk performing arts. Even the dates of specific fertility rituals and folk performances were decided by the Kolathiris of which many are continuing even today. The *Theyyam* festivals, even now, are conducted as per the dates once fixed by the King.

The folk arts of Kerala can be broadly classified under two heads:¹⁹ ritualistic and non-ritualistic. Ritualistic folk arts can be further divided into two: devotional and magical.

Devotional folk arts are performed to propitiate a particular God or Goddess. *Theyyam, thira, poothamthira, kanyarkali, kummatti*, etc., are some of them. Forms like *panappattu* and *thottampattu* are composed in the form of songs. In *kolkali, margamkali, daffumuttukkali*, etc., the ritualistic element is not very strong. Magical folk arts seek to win general prosperity for a community or exorcise evil spirits or to beget children. *Gandharvas* and *nagas* are worshipped in order to win these favours. The magical folk arts include *pambinthullal, pooppadathullal, kolamthullal, malayankettu*, etc.

Local history is a branch of the major discipline included in history. In sciences various micro branches developed. In the case of history local history is an important branch. Folklore is the micro level study included folklore as a major factor to the development of local history. Folklore has a rich legacy of every culture. Folklore contributes to the growth of local history of any civilization. Every nation have a rich variety of such legends and myths. India is an ethnological museum of different castes and tribal groups. Consequently India is a treasure house of folklores. Every university has importance to the study of folklore as a separate wing. Kerala have an academy for folklore studies i.e. known as Kerala Folklore Academy situated at Kannur district. We can't neglect the influence of folklore in the study of local history.

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- ¹⁷ M.V.Vishnu Nambuthiri, *op.cit*, p.12
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, Vol.IV, p.54
- ¹⁹ K.K.Kusuman, Ed, *op.cit*, p.208