Indian Folklife

Chennai Conference Special

Folklore as Discourse
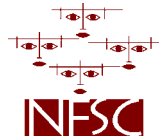
NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) *is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking and publications. The aim of the centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues and folklore advocacy with public programming events. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation.*

CONTENTS

COVER ILLUSTRATION

The performers at the conference, from left to right:
Aparna, Gandhi Arumugam, J. Vaidyanathan,
Bharathi Thirumagan, Muthu Ganesan, Subbu Arumugam,
Premeela Gurumurthy, S. Thirumugan and Akhila.

THIS ISSUE

The focus of this issue of *Indian Folklife* is on the NFSC's conference on Folklore as Discourse, which was held from February 2 – 4, 2004. This conference was organised in collaboration with the Centre for Indian Languages, Mysore, and the Department of Anthropology, University of Madras, Chennai.

All communications should be addressed to:

The Editor, *Indian Folklife*, National Folklore Support Centre, 7, 5th Cross Street, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Velachery, Chennai - 600 042 (India), Tele/Fax: 91-44-22448589 / 22450553, email: info@indianfolklore.org, muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in, nfsc_india@yahoo.co.in

http://www.indianfolklore.org

The Asian Century of Folklore Scholarship: Reflections on the Chennai Conference

Eric Miller

In the 19th century, a good deal of Folklore scholarship around the world was carried out by people of the colonial occupations, especially administrators and missionaries. They perceived and collected folklore as objects (such as stories) and classified these objects into pre-conceived genres (such as folktale, legend, myth, etc.). In the latter part of the 20th century, a group of USA Folklore scholars developed the *performance centred approach to folklore*, which views folklore as a process of communication, and this approach has been applied around the world with excellent results.

Now we have arrived in the 21st century, and a case can be made that this might be the Asian century of Folklore scholarship. Some evidence that might support this supposition can be found in the dialogue that occurred in and around the *Folklore as Discourse* conference that was held in Chennai recently. The current issue of *Indian Folklife* presents this evidence.

What are some factors that might suggest that we might indeed be in the Asian century of Folklore scholarship? Situated between Africa and Oceania, with strong cultural and other links to both of those regions, Asia can be said to be in one of the centres of the developing world. Many traditional forms of performance, and craft production, continue to exist in Asia. Although folkloric processes of communication and community continue to operate wherever people live, in the West most of the traditional folk storytelling and theatre forms long ago were separated from ritual, and vanished. The fact that so much traditional folklore — and oral-centric culture in general — continues to live here in Asia is a great stimulant and advantage for Asian Folklore scholars, who are living in the midst of the activity, and who have the linguistic and other cultural knowledge necessary to investigate it.

Due in part to the wonderful contribution of the Ford Foundation, Indian Folklore scholarship has had especially wide and deep exposure to the *performance centred approach*, and there has been a great deal of communication with members of the generation of USA Folklore scholars which originally developed this approach. People who might not appreciate the Ford Foundation's support of Folklore scholarship in India will be pleased to learn that the Ford Foundation has indicated that it will be reducing the level of this support. The time is coming for Indian Folklore to be more self-supporting, both economically and in other ways, and this is all for the best. For one thing, the case will have to be made to the Indian people that they should increase their support for Indian Folklore scholarship.

The *Folklore, Public Sphere, and Civil Society* symposium that was held in New Delhi in 2002 added a new dimension to Folklore studies. In that symposium, the concept of the *public sphere*, which has been developed by the German social philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, was applied to folklore performance. The *public sphere approach to folklore* looks at the ways folklore performances raise and discuss public issues, and at the interactions between the performers and the societies around them. The *public sphere approach to folklore* is now a vital part of the new Asian Folklore scholarship.

What might be some of the other hallmarks of Asian — and specifically, Indian — Folklore scholarship in this century? Three themes that emerged at the *Folklore as Discourse* conference were: 1) The need to see the data from the points of view of the people who produce it. 2) The need to be open to new paradigms, models, tools, and theories that might emerge in the course of working with local data and social conditions (this might involve adding to and/or modifying already existing theoretical approaches). And, 3) the need to use Folklore scholarship for the benefit of the community that produced the folklore, as well as for the benefit of Indian society as a whole. This might include applying knowledge from folklore (the activity) and Folklore (the discipline in which the activity is studied) to development projects (more about this below). This theme of the social responsibility of the scholar to apply scholarship in practical ways for the benefit of people was very prominent at the conference, and appears repeatedly in the pages that follow, in the transcripts of the post-conference conversations.

***

What might be some practical applications of folklore and Folklore knowledge? As mentioned, in the course

of the conference numerous scholars called for practical applications — but there was little in the way of specific suggestions or proposals. Please permit me to state some ideas regarding this matter here.

As Desmond Kharmawphlang very reasonably points out (on p. 19 of this issue): all sorts of people have used folklore, "but as folklorists, we have the responsibility to just observe it." Yes, we in the Humanities, and especially we Folklore scholars, have been trained that as much as possible we should avoid affecting the people and processes that we are studying, as our modernity might pollute and corrupt the tradition bearers. While this still holds true on certain levels, I believe it is also true that the time has come for intervention. If nothing is done, the people of the earth are in danger of losing their connections to the past, and also to their own humanity. I submit that Folklore scholars need to accept the responsibility to help humanity not only to conserve, but also to help plan, cultures and communities.

Historically, ethical Folklore scholars have, with good reason, been hesitant to participate in social engineering experiments. However, I believe that we now need to develop a section of our discipline that would do precisely this. For even in the remotest villages, even in places where there is no electricity, people all over India are, day and night, listening to cinema songs on FM radios, and on audiocassette and CD players. It is not that there is anything basically wrong with electronic technology such as radio, TV, cinema, video games, and computers: the problem, from a cultural preservation point of view, is that at present the form and content of of these media are being created almost totally outside of the local communities.

Folk theatre, storytelling, and singing forms are endangered because the entire context of life — even rural life — on this planet is changing. The old performance venues and systems of patronage are often no longer in place. The connection of folk performance forms with ritual is often diminishing, in part because the old rituals are often no longer being conducted in the same way.

To survive, the traditional forms of folklore performance need to be transposed into the new world, including into electronic aspects of this new world. This takes a lot of thought, planning, support, experimentation, intelligence, and talent by all concerned. If people are left to their own devices, what we are seeing is that the traditional art forms are tending to be abandoned. In the USA, things are left up to the "marketplace," which is increasingly dominated by a smaller-and-smaller number of larger-and-larger multi-national corporations. There is little support for, or tradition of, scholarly or Government intervention in cultural matters. But India is different. Indian society claims to want to protect its people from an impulsive rush into the soulless oblivion of mass media and materialistic modernity.

The globe is an increasingly small and inter-connected place. Humans are beginning to plan life and culture in our soon-to-exist (and already existing) spaceships and space-stations, and in our soon-to-exist colonies on the moon and on planets other than earth. No one is more qualified to participate in the planning of the cultural environments of these places — as well as of communities on earth — than Folklore scholars, because we observe from the inside how cultures work.

In the words of Roger Abrahams (my primary professor at Penn Folklore, where I am a Ph.D. candidate), culture is composed of the *formulaic use of conventional units* of thought, language, and behaviour. (Links to the texts of ten of Roger Abrahams' early articles in which he discusses this theme can be found at http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/storytelling/RDAarticles.html). Following such principles, we Folklore scholars can help to set up the conditions under which cultures can grow and flourish.

What I am speaking of here is not only social and cultural reform, but also social and cultural creation, design, and engineering: that is, community planning and development — in terms of both physical design and cultural activities — based on folklore principles, activities, and processes. We as Folklore scholars and as citizens of the earth need to help pass on practices by which — and help to create environments in which — authentic cultures can grow. As ridiculous as this may sound, we need to help people to understand what culture is, and we need to help people make culture.

Three keys to avoiding exploitation of folklore are:

1) People should receive training primarily in folklore processes (of production, composition, performance, dialogue, etc.), and only secondarily regarding particular folklore objects (specific stories, motifs, symbols, etc.).

2) People must be allowed generous amounts of free time and space, to digest the larger society's structures and to formulate responses to these structures. Pockets of non-structure need to be incorporated into the design of every structure.

3) Critical voices must be permitted to speak and be heard in public spheres. Healthy cultures are self-correcting: if something even possibly objectionable is going on, someone is likely to bring it up in public performance or discussion, and the group has the opportunity to make corrections. A primary way to improve societies is through inclusion of critical points of view. For the good of all, people must be given the ability to publicly comment upon the leading discourses of a society.

These principles may be difficult for some authorities to accept and accommodate in practical terms, and thus negotiations must occur. Community and cultural design and implementation are best done in teams, including (this is an incomplete list) community members, social

psychologists, engineers, and Government officials. We Folklore scholars should be members of such teams, in which we could help to apply the above-mentioned principles. Folklore scholars have the potential to be invaluable *conflict resolution* facilitators on these teams, as we know and have appreciation for both the language of the folk, and the language of institutions.

How can a community be designed? To begin to answer this question, one must ask: What is a community? What is a neighborhood? How can such things and processes be fostered? Let us not be naïve: such efforts to shape social environments are going on, in both the private and public sectors. To ignore such efforts is to permit them to occur without our participation.

More than ever before, it is time for Folklore scholars to apply their skills to projects in fields such as *education*, *ecological-* and *educational-tourism*, *water management*, *energy production*, and *agriculture* (including *agri-forestry*). There is a need to apply folk knowledge and perspectives, and Folklore scholarship methodologies, to sustainable development projects of all sorts. This would help to ensure that these projects are grounded in the humanity and cultures of the communities, that the present is linked with the past, and that the new technology is linked with humanity. It would also help people to locate themselves, and to develop their individual and community identities, in our rapidly changing world. Cultural conservation and preservation strategies should be applied alongside efforts to protect physical environments. The folk, and scientific engineers share a love for ingenious and economical engineering processes, and once again, Folklore scholars can act as go-betweens to help these two parties to apply their wisdom together.

The folk — whether defined as rural and oral-centric, or in any other way — are not simple. They are often very shrewd and sophisticated about the ways of the world. As such, community members should, as mentioned above, be playing real, active, decision-making roles in community design processes. Culture does not just happen by itself. There are many internal and external factors that may shape and influence the development of a local culture, and people in that local community should be having a large and conscious say regarding this matter.

Fields such as the design of public space, and urban design, are eminently respectable. These fields involve the study of social psychology. Thus, however, they are possibly related to the potentially scary field of behavioural psychology, and to the less-than-respectable fields of brainwashing, propaganda, and manipulative cultural programming. The dangers of these abuses are there, and we as Folklore scholars also have the responsibility to train people to be able to immediately recognise the appearance of such practices.

***

Speaking of designing communities and cultures: As the topic of the conference involved discourse, it was only natural that at times the participant scholars would turn their analytic gaze on themselves, and consider their own methods of discourse.

"Please don't let this turn into a conversation!," said one very well-meaning moderator to two speakers during an end-of-panel discussion period. And I thought, "Why in the world not?! Good public conversation is precisely what we need at a conference!" Spontaneous comments, follow-up statements, and unfettered dialogue should be allowed during defined sections of the proceedings. However, good public conversation requires of its participants a great deal of ongoing self-discipline and concern for the good of the group. People must take care to limit themselves appropriately, to speak in ways that will be interesting to all, and to seek to hear the voices of the quieter people present. It is my firm belief that generally people have the maturity to do these things in public, given the proper context.

A standard practice at academic conferences is to allow thirty minutes per presenter, with three presenters on a panel. Typically, twenty minutes is allocated for the reading of the paper (or the giving of the talk), and ten minutes is allocated for discussion. Sometimes the scheduled ten-minute discussion periods are held after each paper, sometimes they are held together after all three papers have been presented, and sometimes there is a combination of these approaches.

The problem is that twenty minutes is invariably not enough time to read an entire paper, and we as an academic community need to really face this fact and find solutions. Because what happens at present is that people invariably go overtime in reading their papers, leaving little or no time for discussion — and making the final presenter on the panel very nervous! The number one complaint I have heard from fellow scholars regarding conferences in general is that there was not enough time for discussion, for the material to be digested by the group. I suggest that we as an academic community need to change the paradigm, from seeing discussion as an expendable extra, to seeing it as the central thing that needs to happen in a panel session.

Scholars often arrive at conferences with two different objectives in mind: 1) to present a paper that will be published, and 2) to initiate and lead a good discussion. The trick is to devise ways of achieving both of these objects at once. To this end, there have been numerous experiments in shaping and structuring discourse at academic conferences.

One way to make conference sessions more interactive is for the papers to be available for reading in advance. Then, during the conference session, only an abstract is read, and discussion can ensue. Another approach might

be for the presenting scholar to read a brief statement (say, two minutes or less), and then lead a discussion about this statement. This statement-and-discussion process could be repeated five or six (or any other number) of times in the course of a thirty-minute session. In the case of this practice, the paper for publication would be submitted separately.

The subject of how we communicate — how we convey information and relate to each other — at conferences is a very important one. The form of our communication comes to affect the content of our communication, as well as our entire worldviews. Moreover, at academic meetings, as at all social gatherings, people are constantly creating society and culture anew, and in so doing we are perpetuating certain social practices and structures, omitting others, and inventing others. We need to very consciously and seriously take responsibility for this act of social creation , as there are always consequences as a result of what is created.

***

As I write this editorial in Chennai, on the other side of the globe the Folklore Program of the University of Pennsylvania (also known as, Penn Folklore), in which I am a Ph.D. candidate, is holding its 40th anniversary conference. M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, the Director of India's National Folklore Support Centre, is giving the conference keynote address. Before he left for this trip, I had the chance to ask M.D. Muthukumaraswamy about his thoughts relating to the work of the National Folklore Support Centre.

He spoke of the metaphor of the coffeehouse, a place where citizens can go to discuss public issues and develop public opinion. He said he had come to realize that there are a multitude of public spheres, and spheres that are combinations of public and private. He expressed his fondness for the discipline of Folklore, saying that it does not reduce things to abstractions, but rather that it pays attention to multiple versions of things in multiple contexts.

He noted that the New Delhi symposium (in 2002) had looked at the interactions between folklore performances and the societies around them. An output of that event had been the realisation that there was further need to study the internal processes of the performances themselves, and this was the purpose of the Chennai conference. (In a symposium, the emphasis is on discussion; in a conference, the emphasis is on the presentation and consideration of papers.)

He mentioned that two other scholarly gatherings organized by the NFSC (and others) in recent years have concerned 1) documenting and archiving folklore practices; and, 2) ways of presenting folklore to the public in exhibitions and workshops. It struck me that in a small number of years, the NFSC has done a very thorough and brilliant job of investigating many aspects of the Folklore scholarship process.

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy expressed the desire to take folklore documentation back to the communities that created the folklore, and to discuss both the folklore and the documentation practices with the folk artists, and in this way help to build up the cultures being studied. He is interested in the question of how to put recording, archiving, and communication technologies at the service of folklore communities.

He also mentioned that the NFSC is planning to offer two courses in Chennai: one regarding video-making and other methods of documenting folklore; and the other regarding uses of folklore in education (this course would be designed especially for teachers, and would be held on weekends). Interested parties are encouraged to contact the NFSC regarding these courses.

It has been an incredible honour to guest-edit this issue of *Indian Folklife*, and I hope I have begun to do justice to the task. My thanks beyond words to M.D. Muthukumaraswamy for enabling me to have this experience.

A final note: The term, *context*, is used a good deal in the following pages, and I would like to add the clarification that two kinds of context are: the *event context*, and the *socio-historical context*. The *event context* is composed of all the aesthetic things that occur during an event, including the interactions between participants; whereas the *socio-historical context* concerns all of the practices of the society, both in the present and in the past. Just as other disciplines can benefit from adopting Folklore methodologies — such as observing and documenting the mechanics of practices of production and performance, and discussing these processes with the doers of them — so Folklore work is always enriched by thorough historical and sociological research.

National Conference on
"Folklore as Discourse"

We are inviting faculty, scholars, and students to participate in the conference to address the various issues of folklore. The formal description of sets of words beyond the level of the sentence is known by the word 'discourse' in modern linguistics. Although it has been a subject of traditional rhetoric also it is difficult to give a single definition of discourse analysis as a research method. Indeed, numerous "types" of analyses ranging from Derrida's deconstruction to Foucault's genealogy are grouped under the rubric of 'discourse analysis'. However the contribution of the post-modern discourse analysis is the application of critical thought to social situations and the unveiling of hidden politics within the socially dominant as well as all other discourses. Given such contribution, discourse analysis is meant to provide a higher awareness of the hidden motivations in others and ourselves by making us ask ontological and epistemological questions.

With this background on discourse analysis when folklore (both the material and the discipline) is seen as a discourse it immediately brings to focus the general frame of understanding of the material on the one hand and the intellectual foundations of the discipline on the other. By focusing on folklore as discourse the conference seeks to address the following questions:

- What is the status of folklore as discourse in the changing world?

- What are all the epistemological breaks that have occurred in India in understanding the discourses of folklore?

- How exactly the relationship between orality and literacy gets defined through the uses of folklore discourses?

- How do the underlying concepts of tradition, ethnicity, authenticity, individuality, creativity and folk determine the course of folklore discourse?

- How do genre specific qualities, say the qualities of verbal arts contribute to the understanding of folklore as discourse?

- What are the processes by which folklore becomes the enveloping phenomena of other forms, say, Indian cinema?

- How does the understanding of performances, legends, spaces and specific societal and historical phenomena as discourses contribute towards the development of general theory of Indian culture?

While the above list exemplifies the directions the conference can help to define, it no way constrains the emergence of new thinking in the discipline.

Hopefully this conference will become a pace setter in defining or changing the course of the discipline of folklore.

In addition to the stated objectives the conference, the gathering of the scholars for three days would greatly facilitate to do the preliminary work towards the preparation of a directory of Indian folklore scholars. This may be treated as one of the supplementary goals of the conference.

The National Folklore Support Centre will stand committed to the publication of the papers presented in the conference in collaboration with the participating institutions.

National Conference on
"Folklore as Discourse"

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE
February 2 – 4, 2004

Monday, February 2

Inaugural Session

WELCOME ADDRESS: Prof. V. Sudarsen,
Professor and Head,
Department of Anthropology,
University of Madras, Chennai

INTRODUCTION: Prof. J.C. Sharma,
Professor cum Deputy Director
Central Institute of Indian
Languages, Mysore

INAUGURAL ADDRESS: His Excellency
Mr. Sumith Nakandala
*Deputy High Commissioner of
Sri Lanka*, Chennai

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Prof. Jawaharlal Handoo,
President,
Indian Folklore Congress,
Mysore

VOTE OF THANKS: Prof. M.D. Muthukumaraswamy,
Director,
National Folklore Support Centre,
Chennai

Session 1:

FOLKLORE AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

V. Sudarsen
Chairperson

Jawaharlal Handoo
The Palace Paradigm and Historical Discourse

Arupjyoti Saikia
*Literary History, Orality, and Discourses of Madness:
A Note on the Social History of Assam*

Sadhana Naithani
Colonial Hegemony and Oral Discourse

Session 2:

DISCOURSE OF FOLKLORE THE DISCIPLINE

Guru Rao Bapat
Chairperson

Peter Claus
*Far and Near:
The Advantages of Studying Folklore as Discourse*

K.M. Chandar
Critical Regionalism and Contemporary Discourse

Session 3:

DISCOURSE OF DANCE, MUSIC AND FESTIVAL

Saugata Bhaduri
Chairperson

Molly Kaushal
Ritual Spectacle and Enactment of the Self

Premeela Gurumurthy
Musical Components in Discourse

Venugopalan Nair
Jagor as a Discourse: Past, Present and Future

**Music and Dance Performances by Students
of the Department of Indian Music,
University of Madras**

Tuesday, February 3

Session 4:

DISCOURSE OF LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Sadhana Naithani
Chairperson

Chandan Kumar Sharma
Geneology Contested:
Oral Discourse and Identity Construction

Vanishri S.P.
Folklore as Linguistic Discourse

Desmond Kharmawphlang
Poetry, Lore, and Language: The Khasi Phawar Tradition

Session 5:

DISCOURSE OF LEGEND AND MYTH

Peter Claus
Chairperson

Kishore Bhattacharjee
The Legend, Popular Discourse, and Local Community:
The Case of Assamese Legends

Laltluangliana Khiangte
Discourse in Oral Society of the Mizos

Pulikonda Subbachary
Caste Myth: A Multi Voice Discourse

Session 6:

FOLKLORE AND THE DISCOURSE OF GENDER

Deborah Thiyagarajan
Chairperson

Lalita Handoo
Discourse of Gender: Power and Practice

Subbalaxmi Das
Gender Biases in Vrata Katha: A Study

Eric Miller
Public Presentation of Folklore:
Politics of Technology, Culture, and Discourse

Session 7:

DISCOURSE OF FOLK THEATRE AND DRAMA

J.C. Sharma
Chairperson

Guru Rao Bapat
Performance as Discourse

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy
Discourse of a Blurred Genre:
The Case of Draupadi Kuravanchi Koothu

D.R. Purohit
Folk Theatre of Garhwal:
Formulating a Dramatic Discourse

Demonstration of Three Storytelling Traditions
A Story from *Mahabharatha:*
"Karna Moksham"
("Karna Attaining Salvation")

Harikatha
Premeela Gurumurthy

Villupattu
Subbu Arumugam

Therukoothu Kathakalaksepam
Muthu Ganesan

Wednesday, February 4

Session 8:

DISCOURSE OF IDEOLOGY, RELIGION, AND WORLDVIEW

Molly Kaushal
Chairperson

Nirmal Selvamony
Kalam as Heterotopia

Saugata Bhaduri
The Ideology of Discourse in the Folk Sacred Space

Raghavan Payyanad
Religion, Native and Alien: Interaction, Assimilation,
and Annihilation — A Study Based on Worldview

Session 9:

DISCOURSE OF PRINT, ADVERTISING, AND CINEMA

Kishore Bhattacharjee
Chairperson

V. Bharathi Harishankar
Interstitial Discourses: A Case Study of
Printed Single Sheet Material in Tamilnadu

Theodore Baskaran
The Discourse on Tamil Cinema

G. Sandhya Nayak and J.C. Sharma
Advertising as a Folk Discourse

Panel Discussion
Preliminary work towards the preparation
of a directory of Indian Folklore scholars

Valedictory

All of the presentations were centred on the conference concept of Folklore as Discourse. Excerpts from the presentations are presented here…

Jawaharlal Handoo: The paradigm of thinking, writing, and perpetuating *history* is essentially a powerful civilising discourse based on the stories of kings, and more often than not, on the exaggerated or false stories of kings and their palace surroundings. I call this the "palace paradigm." It has misled many generations the world over, and has blurred the story — the real story — of humankind, and has helped the hegemony of power politics and domination.

Arupjyoti Saikia: Scholarship on colonial psychiatry opens a new and important window, revealing a great deal about what psychiatric practitioners, judges, police, families, and neighbors considered *pathological* in the colonial context, thereby shedding light on the *normal* as well.

Peter Claus: Excessive professionalism in scholarship — which encourages the distancing theories of the social sciences — entails an elitist irrelevance and rapidly diminishing understanding of precisely what one wants to know.

Sadhana Naithani: Colonialism generated space for many kinds of new oral discourses: the colonisers talking about the colonised (which is largely known and studied), and the colonised talking about the colonisers. The latter area of research remains almost untouched.

K.M. Chandar: Five essential attitudes of Critical Regionalism are love of: 1) Place, 2) Nature, 3) History, 4) Craft, 5) Limits. The emphasis is on establishing a meaningful dialogue, a synthesis, between one's tradition and innovation, the specific and the universal, the transitory and the enduring.

Molly Kaushal: The symbols and images that are displayed in the public domains of traditional societies are used to legitimate authority. My goal here is to explore the cultural spaces generated by folklore in a number of instances to see how, if at all, numerous distinct voices are permitted to articulate separate and possibly conflicting aspirations in these domains.

Venugopalan Nair: *Jagar* refers to a night-long performance, an ardent vigil to commemmorate and worship the village protector who is believed to invoke countless blessings on the people of the village. Performed in the *mand* (an open space in the village, which through traditional use has become sanctified), *Jagar* is accompanied by the indigenous musical instrument, *ghumat*, a semi-circular earthen vessal, the front of which is covered with lizard skin, the back of which is open.

Premeela Gurumurthy: The *Kirtan* (the Marathi term for *Harikatha*) was very entertaining, featuring many lilting tunes along with histrionic presentation of various characters in the story, which was given prime importance. The philosophical and *upanishadic* focus became somewhat diluted with the music and the humorous anecdotes, thus enabling the *Kirtan* to become a popular entertainment which could appeal to a larger and less learned audience.

Chandan Kumar Sharma: History writing is a construction created from the vantage point of the present. The socio-political environment of the present plays a vital role in determining the 'history' of a particular people, leading to different and contested discourses.

Vanishri, S.P.: The study of discourse has developed in Anthropology, Folklore, Sociology, Linguistics, (Social) Psychology, and other disciplines. Thus, *discourse analysis* takes different theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches, such as *speech act theory*, *interactional sociolinguistics*, *ethnography of communication*, *pragmatics*, *conversation analysis*, and *variation analysis*. All of these approaches view language in the context of social interaction.

Desmond Kharmawphlang: The Khasi form of storytelling known as *phawar* is often performed at festivals, workplaces and other gathering places, hunting and fishing expeditions, and during participation in games and archery. The *phawar* master is acutely aware of the effect he has on audience members, and responds with enthusiasm to their reactions, especially in contests. This performer/audience interaction provides scope for the development of call-and-response, or leader-choral antiphony, which is the most salient feature of the *phawar* tradition.

Kishore Bhattacharjee: The major concern of legends is the construction of the history of locality and local geography, public places, and the lives of saints. The plots of legends tend to be simpler than those of folktales and myths. Members of local communities spin these stories to glorify their places, and to communicate local identities and worldviews. The mythological elements in legend discourse are used for negotiation with the dominant discourses.

Laltluangliana Khiagte: The most memorable personality in the world of Mizo folk literature would naturally be the great Chhurbura, the unchallenged hero of Mizo folktales. There is a great paradox in his character. He can be considered to be the silliest of all simpletons. At the same time, he can also be considered to be the cleverest of all wise men, as all of his actions and behaviour by which he was considered foolish were, in fact, due to his abiding love and affection for his elder brother, Nahaia, who happened to be one of the laziest of all men.

Pulikonda Subbachary: A caste myth, or *kulapurana*, is basically a folk narrative. In the eyes of the people whose caste's origin, identity, and status is discussed in a *kulapurana*, this narrative is sacred, as it tells the story of their caste originators, heroes, and deities.

Lalita Handoo: A discourse is a system that determines the production of knowledge and the distribution of power. A society's *gender discourse* becomes a ritualized practice of ideology that shapes the natures of both men and women, and defines their relationships to each other and to their surroundings.

Subbalaxmi Das: We find that mostly women are supposed to keep *vratas* [a ritual involving fasting and storytelling] for the prosperity and long life of the husband, children, and other members of the family. But husbands, sons, and other males in the family seem to rarely observe *vratas* for the longevity of their female relatives.

Saugata Bhaduri: Three areas in which the *vrata katha* narratives challenge normative gender, class, and caste assumptions are: 1) gods and goddesses are anthropomorphized, often to the extent that their divinity itself is jeopardized; 2) rituals and practices that are animistic in nature are presented; and 3) the possibility of Hindism-Muslim syncretism is shown.

Guru Rao Bapat: In India today, many performance traditions — and the discourses that they project — are undergoing radical changes. These changes have to be understood in the context of the fast-changing Indian society as a whole.

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy: In the storyteller's art, the thin membrane separating fiction and reality breaks many a time, assisting the audience to traverse through both realms.

Nirmal Selvamony: A *kalam* is a geometrically designed space associated with various activities, such as worship, fortune telling, acting and dancing, combat, and threshing. It is not on raised ground, but rather is marked off by a diagrammatic figure. It is the prototypical dramatic stage of antiquity.

Eric Miller: The very people who should be here, who should be taking an active part in the centre of these deliberations and explaining many things to us, are not here: I am speaking of the grandmothers who live in small villages, a kilometre or two away from the main road.

Raghavan Payyanad: In *Teyyam* worship, man is completely submissive before the power of God and tries to appease it by several means, including by singing praises. God is pleased by the praise, and arrangements are made for its appearance on a divine stool. Later, it transfers into the body of the performer through rice, fire, and sword. In the end of the ritual, it returns to the divine stool and disappears.

V. Bharathi Harishankar: In studying the use of printed single sheets — including invitations and greetings, drama and movie notices, and pamphlets — in Tamil Nadu during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one finds that their publication by individuals for personal/commercial uses displaces numerous binaries, including: technology vs. tradition, high vs. low culture, print vs. orality, public vs. private spheres, and coloniser vs. colonised. One binary does not replace the other, but instead there is a negotiation between the binaries.

Theodore Baskaran: The questions I would like to raise are: How was the new art form of cinema received in Tamil Nadu? What were the responses of writers? In other words, what was the nature of the discourse that followed, and how did that discourse affect the development of cinema, and of cinema appreciation? I would like to argue that the nature of a cinema is in part shaped by such a discourse, and that the filmmakers themselves are not the only people who can be held responsible for the quality of what the tradition produces.

G. Sandhya Nayak: The resurgence in interest in preserving and celebrating ethnic and linguistic identities, traditions, and histories has resulted in a close link between mass culture, advertising, and folklore in India.

Observations

Molly Kaushal, *Associate Professor, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi.* <mollykausal@yahoo.com>

V. Bharathi Harishankar, *Dept. of English, University of Madras, Chennai.* <haribharathi@vsnl.net>

Premeela Gurumurthy, *Professor and Head, Dept. of Indian Music, University of Madras, Chennai.* <guruprema@vsnl.net>

Sadhana Naithani, *Centre of German Studies, School of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.* <sadhanan@email.inu.ac.in>, <sanaith@hotmail.com>

Kaushal: First of all, I would like to thank the National Folklore Support Centre and Muthukumaraswamy for inviting me over. For me it has been a continuation of the dialogue we began in New Delhi at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts at last year's symposium on *Folklore, the Public Sphere, and Civil Society*. There also folklore was appearing as a discourse of a certain kind, and what I have experienced in these past three days makes me think of the linkages and the continuity between the two conferences. Definitely what emerges here is that folklore is a specific kind of discourse, and that this discourse needs to be investigated on its own terms. Probably we do need to develop new paradigms in order to understand this discourse in its context.

There was lot of information pouring in, a lot of new ethnographic materials, and a lot of interesting discussions were taking place. What kept emerging was

that — even when we were talking of this discourse in terms of alternate discourses, and in terms of discourses of different competing voices — there is a strong tendency for negotiation of space by the different communities, caste groups, or competing ideologies involved. So, rather than looking for some exclusive space, the effort seems to be to find one's own place within the broader framework of the general community.

And then if we move out from there we found, in Bharathi's paper, a mention of negotiation between modernity and tradition. And emerging new forms — when you talk about advertisements, those are emerging new forms. I also think that whether one is talking of colonial or post-colonial interpretations, we need to discuss the whole construct of Folklore as a discipline, and categories such as folk, tribe, orality, textual — these are constructs and they have their own socio-political and historical baggage, some of which is very much rooted in the ways practitioners of colonial methodologies were creating new disciplines as they were encountering cultures outside their own countries — and maybe even within their own countries — that seemed involved with different levels of discourse than what industrialization was engaged in.

Probably at some level there is a need for us to unlearn our categories of discourse. And, as was very well put by Prof. Peter Claus, there is also the need to go nearer to the discourses of the communities that we are discussing. We should be aware of academic agendas and discourses, and of the discourses in and around particular disciplines, be they Folklore or Anthropology or Cultural Studies and so on. Whether it is structuralism or psychoanalysis or post-colonialism, intellectual frameworks tend to remove us from those who are practicing the tradition. While deconstructing and decoding folklore events, we must take care to keep sight both of the empirical data and of local community members' ways of looking at that data.

These are some of the very fundamental issues that this conference has thrown open. Hopefully we will continue to engage in this discussion, and eventually arrive at some better understandings of the discourses of the communities with which we are engaged, as well as of our own discourses.

Harishankar: I came to this conference from a different perspective: that of a literary theorist. During these days of deliberations, one thing that became clear to me is that we should look into those inter-disciplinary nuances that can provide better insights into the specificities. Another point that interested me is that even though we had multiple voices, they were still mostly talking from one end of a binary or the other. My commitment — both in terms of theory, and in terms of the way I look at folklore — is to an interstitial position. This doesn't mean that I am avoiding commitment to any one binary, but

rather that I am focusing more on the 'how' of things. If we juxtapose, rather than oppose, polarities we can learn a great deal. This is an approach that I would like to see much more of at such gatherings and meetings.

I have been working for some time now on cross-cultural influences. This has involved my personal engagement with native peoples of Canada, the Mauritius islands, Australia, and New Zealand. While some similarities are emerging, the differences are equally drastic. Thus, it may be a good idea to include discussion of more cross-cultural approaches to folklore in the near future. But overall it has been one of the most rewarding conferences that I have attended in recent times.

Gurumurthy: Initially I should thank Muthukumaraswamy, Professor Sudersen, and Eric Miller for inviting me to read a paper on *Katha Kalaksheba*, also known as *Harikatha*. This is a form of religious discourse, and can also be considered a form of storytelling. I became acquainted with the term, discourse, when I first started working for my Ph.D. on *Katha Kalaksheba*. Discourse is understood differently in various contexts, and it was good to hear about this at the conference.

On the second night of the conference, I gave a brief demonstration of *Katha Kalaksheba*. Demonstrations of two other storytelling traditions — *Villupattu* and *Therukoothu Kathakalaksepam* — were also on the programme, and this gave me the opportunity to see some of the differences between these various genres, and how the story is depicted in the various styles.

It was also very interesting to hear about other cultural styles of story narration, which are available in states like Assam. And also, about other ways of approaching the epics. Many traditions are trying to interpret the heroes and incidents of epics in different contexts, although some traditions are not open to critical comments in certain areas. This has made me more aware of the importance of anthropological and other points of view, regarding both the study of oral folklore, and of traditions that involve written texts.

In general, I felt that there could have been a little more time for discussion. Because, after all, we are coming here to take part, not just to listen. So I felt that sometimes you can just read the synopsis aloud and then open everything for discussion. That's what we did recently in one of our seminars in the Department of Indian Music. We already had the papers, so people could read them in advance. We need time to digest the information — there is so much coming up.

One point I want to put forth pertains to what Mr. Theodore Baskaran was saying yesterday about research regarding Tamil films. Anuradha Sriram was one of our students. She went to Wesleyan University, and there she has worked on Ilayaraja's *Mannan*. She took it up there. So you see, the American universities are giving equal importance to the areas of film and classical music. I also have started to guide students to give equal importance to film music, and one of my students from Kerala, she worked on Devarajan as a music director in Malayalam films. So, we have to have an open mind — every aspect of culture has to be viewed in the context of the whole.

Another point was that traditional themes in *Harikatha* were also presented in dramas, and in the early films. *Srinivasa Kalyanam* is one theme which came as a film also. So, the technology and contexts have been advancing, but aspects of the texts remain the same. I would like to point out that Carnatic musicians have contributed a great deal to the film field, especially in the early days of the film medium. For example, in 1932 my father-in-law, who was a Carnatic musician, acted in the film, *Seetha Kalyanam*.

So, in these ways these sessions were very useful, and I hope we will all be interacting more in the future. We would like our students — they also performed here yesterday — to understand and appreciate, and really feel the importance of folklore.

Naithani: The seminar was good. It was very heartening to see that there are so many scholars, especially younger scholars, in the country who are working on folklore as defined traditionally and also in post-modern terms. Folklore has been defined for the last 200 years across the world, and it continues to be defined and redefined today. I think its definitions will always remain important, because they have political implications. Because the moment we are talking about folklore, we are talking about the folk — we are talking about majority populations in any given cultural zone. And folklore as discourse is an important subject. In the context of our own country it is especially so, in reference to the widespread orality and oral cultural expression, as well as to the problem of illiteracy.

Conversation 1: Folklore and Development

Raghavan Payyanad, *Coordinator, Centre for Folklore Studies, University of Calicut, Kerala.*
<calicutfsfp@rediffmail.com>

R. Venugopal Nair, *Lecturer, Dept. of History, Goa University.*
<venugopalan_2000@rediffmail.com>

Guru Rao Bapat, *Principal, L.B. and S.B.S. College, Sagar, Karnataka.*

Pulikonda Subbachary, *Professor and Head, Dept. of Folklore and Tribal Studies, Dravidian University, Kuppam, Andhra Pradesh.*
<psubbachary@yahoo.com>

Subbachary: Generally, how are you looking at this issue, folklore as discourse? You mentioned in your paper that a lot of confusion has been created in the name of discourse. Everything is brought under the subject. So, how would you limit the meaning of the word, discourse, in this context?

Bapat: To begin with, the word, discourse, is being used in several disciplines, not only in Folklore. And in each discipline it is used with a slightly different meaning. Particularly now when we come to folklore, the question of discourse becomes important because, in the first phase, folklore items were collected. In those days we had a romantic notion of folklore, but now we realize that folklore also has a very fundamental contemporary relevance, not merely to our cultural self, but also as a political force, as a social force, especially in regard to its potential for helping to correct the imbalance between the subjugator and the subjugated, between those who

rule and the vast mass of our society which has been suppressed. I see folklore as one of the ways by which this subjugation can be delineated, confronted, and even possibly alleviated. The worldview and native wisdom of a vast section of our society manifests itself in folklore. I believe this should be the main thrust of how one looks at folklore as a discourse: that it is a discourse of the suppressed, the weak, the oppressed. Sometimes very clearly and sometimes in very symbolic terms, folklore discourse subverts the official discourse, or at least comments upon it. These are the ways in which many communities have learned to live.

It is a very healthy development that Folklore is becoming inter-disciplinary. There was time when only students in Literature and Linguistics used to participate along with self-identified folklorists. Now, it is becoming more open, and people from disciplines such as History and Sociology are also participating. In all of these disciplines there are similar questions, for which answers can be found only in the study of folk-systems. Ultimately, the aim of all of these disciplines is the betterment of society.

Subbachary: In recent times, we have begun looking at folklore as an ongoing process in a live event. Now we are also calling this process a discourse. How do you feel about this concept?

Payyanad: There is a lot to it. A performance is also a discourse between two generations — that part we never considered here. Another point I would like to make is that most of the papers referred to oral discourse: we did not give very much attention to pictures, dramas, music, dance, gesture, and so on. If an activity communicates, if it transfers a message from one person to another, it is a type of discourse.

Subbachary: Many scholars want to give importance to texts. They think in terms of analyzing texts under the term, discourse analysis. What does this have to do with the whole gamut of folklore activity that you mentioned just now? And what about ritual? How do you look at a ritual as a text? It seems that now–a–days, in modern Folklore theories, it is said that a text need not be literary: they are looking at entire social events as texts.

Payyanad: Yes, the term, text — just like, discourse — is being defined by different disciplines in different ways. Literate people are so dominant in many areas, and to many of them, only a piece of literature can be called a text. But in folklore this is not true. Because, as you know, in folklore, the spoken words occur within a context. Whatever we get in the context — gesture, movement, interaction between people, everything — all of this discourse is part of the text. That is the definition of text as far as folklore is concerned.

Subbachary: Our senior folklorist has stated that discourse analysis should help with the development of our society. How do you react to this comment?

Nair: Actually, in my paper I have sided with this notion. Rather than bringing up pure theoretical frameworks, I have argued that we should look at things from the people's points of view — or at least, that we should present and discuss those points of view.

The authors who created the theoretical notions had certain social conditions which prompted them to think and write in that way. Our condition is totally different. For one thing, we have a condition of ruralism. For us philosophy is different. The meaning, the function of philosophy is different from what it is the West.

So, in this way I have always had the feeling that we should not be looking at folk discourse from a merely theoretical point of view. We should look at it differently. Let the people of a community speak and say whatever they want, and let their voices be heard. And in this there is a big problem, as Dr. Payyanad has pointed out: "Where do I locate myself?" As an author I have to locate myself somewhere. This is a problem I have been trying to analyze in my paper, and at this conference.

Bapat: For too long — at least for the last twenty years — Western theoretical models have dominated our minds so deeply that perhaps we have not asked certain salient questions. To what extent are these theories really relevant in the Indian context? Can we apply them wholly? Or do we need to make certain changes or additions? I think the time has come for Indian folklorists to get out of this straight-jacket of Western models. Because the situation in India, the kind of tensions in which we operate, the kind of problems that Indian society faces — our traditions, our modernity, our caste system — all of these are very different from conditions in the West, which is where these models emerged. So I think it is high time now that Indian folklorists should think of things in different terms. In my paper I have given just one or two hints in trying to evolve certain theoretical positions from the performers themselves, the kind of concepts that they make use of. But can we term such concepts as theoretical postulates?

Nair: That approach itself is a theoretical postulate.

Subbachary: Discourse analysis is a meaning-making process. A scholar deciphers a discourse and brings out a meaning from it. He says what he thinks it means — that is his meaning. Then, you need to look at the issue of subjectivity — the socio-cultural background of the scholar. For example, when I am analyzing a caste myth and discussing its meaning, my social background is bound to affect my theoretical and social concepts. Should the scholar's point of view be the dominant voice in the discussion?

Bapat: No doubt the scholar has a major role to play, but what should it be? I think the real makers of the meaning are the people who participate in the folk performance. The performers as well as the spectators — together they are the folk. Whether it is the telling of a folktale, the performing of a ritual, any kind of folk item — they continue doing it only because they find it meaningful. Otherwise they wouldn't be doing it. So I think the task of the folklorist is to humbly try to find out what the meaning is according to the participants of the folk item, instead of trying to impose our meanings on it. But sometimes scholars have the ego or the pride to decide, "I am the meaning-maker."

Payyanad: We are in an international social-political situation. We are loaded down with all these canons. And then we have this idea of development. What is development? We are for the development. Our country is for development. So it is easy to go away from what we have inherited from the West and make our own approaches. Only if we make such a decision confidently can we change this academic system, this knowledge-creating system, this knowledge industry. Whom is knowledge for? What is it for? These are the questions we need to ask and answer.

Bapat: I think that as a nation, we should grow confident enough to say that we will create positions which are more relevant to us. We may not succeed in the beginning, we may not be heard in the West, but I think that if we, as a scholarly community and as a nation, are strong enough, we can make ourselves heard.

Payyanad: No. We are instruments in the hands of a political system. What they suggest, what they request, we do. That is all academicians can do. When we prepare the syllabus, the syllabus is coming from this sector. Everything is by this. We are accepting even globalization. So what we are discussing is a political issue also, and not just a purely academic one.

Subbachary: Regarding developing our own theoretical models: Do you think that our Indian *Shasthras* might be helpful in analyzing some folklore genres?

Bapat: In the *Kavya Sasthra* there are certain methods to understand the meaning. Let us say, *Lakshya Sasthra*, and *Avidha Lakshya*. But when we make use of either the Western paradigms, or paradigms taken from Sanskrit critical cannons, particularly in the South Indian context, we find that all of these cultures are in a kind of a tension, a kind of a give–and–take, love–and–hate, relationship. Anyway, we should try to find the meanings of folk activities from within the community itself. The task of the folklorist is to find out what needs the folklore item is fulfilling in a community.

Payyanad: Aesthetic needs.

Bapat: Yes. And ritualistic needs.

Payyanad: They have their own measurements. When a performance or a performer is considered amazing by people, people have their own idea and criteria for that. You have to discover that criteria and apply it accordingly.

Subbachary: Just now we were hearing that some Folklore departments are in crisis in some other countries. In the

Third World countries, new Folklore departments are coming in, whereas the established Folklore departments in the developed countries are not receiving funds. How do you look at the future of the Folklore discipline in India, and around the world?

Payyanad: We in India are always behind. After twenty-five or thirty more years, our departments may also be in danger. When we reach the level of those people, the same thing might happen in India also. The other thing is that now in the world everything has to have financial potential. So, subjects that have no financial potential will be discarded.

Subbachary: But the question of financial potentiality is applicable to every Humanities discipline.

Payyanad: Yes. And look at what is happening to most Linguistics departments. Then, Philosophy.

Subbachary: Regarding Folklore, there is a difference between the context which is there in the developed countries and in India. In America, they may not have enough material for their studies in their own country. In Finland, no road singer is living. But India is still rich in folk traditions. So, don't you think there is a lot of scope, there are a lot of chances for survival of Folklore departments in India in contrast to West?

Payyanad: If our nation defines what is our nation's objectives, and defines the development — then only disciplines that fit within that development can sustain.

Bapat: Folklore studies are also political statements. Within India, you will find that Folklore departments are very strong only in certain regions — for example, in the South, in the Northeast, in the regions which try to define themselves as different from what may be called the mainland of India, the Aryan–Brahmanical belt. You will find that folklore is a strong assertion of these other region's identities — identities that are different from the pan-Indian identity that is being projected by some people. It seems that Folklore departments are not very strong in any of the Hindi-speaking states.

Subbachary: Do you see any kind of threat to Indian folklore, or Folklore studies, by Western patronization?

Bapat: Just now I spoke of Indian political statements. Western patronization is an international political statement. If we believe international funding agencies are innocently providing for the survival of a discipline, that will be too naïve. A variety of factors are involved. But even before the Ford Foundation arrived, Folklore as an academic discipline was the pursuit of certain committed scholars who have developed very strongly, especially in South India.

Payyanad: And Bengal.

Subbachary: The discipline of Folklore is looked down upon by some people in the other social sciences. You are from History. Some anthropologists do not even recognize Folklore as an independent discipline, even after hundreds of years. How do you see the future of Folklore in India?

Nair: Folklore studies will remain. It has its main idea. It is a discipline also. There is no doubt about it. What I and many anthropologists and historians have done is that we have borrowed from Folklore. Because if you stick to your own discipline, it will be very difficult to understand certain processes. So when you come to a Folklore conference such as this one, there is a dissemination of knowledge. Ideas are presented, and some of them are very strong.

You know, many people in the sciences look down on all of the social sciences. That is in part because of the market forces we were discussing, and the whole notions of globalization and development. So, many disciplines are in crisis, and not only in social sciences, but in disciplines such as Mathematics and Physics also. Everyone is going for disciplines which are job-oriented. So, there is a general crisis in education.

Bapat: There is no doubt that Folklore studies will continue. Whether or not it will continue to be prominent academically depends on many variables, over some of which perhaps we don't have very much control. We should remember that Folklore studies is not restricted to academics only. There are a good number of people outside the universities who are also doing serious work in this area.

Payyanad: Folklore has within it different ideologies that are colliding with each other, and wanting to say something. These diverse ideologies, these different ways of understanding the universe, make up folklore. And the balance has to be arrived at. Then only will we do justice. Because if we are looking only from the top, we will see nothing from below. More of a participant model has to be brought out, so that when problems arise they can be discussed from different points of view.

For example, when I presented my paper, the person concerned did not ask me any questions, but when I came out she told me that she belonged to a particular community and she asked me why, in my opinion, had the performance not been done in the night. I gave an answer that it was done by an agrarian community and that is why it was not done in the night. She suggested a reason that was different from mine: she said that most of the Brahmanical gods are present in the morning but the others, the gods of the marginalized communities, are present only in the night. So, there is a participant's view, which is not given its due. We should do something about it. Instead of looking at a situation from theoretical assumptions, when we look at it as a ground reality, a lot of things will come out and that is what we need.

Conversation 2: Folklore and Identity

Desmond Kharmawphlang, *Program of Folklore Research (and Archive), Centre for Cultural and Creative Studies, Northeastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya.* <desmond_kharmawphlang@hotmail.com>

Arupjyoti Saikia, *Lecturer, Dept. of History, Cotton College, Guwahati, Assam.* <Arupjyoti_saikia@yahoo.co.uk>

Laltluangiana Khiangte, *Reader and Head, Dept. of Mizo, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram.* <dritkhiangte@yahoo.co.in>

Chandan Kumar Sharma, *Dept. of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University, Naapam, Tezpur, Assam.* <chandan@tezy.ernet.in>

Saikia: In response to the conference in which we have just participated, I think it is essential that we should sit and take up issues that have been raised during the last two days, and engage in a dialogue especially in relation to the region that all of us come from — Northeast India. Let us start with Chandan. He has contributed a lot to Folklore studies. So, what areas do you take up for study in Tezpur?

Sharma: Folklore constitutes a very important component of our department. Our department in Tezpur University is the Department for Cultural Studies. As you know, Cultural Studies is coming up as a kind of inter-disciplinary field, and Folklore itself is emerging as a kind of inter-disciplinary field. Apart from folklore, we also study art, aesthetics, language, performing arts, and literary and other cultural theories — so it really is quite inter-disciplinary.

Kharmawphlang: When did your department start?

Sharma: 1996.

Khiangte: What school are you in?

Sharma: We are in the School of Social Sciences.

Kharmawphlang: It has been a trait of Northeastern Folklore studies that Folklore studies has come to be synonymous with the study of literature in many respects. In Khasi Literature departments, fifty per cent of what they are studying is actually folklore. The same is the case in Assam.

Khiangte: In my department also — the Department of Mizo — we have the category of folk literature. We call it folklore literature. Of course we deal with all folklore matters. This is a compulsory course. We trace right from the beginning of oral cultures to when writing appears.

Sharma: From what I have seen in this conference, this is not something that is unique to the Northeast. It seems that many Folklore scholars are based in Literature departments.

Saikia: Also Sociology. And I am from History. People from many disciplines are coming and working in the field of Folklore.

Kharmawphlang: One feature of Folklore studies is that until very recently our job has mainly been the collection and compilation of data. There has not been very much analytical, scientific, or theoretical analysis of the materials. I think now some changes are taking place. People are getting trained, they are getting exposed. Scholars are travelling, they are reading, they have access to the Internet. So, some very promising people are coming up to take up this job of taking Folklore as a very serious discipline.

Khiangte: In that sense I feel that the present conference is very important. At least we can meet all these popular folklorists, experts in their fields.

Saikia: Personally, I am open to all kinds of disciplines. The question is, "How can folklore help us to understand ways to improve society?" Folklore provides a large landscape. It provides a landscape of material located in different forms, and awareness of folklore can help scholars to understand any subject in the Humanities in a much more dynamic way. For example, I'm writing about the social journey of a legend over the last five hundred years. The different components of folklore are helping me to understand the social history of Assam.

A problem in the Northeast is that most of the folklorists are primarily antiquarianists. They are trying to collect. There are other groups also, who are on theoretical platforms. I think there should be a better mixture of these groups. As has been mentioned, most of the theoretical formulations that have been created over the

last ten or twenty years were primarily grounded in European or other Western epistemologies. I think we have a responsibility now to reformulate those theoretical approaches, and to formulate different kinds of questions and definitions in our own context. For example, this question of hegemony and resistance. We don't speak in these exact terms in our society.

Saikia: All of the tribal societies have their own epistemologies about these theoretical questions, and I think we should be more inward looking. Also, we need more rigorous academic training to understand the subject. In the Northeast region some time back there was a seminar in Gauhati University's Folklore Department: "Folklore and Oral History." As a practicing historian, I had a serious problem. Some scholars were considering oral tales as history.

Khiangte: Oral traditions do have some history in them.

Saikia: Yes, but sometimes there is a gap between the tales and the history. We have to develop techniques in order to use oral traditions to understand our society better.

Sharma: And for the socialization of our people. I think Mr. Desmond also should share some information. He is from Meghalaya. Your experience please.

Kharmawphlang: In Shillong state, there are splendid examples of how myth and legend are combined to create history. In our undated myths, the gods, goddesses, and other supernatural beings from that particular discourse have percolated down to a legend which has no supernatural beings, but rather only human beings. And then you have written history.

Saikia: We need to collectively develop some kind of theoretical frameworks to understand the Northeastern genres, including those that occur in everyday life. There is a lot of folklore in people's everyday lives.

Kharmawphlang: I've never come across any scholars talking about rice myths. In Khasi folklore, rice myths constitute a very important part of the discourse. [Please see the book review on page 26 of this newsletter.]

Saikia: In fact, the folk-world of the Northeast is largely outside of the pan-Indian folkloric world. For example, a *Bharata Katha* has not touched Assamese society. I don't think we have *Bharata Katha* to a large extent.

There is another important point that we should not ignore: Folklore practices have been given an important role in the recent politics of Northeastern India. Folklore is becoming an important weapon for the middle class, as well for other segments of society. How do we understand this process? I think this issue appears in the Northeast in a much more vibrant way than it does in most other parts of the country.

Sharma: Many people in adversity are using folklore in terms of their origins, the past.

Kharmawphlang: Nagas are using Christianity. Khasis are calling themselves *Hynniew Trep*, which means, seven huts, which is referring to the past. This is an attempt to unify all of the tribes and sub-tribes that fall under the umbrella of Khasis.

Kharmawphlang: Nagas have different ways of imagining themselves, because of their heterogeneous character. Nagas are dispersed over a large area. But Khasis are more homogenous, more cohesive, and it is easy for them to imagine a kind of unity. And now the Government is also using folklore. And those protesting against Government policies are also using it, in a different way. Folklore was important for the 1857 rebels, and again during the freedom struggle. And the British missionaries, that is, the administrators, they had their own uses of folklore. Hitler also used folklore. But as folklorists, we have the responsibility just to observe it.

Sharma: I've not seen much political use of folklore in Assam, apart from the Boro case perhaps. I think that the insurgents may also be using folklore for propagating their goals.

Saikia: In this way the *gamocha* [a traditional cloth] has become a symbol of the Assamese society.

Sharma: No, I am referring to the militants.

Kharmawphlang: A friend of mine was taken from his home by an insurgency group, taken to a camp of insurgents. They asked him to stay there for two weeks to talk about folklore of the Khasis in order to inspire some sort of unity among the cadres.

Sharma: In Meghalaya also folklore is being used. And in Assam. The symbols are being used. Bodos are doing it, but not the militant groups. Bodo middle-class leaders are very consciously involved in the construction of their own community identity. Elements are there in their folk tradition, and they trying to build up a new identity for themselves. People have different ways of imagining themselves as communities.

Saikia: The Karbis are also doing that. They are organising folk festivals that become a space for the assertion of their rights and authority.

Kharmawphlang: I've been to one of the Karbis Association conferences, at Taralanshu. They also are consciously making use of folklore. They are giving their own interpretations, and they are developing new modes of expression, which is important.

Sharma: All kinds of methods are being used to emphasize particular points and ideologies. For example, we see the legend about Krishna from Dwaraka marrying Rukmini from Sadiya. And Krishna's grandson, Anirudha, marrying Usha from Tezpur. You see, Assam is primordial. These legends attempt to emphasize the link with mainland India.

Saikia: I think the pan-India idea began in the mid-19th century, with the advent of modern scholarship. They were trying to manipulate the entire local knowledge and connect it to their vision of a pan-Indian landscape. It is quite interesting.

Sharma: These materials are being used to try to authenticate institutions and prove versions of history. "This has happened, so this is a fact!"

Saikia: I think that we need a platform encompassing the entire Northeastern region in regard to all of this. Perhaps a journal. Maybe we can have an annual meeting where scholars of the Northeast can interact.

Khiangte: Folklore is very deep-rooted in our states, and people are very interested in folk literature and in the other arts also. Whenever we have literature conferences, they are busy with their dances and all kinds of expressive forms. I support the idea of having a forum in the Northeast region. We don't have any seminars particularly for discussion of folklore, and we should. Refresher courses and awareness campaigns are also needed in my state.

Khiangte: Well, to begin with, I suggest that whenever one of us has a programme that relates to folklore — whenever some paper is going to be presented — we can invite each other and other scholars who are interested in Folklore studies. In this way, we can build up a region-wide discussion.

Sharma: Yes, whenever we organize an event, we should send invitations to all. That is the way we should function.

Conversation 3:
Folklore and Ideology

Kishore Bhattacharjee, *Reader and Head, Dept. of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam.* <bhattkishore@yahoo.co.uk>

Saugata Bhadhuri, *Associate Professor, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.* <bhaduris@hotmail.com>

K.M. Chandar, *Academic Staff College, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Karnataka.* <chandarkm@yahoo.co.in>

Bhattacharjee: We have assembled to discuss the *Folklore as Discourse* conference. Since the middle of the 20th Century, numerous ways to understand discourse, and the role of discourse in society, have been developed. I believe Folklore as a field of study might approach discourse in a fundamentally different way than other disciplines, and I am interested to know your opinion about this.

Bhadhuri: I agree! The fundamental difference arises from the fact that folklore activity initiates primarily from within the masses, and this affects all of the work done in Folklore scholarship. At the same time, it is true that, to my knowledge, all academic theories of discourse, including those used in the field of Folklore, are parts of an ideological apparatus that has been developed mostly by the members of elite classes. But now we are in the post-Gramcian, post-Althusserian, post-Saussurean Age. We must seek to understand what all of these great scholars — not to mention Foucault and Derrida — had to say about discourse, but for us — as Indians and as Folklore scholars — this should be just the starting point.

Chandar: It seems to me that Folklore scholars tend to defy all pre-conceived notions, because on certain levels, folklore activities do the same. Earlier we were talking about canons, about the notion of a canon, and the applicability of this concept to folklore, and I would like to take the stand that Bakhtin takes as far as norms are concerned, and try to apply it here. What I am saying is that on some levels, the folklore process defies all canons, defies the determinations of the powers-that-be and of the institutional frameworks through which those powers operate. Because the folklore process involves dialogue, questioning, commenting, mimicking — it does not allow the powers-that-be to have the last word. So I am thinking of folklore as something which has its own canon, a canon of practices, although it is not really a canon, for it keeps evolving. It is almost like the concept of Brahman in our Indian culture — the moment you define it, it is not that, it is something else.

Bhattacharjee: Yes, definitely. It doesn't have to get canonized. It can't be canonized.

Chandar: The moment you think it is within your grasp and you attempt to grasp it, it is not there. But yet it always seems to be there within your grasp. I think this is the finest quality of folklore.

Bhattacharjee: One issue I think we can relate this to is the question of ideology. An ideology is a system. It may be a dominant system. Folklore, on the other had, as we have just stated, is dialogic. So what happens when folklore comes in contact with an ideology? Does it necessarily critique that ideology? I think not. Ideologies can also penetrate into folklore. Perhaps the point is that ideologies sometimes use folklore objects, and seek to avoid or suppress the dialogic aspect of folklore.

Sauguta: We must also keep in mind that power doesn't operate by brute physical repression alone. There is a generative aspect of power. People themselves consent to be exploited. The colonizers did not shoot every Indian. I mean, they came with their English language — there were many apparatuses through which we consented to be ruled by them. We are all subjects of our own objectification.

Chandar: There is a beautiful folktale episode of *Ramayana* in which Ravana, infatuated with Sita, learns that Sita is completely committed to Rama, so he devises a strategy. He decides he should come disguised as Rama, to come to take away Sita. But the moment he puts on the mask of Rama, all his infatuation disappears, and so he goes back empty-handed. So he can come only as Ravanna, and not as Rama. One thing that this story illustrates is that if you have a preset ideology, and it doesn't work, then you have to think of some other strategy. So things are defined, predetermined, only to a certain extent, but from that point onwards, you know, the whole world is at your disposal, and you have to evolve, you have to search for some other new discourse to emerge at that point in time.

Bhattacharjee: Folklore used to be defined wholly in terms of tradition. A tradition is an ideology, in a sense. But if you take the new definition of folklore — that it is something dynamic, something that questions everything — then folklore it seems would not fully accommodate any ideology, including any tradition. There would be reactions to traditions and other ideologies, and interactions with them. What would result would be a very interesting and fascinating field, I believe.

Bhadhuri: I think the problem arises in reconciling ideology and multiplicity only if you look at all ideologies as being very monolithic and orthodox. Ideologies can also be flexible in certain ways. You know, insisting on folklore as a discourse of subversion and resistance, as something that continuously undercuts dominant narratives — this itself is an ideology that we are imposing upon folklore.

Bhattacharjee: Well, I am speaking from an empirical point of view, and I am saying that, empirically, we must see how these things operate in reality and not just in theory. What happens to political structures in a folklore context? There is that which comes from outside the community, and that which comes from inside — I believe these are called the etic and the emic, or the exoteric and the esoteric, but let us avoid jargon. Let us say that political structures, or aspects of them, are coming from the outside, and are being imposed on the local community. Some local people might accept it, others might object — but inherent in the process of discourse is that the local people will be recasting it and making it their own.

Bhadhuri: This is where people can appropriate the dominant means, and try to use it for their own purposes. If people do object to what they are perceiving is being imposed, two ways they can fight it are by trying to alter that structure, or by trying to ignore that structure and build their own.

Take feminists, for example. Some feminists say that women have a different discourse altogether, that women talk and write differently, and that if they are in contact with men it is inevitable that they are going to be exploited. Other feminists say, no, the only way women can be liberated is by infiltrating the patriarchal structure, by taking advantage of the opportunities for education and employment that the patriarchal state offers, and by appropriating, subverting, and transforming things from within the system.

Folklore cannot — especially in this current capitalistic, globalised world of ours — folklore can no longer be seen as something which is insulated from the outside. It is continuously being taken within the academic fold. It is continuously being engaged by the electronic media, by the business world, and by other forces of civilization and modernization. But, folklore can live within these modern institutions and discourses and work to transform them.

Chander: Sometimes working in a very subtle way. I am reminded of another folktale episode of *Ramayana* — one which Ramanujan told us. Rama has to leave for the forest with Lakshmana and others. He tries to dissuade Sita from accompanying him. Sita, being a very devoted wife says, "No, No! I must go with you." And Rama says, "No, you are a princess. You are acclimated to palatial comforts, you need that tenderness." But Sita says, "But how can you deny me now?" And so you have what we are talking about: someone continuously trying to extend the boundaries of a framework. You know, in many of these folk *upakathas* [sub-stories], a frame is challenged. The boundaries are explored, sometimes even extended, but only to return to the frame in the end. So in the frame you have this elasticity. Canons can be elastic in this same way.

Bhadhuri: Yes, if the canon is not elastic, people may seek to abandon it and create an alternate canon.

Chander: You know, in rural Karnataka we have a very famous folktale, *Male Malleswara*. The telling and singing of this story is a living tradition, and scholars are collecting versions of it, of course. One time we were listening to this gentleman singing, telling us the tale. There was a reference to a princess living in a palace — and he knew that we were from a university office, from our dress and from the way we were talking in English amongst ourselves now and then, and we were recording too. And he said, "Sir, do you know where this palace was? It was the very place where your administrative offices all function today!" That was the palace of this princess! I couldn't tell him that this building is just eight years old, whereas he was narrating a tale which was 800 years old. This item was fascinating to me! The process is so alive that anything can be appropriated! A university administrative corporate hall can become the palace of this princess who lived 800 years ago! This also relates to the subject of extending boundaries.

Bhattacharjee: I want to give some instances. In certain folktales, women take the dress of men, and along with that they take the male discourse and use that discourse to subvert the system and to create a space for themselves. And in the case of many Rajasthan women's songs, the dominance of men is questioned and criticized — they challenge the discourse. So, a great deal of contesting the system can be permitted within the overall discourse. And, of course, folklore is not monolithic: even within a single genre, multiple discourses, multiple points of view, are often given voice.

Bhadhuri: It is not just that social institutions give rise to discourse, positive and negative. It is also the case that discourses can come to constitute social institutions. So, I think we have to look at the relationship between institutions and discourse in a two-way manner.

Bhattacharjee: There is another dimension. I am working on legends, and I find that there are often a multiplicity of discourses in them, and some of these discourses are not necessarily consciously stated. This has to do with the psychological dimension of folklore.

Bhadhuri: I'm a little wary about psychoanalytical approaches to folklore. It seems to me that folklore cannot be used for understanding individuals' personal conditons, because folklore is not the discourse of one person. It is a collective creation. So the only thing that can possibly be analyzed is the common social personality, and the collective unconscious, as Jung called it. Anthropologists like Ruth Benedict say that culture is individual psychology writ large.

Saugata: We do have to look at the tension between the individual and the collective. Because obviously, individuals comprise the collective. And, collective desires and beliefs come to constitute the individual. So it is not that one approach should be suppressed in favor of the other, but rather that there should an understanding and interaction between the two.

In society, groups are differentiated. And folklore groups may emerge in the course of performance itself. So when people negotiate, contest, challenge, aspire — again it involves the dynamics between individuals and the collective. One cannot keep the individual out of this discussion.

Chander: You were saying that you were interested in legends. Down South we have so many rituals to be observed. Each day we have them: rituals for Sathyanarayana, Lord Ganesh, Goddess Gowri, and others.

Bhattacharjee: Everything is Sanskritised.

Chander: Yes. You have the head of a family and his wife who observe these rituals — they observe the whole thing in Sanskrit. But in the evening there is a kind of storytelling. It takes place in community centres, and everyone is invited. Some one hundred people may gather. And this storytelling — it is Sanskritised, yet not Sanskritised. It is in Kannada, it is in Tamil, it is in most of the regional languages. People read out the story — little folktales — and then there is often a rider, that if you don't do this, if you don't listen to this, something will happen. And if you do do it, Lord Ganesha will bless you. In the early part of the day, people would come only for lunch but not take part in the ritual, but in the evening they take part in the ritual because they want to listen to the story and learn why the ritual is observed.

Saugata: I think this is an excellent example of how the orthodox and the folk aspects of culture may work together! The folk culture is storytelling — it is practical, participatory, and dialogic — and in this case it seems that it is being used by the orthodox system to convey messages. All of the points that we have been talking about are here! The Sanskrit monologue of the morning has somehow to be transposed into the local folk dialogue of the evening. The same ritual has both sides to it. Thank you for this excellent example!

Conversation 4: Folklore and Contexts

Jawarlal Handoo, *President, Indian Folklore Congress, Mysore, Karnataka*. <jlhandoo@eth.net>

Peter Claus, *Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Anthropology, California State University, Hayward, USA*. <pclaus@csuhayward.edu>

Eric Miller, *Ph.D. candidate, Folklore Program, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA*. <emiller@sas.upenn.edu>

Miller: The *Folklore as Discourse* conference has just come to a close, and we — myself, Dr. Handoo, and Dr. Claus — are sitting in the Anthropology office and having a brief discussion on the topic of folklore as discourse. We are discussing the field of Folklore and the future of the field. So, whoever wishes to begin must do so.

Handoo: Well, this has been a very important experience for me, in terms of being an Indian folklorist. It took so much time to reach this stage of treating, and convincing people and scholars also to treat, folklore in totality as a discourse. I find it is very relevant, for, in all my life's work, finally I feel there is no other way except to treat folklore as a discourse. This is not to question the importance of any other discourse that is already available for study in this country. But culture has to be viewed in totality. All of the different strands of culture need to recognised, so that we can perceive the kind of messages we are looking for in a society which has very complex systems and which is very ancient and highly hegemonic also. This was what I kept thinking was the purpose for wanting such a conference on folklore as discourse.

Miller: You were mentioning earlier that much of Indian society is oral-centric and that this is often ignored by scholars, who often are more interested in studying printed materials. You said that it would benefit all of us to acknowledge and understand the oral nature of much of Indian society.

Handoo: Yes, by and large India is an oral society. The written discourses, and the other kinds of discourses that are available — I feel that most of them are highly hegemonic. I understand the hegemony of written discourse, whether it concerns the caste system, or sacred spaces, or the great architectural marvels of this country, or anything else. There are so many illiterate people in this country. They have no written languages. What about their discourse? I am talking about that discourse as oral discourse and that is very powerful. And it will make the picture of Indian civilization complete in every respect if we add this oral discourse dimension to all of the other existing discourses in India.

Claus: I am a little disturbed by the fact that people tend to take the term, discourse, in a very narrow sense, as simply referring to political phenomena, as if the political is the only function of discourse, or as if that is the only dimension of discourse worth talking about. As Guru Rao Bapat illustrated in his paper, performance analysis is also part of discourse analysis.

And as Muthukumaraswamy pointed out, discourse is also studied by sociologists: Erving Goffman, for one, looks at frames, and how we shift from one frame to another, what kinds of cues there are for this. Muthukumaraswamy explained how in the rituals he was studying, legitimacy and authority are given by a priest to the actors who will be playing the five Pandavas — only then can they start the performance. We need to look at the transitions from first person enactment to third person narration, and back again to the first person enactment; at how after twenty days of participating in all of these stages of discourse, all day and all night, you become merged in it, you become a part of it. And that is a different dimension of discourse than merely the political sense of the term.

Miller: The style of discourse always does have political implications though. For example, if one person is speaking for a long time and every one else has to listen silently — I believe that is what Dr. Handoo has been referring to as the "palace paradigm." Whereas, if everybody is taking turns, that is the paradigm of democracy.

Claus: The actors need to be legitimized for them to portray the Pandavas, and for the performance to begin. That's not a palace paradigm. It is a theatrical device. It enables a discourse to happen and become meaningful.

Handoo: We are not denying the existence of these mechanics of discourse, of the built-in systems of this discourse. All we are trying to say that oral discourse is important in this country. It has been ignored or it has

not been recognised as a part of the bigger, holistic discourse of our society.

That is one point. A second point has to do with the question of how particular types of discourse may tend to promote specific ideologies. For example, today we had Baskaran's paper on Tamil cinema. He made special reference to the growth and development of the medium. We could see that through the medium of cinema, a discourse was generated which created what he called a *democratic space*, in which now any people who had a little money could sit down together. This was not the practice before.

Claus: I would have liked more papers about oral discourse. Very few people actually looked at folk performances, and at what takes place within that discourse. As Subbachary's paper pointed out, oral folk discourse takes place within small groups, and as soon as you look at a printed text — even if it is a transcription of what was said — you are no longer dealing directly with the oral discourse.

Handoo: Yes, that is true. And as you know, in this country, knowledge, and the mediums of expressing that knowledge, have been used as very strong tools to deprive others and for the benefit of whosoever was interested to use it for his own benefit and his own ideology.

Claus: Newspapers are discourse. Especially the editorial page.

Handoo: But I would say that historically the most prestigious discourse generated in this country was written discourse coming out of the palaces. That is my feeling.

Miller: When you use the term, palace paradigm, what I think of is one person transmitting and everyone else receiving. This sort of hegemony can occur in any medium. However, in oral discourse, there is always the possibility that the listeners might try to break out of this frame and speak, that is, that they might try to create a different social situation. For this reason, champions of the palace paradigm tend to be very careful about how public speech events are managed. Because every communication event, every discourse event — even everyday conversation — not only sets a model for new society, it *is* new society. It is society emerging. And as such, the producers of it might be making a bid for what they are doing to be acknowledged as normal, standard, mainstream behavior. Such bids are, of course, often contested. One way champions of the palace paradigm may deal with a style of discourse that they do not approve of is to forbid it; or if it has already occurred, to punish the producers of it, or — often most effective of all — they may ignore that it occurred and encourage others to do the same. So I believe that the ways in which people are allowed, or not allowed, to take turns — to jump in and take the floor — is a key to the structure not only of a particular discourse event, but also to the general structure of the society.

Claus: Very few scholars have really collected the cues that are inherent in genres, the cues which allow people to indicate when they would take a turn.

Handoo: Society cannot afford to be guided by a discourse that has no possibilities of interruption. But social regulations are backed by a very strong power. Haven't the Dalits been denied the chance to even enter the temples in this country? The Dalits were not having the right to sit in the public space. How was this created in this civilization? There must have been some power behind that kind of discourse.

Claus: That's what I liked about Eric's presentation. By inviting his research assistants to attend and to speak at the conference, he brought the discourse that he has been having in the field, and allowed us to join that discourse. Most of us keep our data collection on one side. Then we control the discourse amongst us, and what we say gets printed and read by thousands around the world. But we change that discourse. And we control it in our discourse — very often particular communities are called 'high' and others are called 'low,' and histories are imagined. The origins and migrations of Dravidian and other societies and races — all of these are imagined situations. These imagined situations are taken and then used to control the discourse.

Handoo: What is happening in this country now, in my opinion, is that a paradigm shift is taking place at various levels. Of course, at the mass culture level, we have expressive systems like cinema and secular pop music. At the same time, oral discourse remains a very strong discourse of this country. We must understand the role it plays, and see how it functions. There can be no pre-supposed frame. By doing this we can help folklore to find its place as a discourse and interact with other discourses, and see what it can do for the country.

Another point is that you cannot be guided by only the performance itself. A folktale as a text does not tell anything unless it is seen in the whole context, unless it is connected to the other phenomena of the same society. Only then can it become meaningful. We have to develop all kinds of methods, models, and frameworks to try to look at folk discourse from a holistic point of view, to see what it means in its whole context.

Claus: Yes, in its larger socio-political context. But you know that this larger socio-political context is now being dominated by a different phenomena than old feudalism. It is being dominated by global capitalism — a secular, liberal, democratic capitalism — that is going around and giving rationales for invading countries, and giving praise to those countries that engage in civilized, rational discourse — meaning, you know, that they are accepting capitalist expansion of markets. What paper even mentioned this context, which is relevant to all of us?

Handoo: Well, we made a mistake in that we should have had this *Folklore as Discourse* conference first, and then gone on to Habermas, to the *Folklore, Public Sphere, and Civil Society* symposium. But circumstances of all

kinds of led us to hold the *Public Sphere* symposium first, so much of the material presented at this conference has not yet been digested and applied to the larger contexts.

Globalisation may be good for certain countries in terms of money and all kinds of economic orders, but, I think we are passing through a very dangerous phase when it comes to the possibility of people losing their identities. Habermas himself — not being the typical folklorist, but being a thinker and philosopher — says that the mark of a healthy society is that individuals take part in discussions about the important matters of the day, and make up their minds for themselves. So, please go to your community and talk, examine and comment and question, and spread your thoughts through your own means. There is no way we can trust any media. Even if folklore discourse is not perceived as being strong in modern times in certain countries, especially in societies that are mostly literate, I believe Habermas would recommend folklore discourse to be used as a very important medium for the dissemination and discussion of information.

Miller: And I hope that when we consider people talking amongst themselves and sharing their thoughts, we are including their ability to participate in discourse with each other through interactive telecommunication practices such as e-mail, because through such technology individuals can speak to their friends or to the world.

Handoo: This was a very well-managed conference, and I'm sure that when the papers are published it is going to be a landmark in the future growth and development of Folklore as a discipline and a very strong one in this country.

Miller: From your mouth to G-d's ear.

THIRD ISSUE

Indian Folklore Research Journal (IFRJ)
Volume 1, Issue 3, December 2003

ISSN 0972-6462

Subscription
*India: Rs. 150 for single issue (Rs.450 for 3 issues)
Other Countries: US $ 10 ($ 30 for 3 issues)*

Send DD / IMO drawn in favour of National Folklore Support Centre payable at Chennai (India)

Contents

LACHMI JAGAR: GURUMAI SUKDAI'S STORY OF THE BASTAR RICE GODDESS

Gregory, Chris A. (transl.) and Harihar Vaishnav (collector and transl.). *Lachmi Jagar: Gurumai Sukdai's Story of the Bastar Rice Goddess*. Illustrated by Khem Vaishnav. Kondagaon, Chattisgarh, India: Kaksad Publ., 2003. Pp. XVIII+147. ISBN 0/646/422154.

Review by Heda Jason, a freelance scholar who has worked on the genres of folktale, sacred legend, and epic, in the fields of semiotics and classification of oral literature. Her publications include *Ethopoetry: Form, Content, Function* (1977), and *Motif, Type, and Genre: A Manual for Compilation of Indices* (2000).

We have been given a wonderful present: a new great work of Indian oral literature has been found and is on its way to publication for both national and international readership. The work is a myth, sung and enacted by speakers, mostly women, of the Halbi language of the Dandakarya Plateau region, which is drained by the Indravati River, a tributary of the Godavari River, in the region of Chattisgarh, in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The story was performed by Ms. Gurumai Sukdai Koram, a member of the local musician/watchman community, who is accustomed to singing it as part of the relevant rituals. It was recorded and transcribed in 1996 by Harihar Vaishnav, a poet and writer in Hindi and a native speaker of Halbi. Chris A. Gregory (of the Australian National University, Canberra), is the co-translator of the text.

As the transcription of the performance is 31,000 lines long, its scholarly publication (in the original language and English translation, with commentaries) will be a multi-volume affair, and it will take a while for the work to be published. Therefore the collectors have decided to publish a preview with a detailed summary of the story for the benefit of the lay reader, especially the Halbi speakers of Bastar. The summary is published in Halbi, Hindi, and English (in parallel columns).

In the Chattisgarh area, northern Indo-Aryan and southern Dravidian-speaking people live side by side, and Western millet growing and Eastern rice-growing economies mingle. The myth is performed during the cold season; other similar myths are performed in the neighboring districts during the wet season (*Tija Jagar* or *Dhankul*) and the hot season (*Bali Jagar* in Orissa). These three (and possibly more) works are performed by women who use a two-meter long hunting bow as a musical instrument. (This genre is not to be confused with the "bow songs" of the South, whose stories are not myths and which occupies a different position in the religious system of the community; see Blackburn 1989, pp. 208-211). The Chattisgarh region is also the home of the secular semi-epic story of *Candaini and Loriki* (see Blackburn et al. 1989, pp. 212-215).

The *Lachmi Jagar* myth tells a family story: two divine families cooperate to introduce rice cultivation. Meng (meaning, cloud) the husband, and Mengin, the wife, descend from the upper world to the human world and are enthroned by people. Mahadev and Parvati, while in the upper world, invent rice cultivation and they both grant to Mengin a pregnancy. She gives birth to a baby girl who is named Mahalachmi (Lachmi in Halbi, Lakshmi in Hindi). On the allegorical level, this girl represents rice. Mahadev obliges the parents to marry the girl to Narayan, Mahadev's younger brother. When Mahalachmi comes of age, Narayana has already twenty-one wives (who represent various kinds of millets and pulses), but he still insists on marrying Lachmi. A struggle starts among the wives in which Lachmi (rice) gains the upper hand over the other wives (millet and pulses).

Lachmi Jagar can be classified in several frameworks. It belongs to a group of works which form "scripts" for rituals. Many such works have been found in India; consider the Tulu *Siri* story of northwestern Karnataka (Honko et al. 1998), and the Telugu *Palnati Virula Katha* of southern Andhra Pradesh (Roghair 1982). The ethnopoetic genre of these three works is not identical. *Palnati Virula Katha* is a martial epic about the struggle for power and property between two groups of relatives, modeled after the *Mahabharata*. The other two works are not of the epic genre. *Lachmi Jagar* is a myth about the introduction of rice cultivation. The *Siri* story, which is sometimes classified as an epic, is in fact a sacred legend about the punishment of sinners (who did not fulfil a vow), and the establishment of a temple.

The collectors and editors of these works tell us much about the "lives" of these works in their respective societies, including: who performs the works for whom; when, where, and how the performances take place; the chains of transmission and ways of learning, etc. We would like to also learn about the socio-psychological functions of the works. Such analysis requires enthnographic investigations, and this is not a task for philologists, but rather for ethnographers, be they anthropologists or folklorists. We hope that ethnographers will be found who are interested enough in these rituals to participate in the investigations.

References:

Blackburn, Stuart H., Peter J. Claus, Joyce B. Flueckiger, and Susan S. Wadley, eds., *Oral Epics in India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Honko, Lauri, Chinnappa Gowda, Anneli Honko, and Viveka Rai, eds. and trans., *The Siri Epic, as Performed by Gopala Naika*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica (FF communications no. 265-266), 1998

Roghair, Gene H., *The Epic of Palnadu: A Study and Translation of Palnati Virula Katha*, *A Telugu Oral Tradition from Andhra Pradesh*, *India*, Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1982.
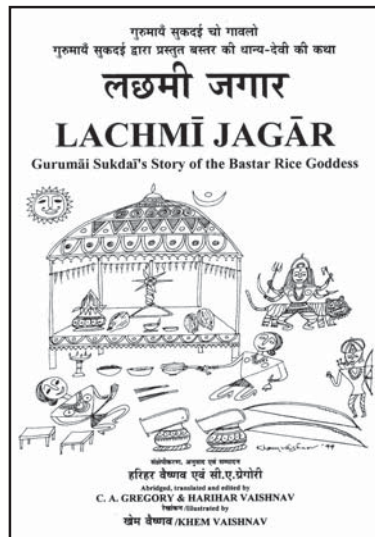
Two recent events:

NFSC
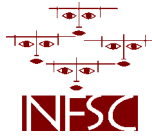
National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai

*cordially invites you for the inaugural
function of a Five Day (23 to 27 March, 2004)*

*Design Workshop for
Folk Toy Makers of South India*

*to be held at 10:30 A.M. on March 23, 2004, at the
Alliance Française Auditorium: 24 (Old No. 40), College Road, Chennai - 600 006*

ALL ARE WELCOME

Workshop sponsored by: **Office of the Development Commissioner, Handicrafts, Southern Region,
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India**

"At first all was water; the earth was below. Even the rocks were soft as wet mud. It was very, very difficult to create life on it…" – Beginning of Adi Creation Myth
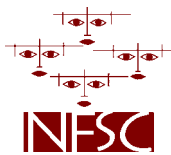
Chronicling Culture and Nature

An Exhibition on Eco-Friendly lifestyles, Arts and Crafts of North Eastern India

MARCH 3 — 7, 2004

Venue: **DakshinaChitra**
Muttukadu, East Coast Road, Tamil Nadu 603 118

Organised collaboratively by

NFSC

NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE
No. 7, Vth Cross Street,
Rajalakshmi Nagar,
Velachery,
Chennai 600 042
Email: muthu@md2.vsnl.net.in
Website: www.indianfolklore.org

NEHHDC

PURBASHREE EMPORIUM
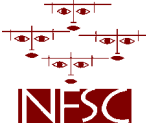**North Eastern Handicrafts and
Handlooms Devp. Corp. Ltd.**
(A government of India Undertaking)
*35-36, Greams Road, Thousand Lights
Chennai – 600 006.*

MADRAS CRAFT FOUNDATION
G3, Maduram Flats,
6, Urur Olcott Road,
Besent Nagar,
Chennai 600 090
Email: cfdak@md3.vsnl.net.in
Website: www.dakshinachitra.org

Sponsored by

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Government of India

Jawaharlal Handoo

Arupjyoti Saikia

Sadhana Naithani

Peter Claus

K.M.Chandar

Molly Kaushal

Premeela Gurumurthy

Venugopalan Nair

Chandan Kumar Sharma

Vanishri, S.P.

Desmond Kharmawphlang

Kishore Bhattacharjee

Laltluangliana Khiagte

Pulikonda Subbachary

Lalita Handoo

Subbalaxmi Das

Eric Miller

Guru Rao Bapat

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy

Nirmal Selvamony

Saugata Bhaduri

Raghavan Payyanad

V. Bharathi Harishankar

Theodore Baskaran

G. Sandhya Nayak