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Indian Folk Literature

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By: Kshiyama Sagar Meher



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**Sample Preview
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

INDIAN FOLK LITERATURE

M.E.G.-16

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt any five questions. Each question carries equal marks. Q. No. 8 is compulsory.

Q. 1. Trace the origin of folktales and their relation with any given society.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 66, Q. No. 2.

Q. 2. Who is Girish Karnad and how is he important in terms of his contribution to Indian Folkloristics?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 91, 'About the Author' and 'About the Adaptation'.

Q. 3. Critically interpret Mamang Dai's 'The Legends of Pensam'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 127, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 2.

Q. 4. What are the relations between Indian folk epics and Sanskrit epics?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 133, Q. No. 2 and Q. No. 4.

Q. 5. Discuss the folk elements in 'Pather Panchali' by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-21, Page No. 153, 'Folk Elements in the Novel'.

Q. 6. Discuss the dimensions of folk in 'The Dilemma' by Vijaydan Detha.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 39, Q. No. 9 and Page No. 36, 'Social Dimensions of Folklore'.

Q. 7. Write a note on the contributions of Sitakant Mahapatra to the oral traditions of Indian tribes.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 141, Q. No. 1 and Page No. 142, Q. No. 2.

Also Add: Sitakant Mahapatra is highly moved by the tribal communities – their poise and simplicity, naturalness and elegance that get reflected in their songs. He says: "I have sought to present the poems as poems of today, living, vital and warm, and not as dry ethnological data of a complex and strange 'primitive' world. Being a poet himself, he tried to see and feel

them as poetry and no other condition has mattered neither ethnology nor religious association or ritual significance. Sitakant Mahapatra has collected a vast array of oral poems from various tribal communities such as the Kondhs, the Mundas, the Santhals, the Parajas, the Hos, the Oraons and the Koyas. The oral songs that he collected are on wide-ranging themes like birth, death, love, sex marriage, misery and tragedy of human life, the concept of time, eternity, spirituality, various rites, rituals, and celebrations that are different from clan to clan, village to village. These poetry reflects the socio-cultural, religious and economic life patterns of the communities and thus its documentation is an authentic source of knowledge. Oral poetry is passed from generation to generation vocally and is rich in meanings, allusions, references, images, symbols and metaphors. In his introduction to the volumes of oral poetry writes, Mahapatra writes that "Most tribal languages are unwritten; conventional from the point of view of us aged but fresh and inventive. They are also highly musical. They contain a large number of symbols. It is necessary to retain in translation as much as possible of the symbolism as it is the essence of poetry. It is also necessary to preserve, as far as possible, the line – structure of the original."

Q. 8. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Myths, Legends and Tales.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 65, Q. No. 1, Page No. 66, Q. No. 2 and Q. No. 3.

(b) Proverbs and Riddles.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 70, 'Introduction' and 'Folk Forms as Protest in History'.

(c) Tamasha, Nautanki and Pala.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-27, Page No. 184, 'Tamasha' and Page No. 185, 'Nautanki and Pala'.



QUESTION PAPER

December – 2023

(Solved)

INDIAN FOLK LITERATURE

M.E.G.-16

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt any five questions. Each question carries equal marks. Q. No. 10 is compulsory.

Q. 1. Bascom writes, “Folklore....is a part of culture but not the whole of culture.” Elucidate the statement.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 38, Q. No. 6 and Page No. 36, ‘Folk Productions’.

Q. 2. Discuss the characteristics and scope of folk poetry and songs.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 59, Q. No. 4 and Page No. 56, ‘Introduction’.

Q. 3. Explain the role of archives in protection of traditional cultural expressions in India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 80, ‘Functions of Archives’, Page No. 85, Q. No. 2 and Page No. 83, ‘Some of Archives in India: Case Studies’.

Q. 4. “Ramanujan”’s tales depict the life of ordinary people.” Comment.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 99, Q. No. 1, Q. No. 2, Q. No. 3 and Q. No. 4.

Q. 5. Based on your study of Verrier Elvin’s ‘When the World was Young’ describe how motifs are interwoven in the tribal tales.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 102, ‘Introduction’ and ‘The Beginning of Things’.

Q. 6. ‘The Legends of Pensam’ by Mamang Dai is a modern response to an ancient and traditional culture. Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 126, Q. No. 2, Q. No. 3 and Page No. 128, Q. No. 4.

Q. 7. ‘Maila Anchal’ by Renu revolves around village life. Comment.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-23, Page No. 163, ‘The Theme of Village Life’ and Page No. 166, Q. No. 7.

Q. 8. Attempt a critical essay on the cinematic representation of folk.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-28, Page No. 189, ‘Identifying Folk and Popular in Satyajit Ray’s Pather Panchali: A Case Study’.

Q. 9. Discuss theatre techniques of Habib Tanvir in the context of his play “Charandas Chor”.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-30, Page No. 204, Q. No.1 and Page No. 205, Q. No. 4.

Q. 10. Write short notes on any two of the following:

(a) Sanskritization and Westernization.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 28, ‘Sanskritization’ and Westernization’.

(b) Paraja Custom of Marriage.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 161, Q. No. 7.

(c) “Chemmeen” as a folk text.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-25, Page No. 176, Q. No. 7.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

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INDIAN FOLK LITERATURE

BLOCK I: FOLK LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE : RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

An Introduction to Folklore



INTRODUCTION

Modern folklore studies started in the 19th century Europe, especially Germany, when scholars started taking serious interests in the collection and study of the folklore materials in various forms like folk tales, folk songs and traditional customs. The interests in folklore resources were created by diverse motivations that arose out of diverse social, political and historical contexts. The growth and development of folklore studies as an academic discipline had to pass through considerable differences and confusions over the meaning of the term 'folklore'. The term 'folklore' was used to mean both the study and the materials of the subject. Besides, different practices were adopted by different countries to label a diverse set of cultural resources as folklore materials. In some parts of Europe and South America, 'folklore' implies the so-called unsophisticated peasant culture, the community performances of music, dance and festival.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF FOLKLORE

Folklore is associated with the rural peasant folk. Folk is any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor which could be a common occupation, language, or religion.

In the 19th century, folklore was considered as a dead culture, but it is alive and vibrant. Folk tales and stories are sometimes considered as based on incorrect facts and myths. All forms of folk culture have the notions of falsehood inherent in it. Folk culture comprises learned habits, beliefs, rituals, institutions and expressions of a people. However, this is not strictly limited to oral habits and could include material culture

as well. This is closely associated with the notions of a folk society that is a group of individuals who are organized around some common interest.

Definition of Folklore

Klintberg defines folklore as "Traditional cultural forms that are communicated between individuals through words and actions and tend to exist in variation". Scholars believe that folklore is communicated orally through informal methods or means. However, both print and visual media communicate folk ideas.

Folklore has been defined in the following ways:

- (i) It is deeply connected to the nation.
- (ii) It belongs to the lower levels of the social hierarchy.
- (iii) It is old fashioned compared to the complexities of modern civilization.
- (iv) It belongs to large societies with a large population.
- (v) Folk is a social group connected through a common tradition and a particular feeling of communication.

EARLY PHILOLOGY AND THE GRIMM BROTHERS

Philology is the study of the historical development of languages. Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) extensively collected German folklore materials for the purpose of his study of the roots of German language. He studied a great deal of German words, folk narratives such as myths and tales. He brought out the monumental German dictionary and compiled, with his brother Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859), some very important books, such as: *Deutsche Mythologie* (a seminal collection of German myths) and *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales, popularly known as Grimm's Fairy Tale).

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They took interest in folkloric resources as the means to trace the root of German language. Earlier German scholars like Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) had also tried to trace the origin of German language.

W. J. THOMAS AND THE WORD 'FOLKLORE'

British antiquarian William John Thomas used the term 'folklore' in 1846. Before that, 'popular antiquities' or 'popular literature' were used for folklore materials. W. J. Thomas wrote a letter to a journal, *The Athenaeum*, suggesting that 'folklore' should be used to refer to the "the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs" and other materials "of the olden time."

His said the word 'folklore', composed of 'folk' (people) and 'lore' (knowledge), would be a good Anglo-Saxon compound instead of other cumbersome terms. He linked folklore with a nationalistic sentiment which was the primary motivation behind his approach to the issue.

FOLKLORE AND IDEOLOGY

Folklore has been used as a kind of collective pride and national glory. They have been the purer assets of humanity, and closer-to-the-nature. Folklore materials enjoyed conscious care during the period of romanticism. In Germany, during Hitler's regime, folklore was used with extreme Nazi racialist propaganda. In Soviet Russia, folklore was used "As a powerful tool to advance communism". In India, the massive body of folklore materials was studied and published in nationalistic spirit in early twentieth century. Folklore was effectively used by the Indians during the freedom struggle.

DIFFERENT ACADEMIC APPROACHES

Mythological School

Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) gave the first theoretical perspective in study of folklore. Max Müller took the linguistic view-point and defined myths and explained the process of myth-creation. He strengthened the comparative methodology and diachronic approach of Jacob Grimm to prepare the mythological school of folklore studies. He used the phrase "Malady of language" to imply this change in language. Max Müller says Myths are created according to as the explanatory narratives of such words and expressions by the later generations.

Diffusion/Migration Theory

Theodor Benfey (1809-1881) made novel contribution to the theoretical and intellectual

development of folklore studies through his translation of Indian anthology – *the Panchatantra* —into German language. Benfey found similarities between ancient Sanskrit tales of India and the tales of Europe. Such similarities were not necessarily because of genetic relationship of people as thought by Max Müller. Rather, Benfey put forward the idea that folktales can and do travel across territories. His said that ancient India produced the folktales which later 'migrated' to Europe and other parts of the world.

Anthropological Perspectives

The rise in anthropological scholarship in England and America in the 19th and 20th centuries brought out a strong anthropological perspective in the folklore study. Anthropologists study the material and non-material aspects of culture from functionalist viewpoints and see the cultural norms and values as predictable and theorizable patterns of human behaviour. E. B. Taylor (1832-1917) and Andrew Lang (1844-1912) in England, Franz Boas (1858-1942), Ruth Benedict (1887-1948), M. J. Herskovits (1895-1963) in the United States are some of the foremost scholars of classical anthropology drew heavily upon the folkloric resources which they collected through exhaustive fieldworks.

Historical-Geographical School

Finnish Method or Historical-Geographical Method is based on Theodor Benfey's hypothesis in Finland. It studied the origin and migration of folklore items. Initially experimented in the study of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, this method was based on the notion that as folk forms travel from place to place and undergo changes in form and content but retain the basic recognizable features. The original forms of folklore items could be reconstructed and the exact route of migration of those items also could be traced through comparative exercise. The exponents of this method are Kaarle Krohn, C.W. Von Sydow, Archer Taylor, Stith Thompson and Axel Olrik. Besides the precision techniques of comparative analysis of folklore data, the scientific way of breaking down folklore forms, such as folktales, into identifiable traits for cross comparative analysis is another major approach.

Psychoanalytical School

Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) extensively studied folklore materials and brought out the books like *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913). He used to see

the myths, dreams, jokes and tales as the symbolic expressions of the unconscious mind. In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud differentiated between dreams and myths and suggested that dreams are the disguised reflection of the repressed desires of an individual in his or her subconscious mind, whereas, the myths are the symbolic expressions of the collective unconsciousness of a race or culture. C. G. Jung noted symbols of sexual drive in myths and other folk narratives. The influence of Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis was enormous, both in academics and common public values of 20th century.

Oral-Formulaic Theory

In 1930, American literary scholar Milman Parry studied the formulaic features of the classical epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He widened his study to the Yugoslav oral poetry and aimed to delineate the form of oral poetry and to compare it with the form of written verses. Later Albert B. Lord published his book *The Singer of Tales* in 1935. He made an observation that oral poetry is performed or sung without reading and writing. He noted that the “Epic singers memorize a set of formulas which enable them to carry on the traditional themes with reasonable accuracy and at the same time give them freedom to improvise new elements depending on the occasion without altering the form drastically”. Parry and Lord influenced succeeding folklore scholarships. In the 1930s, the Russian formalist V. J. Propp was also working on similar lines, though Propp’s work was on folktales and not oral poetry.

Structural School

In structuralism, a popular perspective in several academic fields of twentieth century, a field or an object of study is treated as a system of interrelated parts. In folklore studies, Vladimir J. Propp (1895-1970) introduced the seed of structural analysis. The Russian formalist published his book *Morfologia Skazki* in Russian in 1928, which was translated into English in 1958 as *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Propp adopted a new synchronic approach to the study of Russian folktales. Instead of the meanings of folktale, Propp analyzed their structural forms. He had the view that the vital components of a folktale are not its characters but certain actions of the characters, which are found to be constant in folktales of different places. The presence of such constant actions, which he called functions, are responsible for the similarities between different folktales.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-30 October, 2009), an extraordinarily versatile French anthropologist, led another structuralist approach for the study of folklore forms. He explained myth, kinship and visual arts. Lévi-Strauss did not separate the form and content of folklore. He considered myth as a higher and complex level of communication. He said mythic messages are logical formulations. According Lévi-Strauss, a universal structural scheme could be possible to explain the myths.

Contextual Theory

In the late 20th century, some American scholars took folklore items within multi-dimensional frameworks along with the radical changes in the academic fields. Roger Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundes, Kenneth Goldstein and Robert Gorges were the prominent.

Scholars considered the items of folklore not only as texts but also as events, where the contexts of folk performances such as story-telling, singing, rituals and festivals and conversations were regarded as important as the texts. The root of such approach is found in the works of Parry and Lord.

GROWTH OF FOLKLORE STUDIES IN INDIA

India has a special place in the international folklore scholarship. The works of Max Müller and Theodore Benfey on Indian myths and folktales show how Indian folklore resources contributed to the theoretical development of folklore studies. The *Vedas*, great epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Upanishads* and *Puranas*, and bulky anthologies of folktales like – *Hitopadesa*, *Brihatkatha*, *Kathasarit-sagara*, *Betal-Pancavimsatika*, Jataka Tales are examples of oral and written traditional creativity in India since ancient times. However, the study of folklore in India started only after the coming of the British. Jawaharlal Handoo, one of the foremost scholars of folklore studies from India, divides the growth of folklore studies in India into three periods: the Missionary Period, the Nationalistic Period and the Academic Period.

The Missionary Period

The Christian missionaries were the first batch of collectors and publishers of the first-hand resources of Indian traditional cultural lives in various regions. They came in contact with the hitherto unexplored rural traditional settings of the diverse Indian communities when they reached the interiors of the country. J. Handoo noted that these missionaries recorded habits, manners, customs, oral traditions, rituals, etc. about the

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people. They used some of this information to successfully deliver their main message. The writings they published form a part of the great treasures of folklore.

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

Some western philologists and orientalist also took significant steps of establishing academic societies and starting important periodicals that contributed immensely in driving the focusing on the Indian cultural resources during this time. The Asiatic Society was founded by William Jones in 1784; and journals like the *Indian Antiquary* and the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* gave spaces for "Brief articles on oral narratives and other genres of folklore".

The civil servants of the British administration in India were also engaged in collection and study of Indian folklore materials. Flora Annie Steel's *Wide Awake Stories (Tales from Punjab Told by the People)* (1894); William C. Crooke's *Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1894) and *Natives of Northern India* (1907); S. Mahalinga Natesa Shastri's *Folklore in Southern India* (1884) and *Indian Folk-Tales* (1900); Robinson Edward Jewitt's *Tales and Poems of South India* (1885); George A. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1907); John F. A. McNair and Thomas Lambert Barlow's *Oral Traditions from Indus: Comprised to Tales to Which are Added Explanatory Notes* (1908); E. M. Gordon's *Indian Folk-Tales Being Side-light on the Village Life of Bilaspur, Central Provinces* (1908); Cecil Henry Bompas's *Folklore of the Santhal Parganas* (1909); James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1920) are examples of such works by the civil servants.

The Nationalist Period

Towards the late 19th century, Indian scholars and intellectuals began to search and establish their cultural roots by exploring their own culture and tradition. The western education and the nationalistic consciousness

among the Indian intellectuals to achieve independence from the British were main factors. Lakshminath Bezbaruah's *Burhi Ait Sashu* (1911); Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Sati* (1917) and *The Folk Literature of Bengal* (1920); Zeverchand Meghani's *Halardan* (1928), *Dadajini Vato* (1933), *Lok Sahitya and Kankavati* (1947); Suryakaran Parik and Narottam Swamy's *Dhola Maru ra Doha* (1947), Ramnaresh Tripathi's *Hamara Gram Sahitya* (1940); Devendra Satyarthi's *Bela Phule Adhi Rat* (1948), *Dhart Gatt Hai* (1948), *Dhire Baho Ganga* (1948) are some of the major works of this time.

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

During this time, an Indian perspective started to work on the study of Indian folklore. Secondly folkloric resources were linked with national unity and identity. The discourse of the khadi costumes and Mahatma Gandhi's spinning wheel are the most visible examples of it. Folklore played the crucial role of the medium of spreading Indian national unity.

The Academic Period

The academic period of Indian folklore studies started after the independence in 1947. The academic period saw scientific analysis and preservation of Indian folklore by the Indians. The study of folklore in Indian educational institutions remained/initially annexed with the departments like anthropology, history and literary studies. In 1955, Gauhati University started a Folklore Archive which was later changed to the Department of Tribal Culture and Folklore Research – the first department of folklore in an Indian university. Later many other Indian universities opened their departments for offering M.A., M. Phil. and Ph. D. courses in folklore studies. IGNOU started academic programmes and courses on folklore studies. Besides governmental colleges and universities, non-governmental centres, like the National Folklore Support Centre, were also setup for promotion and dissemination of folklore scholarship in India. The folklore studies in India of this period were marked by inter-disciplinary approach, international collaborations and applications of contemporary theories and perspectives in the field of humanities and social sciences mark. Birinchi Kumar