

PROBLEMS OF PRESERVATION IN FOLK-LORE STUDIES

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It is necessary that the problems of the collection, preservation, and dissemination of folk-lore be understood within the social context of the various regional cultures. Any superficial study, from either an historical or socio-political point of view, might appear to impair the image of the unity of Indian culture. But on closer examination and detailed analysis we discover that throughout the sub-continent, certain interdependent elements fuse to emerge as a synthesis. Indeed, when viewed in the wider perspective, folk-literature and folk-art reveal certain fundamental factors, that establish, within the diversity of forms, a certain underlying unity. I should like to take two examples to clarify this point: first, the study of most of the many languages shows that they derive from the same source with roots that go back to classical Sanskrit. That language contains within its very vocabulary the regional beliefs and experiences of a people and that, as it grows it continues to absorb new concepts while retaining its basic unity, is an established philological principle that requires no further debate. We may therefore accept the unity of Indian culture upon this etymological framework.

Second, on reviewing the racial patterns over the entire country we discern, in contiguous regions such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the inhabitants come from similar racial stocks. Despite the arbitrary division into Provinces during the British regime or even later, into linguistic States after Independence, these racial characteristics of the original migratory peoples persist. As such, then, these divisions appear artificial when seen from this (racial stock) point of view. The dominant element in the creative aspect of folk-art is the racial characteristic. As we delve deeper, these characteristics repeatedly continue to

appear across all such artificial political barriers, pointing to a firm basic unity of culture under the apparent imposition of separateness and diversity. But for the purpose of study it is essential to take cognizance of the diversity of each special region—indeed it is necessary to go into each detail in variants and to carry such study to its fullest possibility. Thus in the folk-art of the different regions we find an abundance of aesthetic experience (artistic incidents, symbols with minute variations and beliefs) which point to an immense multiplicity. The scholar has, by necessity, to undertake the minute of particular problems, and he has to forgo the larger issue of the unity of knowledge and culture. His concern is with these details and an unfortunate aspect his work may assume is that his analysis may suggest with regional overtones, the disparate tendencies in the country as a whole. While those whose concern is with the over-all unity of culture appear to the scholar as deliberately falsifying facts to meet the necessities of their case, by overlooking the variants. Scholars have to be equally on their guard in the over simplification of cultural studies to meet the needs of either the unity or disunity of the nation.

But it has been our experience while keeping this possibility in mind that in the study of folk-instruments of Rajasthan for instance, we found within the geographical limits of the region parallels extended not only nationally but internationally.

In fact, the correct approach and use of the specialised field can and does always lead to a helpful unifying attitude and not to disruptive tendencies.

Educational Limitations

Our Universities which provide us the only source of academic training and discipline in graduate and post-graduate studies do not offer any courses for the folk-lorist. In fact, those of us who work in the field seem to drift into it by accident. In a way this can again lead to dangers as such persons may use their knowledge for ends other than healthy ones. It is necessary for folk-scholars to have a correct training and to have the aptitude for such a discipline. In our case for instance, we got interested in folk-lore, after publishing a magazine in which we included two folk-songs per issue. Although I had done my M. A. in Hindi I had come across no folk-literature, tales or music right from the primary class courses to the final end of my academic studies. On bringing out a special issue on folk-songs we extended our inquiry and ever since the hold maintains.

The unity of tribal life expresses itself without division—in toto—tribal art has no separate entity. Later in agricultural, feudal or capitalistic societies the differentiation of folk and classical becomes apparent. Gradually in a democratic set up, as the masses (or common man) is now involved, the utilisation of folk forms becomes important.

Field of Study

We have collected the text of folk-songs, recorded and put them down in notation. We have collected folk-tales by editing and taking down folk-ballads—recording and transcribing. We have made a special study of folk-instruments and have prepared a 16 m.m. film; analytical studies of the *Parh* (scroll-illustrated) folk-ballad, of proverbs, riddles and sayings; folk-dance and folk-drama. Many aspects of each separate subject have not come within the purview of our study which are yet to be taken up. We are conscious that such work has been undertaken by our predecessors and that similar work is being done in other parts of the country. We are not ignorant of, nor indifferent to this. In folk-songs some twenty books with texts have been brought out and about 5-7 have appeared in Rajasthani with notations. Research papers have been prepared for the doctoral degree of Universities, but these studies were mainly confined to an analysis of the social and literary aspects. The collection and analysis of songs has centred round the occasion of singing, customs, ceremonies, fairs and festivals, and has consisted of descriptive explanation or paraphrasing and to extolling or praising the songs. It is also true that in these studies the documentation lacks a scientific approach; background data and related material were invariably missing. Our own initial efforts suffered in the same manner. Similarly in the collection of folk-tales we have faced certain peculiar problems. The foremost being the choice of the language for scripting. In a folk-song the text of the poem is fixed. The words, syntax and spelling remains essentially Rajasthani. But in an oral prose-tale one confronts the problem whether to use Rajasthani or Hindi. To this day the collection of Rajasthani folk-tales is being done in Hindi. This method of scripting certainly cannot be beneficial to the proper study of folk-tales. Possibly in areas where Hindi is not the mother-tongue in so-called Hindi regions, similar problems must have become significant. In the preservation and transcription of folk-literature the sweetness and intimacy of the mother-tongue is an essential ingredient and cannot be sacrificed. The problems of style also become apparent here between oral and written literature. It might not be possible to transcribe a story as orally told as the style and syntax of the spoken word differs essentially from the written form. In the mother-tongue the oral form of a story might be completely lost if written in another medium.

As in the case of folk-songs, the social and other relevant data has not been studied. Whatever work has been done in this field consists of collections of this sort and their haphazard publication.

In the realm of folk-poetry some significant work has been contributed. Such manuscripts as are available have been edited, annotated and published. Important among these is "Dhola Maru" a legendary romantic ballad which is available in this category in published form. Hundreds of such available manuscripts are awaiting study, editing and publication. Such literature, in manuscript form is of great historical value.

In the same manner sayings and proverbs have been edited and published. A few worthwhile studies on these have been brought out but, here again we are faced with the problem of language, whether to write in Hindi or Rajasthani.

In the field of folk-painting, some informative articles have appeared, but these have not been interpretative, analytical or critical. Such subjects as *mehndi*, *alpana* have been tackled in the manner of magazine features, but these have merely touched the fringes of this study.

The folk-sculpture and folk-architecture aspects have been altogether neglected. Whatever work has been done is but negligible and whatever has been written has been done from a literary and lingual point of view and cannot be termed scientific folk-lore.

Within these fields we should like to consider the matter of recording and transcription.

Recording and Transcription

Folk Songs—Text and Transcription: There is a common tendency among collectors to carry out study of material according to geographical, social or subject-wise divisions—from the point of view of geography, sub-classifications have been made as hilly-areas, plains, deserts. Of social classifications, sub-divisions such as birth, marriage ceremonies, fairs and festivals etc. are made—and subject-wise such divisions as brother and sister, husband and wife and seasonal songs etc. But essentially these three divisions overlap, and/or do not fall exclusively within their own limited categories. As we go deep into these sub-divisional possibilities many problems arise. It is therefore important that in the text collection of the folk-songs of India the different forms of classification should be extensively studied, and an acceptable, detailed classification be formulated as guide-lines to scholars.

It is a commonly held notion that folk-songs do not adhere to any metrical form, but that they are free and spontaneous. We should treat this convention with doubt. Because in every folk-song the text is tied to the musical phrase. In a simple folk-song, each syllable has a separate note and notes have a rhythmic pattern of their own, thus the number of syllables in a line will form the metre of the poem. In transcribing a song, the scholar has to be able to determine the poetic line. This in turn is determined by the textual structure. All scholars who have studied the musical aspect of folk-songs find that a common time and repetitive rhythm continues throughout the song. Due to this musical frame each line and stanza must follow a similar form—conforming to the tune and rhythmic pattern. Keeping this basic factor in view, i.e. the musical pattern of folk-songs, a collector will be able to take down the song in its entirety, and correctly. The folk-singer has a facility of oral-memory while singing a song, which he may not retain exactly while reciting only the text. If the collector is aware of the metrical pattern of the tune, he will be able to discern any discrepancies and point out anything left out or added to the sung version.

A philological study is essential in order to tackle problems of phonetics, syntax and spelling, especially of dialects that do not have a written form.

Musical Structure

The study of folk-music presupposed the acceptance of certain fundamental principles. The understanding of musical form essentially rests on the musical note and rhythm. We have not yet arrived at a point where it could be definitely asserted that the musical scale employed in folk-music conforms to the accepted Indian classical musical scale. The study of folk musical instruments—their structure and technique of playing—points to the possibility of a different musical scale. This problem however, requires closer examination. In the case of rhythm more definite assertions could be made between the classical and folk rhythms. The applications of the *tala* of classical music when applied to folk-songs betrays a distortion of the structure of the song. Apparently rhythmic structure and stresses of folk-music have not achieved the mathematical and well-organised structure seen in *khali-bhari* and *sama* of the classical *tala*. In the works published so far containing musical notation of folk-songs, a tendency has been observed to give a definite name of a classical *tala*, and the song notated according to definite fixed bars. This tends to give a distorted version of the song. We have

instead, while notating the songs, avoided giving the classical *theke* to the notated song. To denote the timing we have indicated the essential rhythm pattern (*chalan*) as being a variety of *tala* (e.g. *Dadra ki chalan*). In notating folk-songs an understanding of these principles—as examined above—will help in preparing a comprehensive system of notation for folk-music.

We are aware of the drawbacks in the various methods of recording folk-music. We are faced with two problems while recording—first, whether to record at the locale in order to maintain the authentic atmosphere, or whether to collect the artistes under controlled conditions of recording. The former method benefits by the preservation of the spontaneous quality of performance but then one is likely to lose exactitude and clarity both in the music and the words.

Most of our work has been done by collecting people under controlled conditions. It is evident that such recording is possible only after you have won the confidence of the artistes. They are at first inclined to exercise their own discretion and the songs that first occur in memory are usually all of one particular type. Cross-questioning or being reminded of other songs acts as a prompter and they respond with a wider repertoire. Another important factor is the priority given to the order of recording of songs, and later how to classify such collected material for the library. According to our experience the collected material should be mainly classified and sub-classified on its musical basis i.e. according to the combination of (scale) notes and use of notes. Once this main classification has been done, other sub-classification can be more easily attempted. Besides we have also found that if music is the primary factor, then the recording tends to be music-orientated. This poses a certain difficulty that the collected material cannot be very reliably used for other purposes e.g. text of songs; or variations on a theme which may not have the same musical value.

The folk-songs of Rajasthan, particularly the folk-ballads are of long duration and from the musical point of view very limited variations are employed. Keeping the high cost of tapes and their lack of availability in mind, we have confined our recording mainly to the musical aspects of the ballads and have written down the text separately.

In the study of folk-music, special emphasis is necessary on the study of folk-instruments, because in order to deduce the essential elements in the music (or the notes) there is no more reliable source than the instruments employed.

Study of Folk-tales

As we have pointed out oral-prose literature when presented in a written form, throws up certain lingual problems. An essential ingredient, to be kept in view is how to preserve the colour and flavour of the original. Story, incidents, characters, dialogue and the moral—to maintain and balance all these elements in their authentic form is difficult. We have found that in the presentation of folk-tales the collector (writer) invariably gets involved to a greater or lesser degree and his own inclination gives a certain personal emphasis to the text.

The collection of folk-tales has mainly affected persons concerned with sociology and literature and anthropology. Some take a dilettante's interest or pursue it as a hobby. The interests of such persons (e.g. literary, sociological or anthropological) affect the transcripts from these various points of view. The basis of our study, collection and publication has been literary, with a view to present the story in a certain literary and artistic style in its written form. Having decided this approach, certain inevitable changes have crept into the form of such an improvisation and, in the context of contemporaneity, the emphasis on the moral has shifted. Nevertheless, the pure form of the story has not been tampered with or impaired; we have taken care to preserve the authentic form i.e. a literal transcription, which could be made available for use to students of other sciences or disciplines.

One might question the freedom exercised by the author in giving a literary form to folk-tales. Our experience is that even the village-narrator, in narrating the tale automatically conveys his own personality and style and emphasis on the moral which cannot be eliminated. In fact, his personal experience is an integral element in the story which expresses itself sharply. Thus in the literary re-interpretation of folk-tales there seems no other way than to permit a certain freedom to the collector.

The recording of folk-tales is also helpful, particularly the longer stories in which incidents and episodes are complicated, where several sub-plots are interwoven. Several folk-tales are narrated by professional story-tellers. Recording also helps to preserve their style.

Collection of Folk-ballads

Operatic ballads are extensively prevalent in Rajasthan. Their collection in written and recorded form is necessary. Here we would like to draw attention to a popular folk-epic built around the exploits of Bagarawat (a pastoral hero). This complete prose-verse work is performed throughout 10-12 consecutive nights. There are at present

very few ballad-singers left who remember the entire epic. It must have been the common experience of scholars in the field of folk-lore that such epic ballads are dying out. Therefore we consider that such operative ballads should be given priority in preservation, throughout the country.

In Rajasthan the Bagarawat and Pabuji folk-ballads have inspired a certain form of scroll-painting. The various episodes of the epic-ballad are depicted on a cloth of about 25-30 ft. in length. The ballad-singer performs (song and dance) standing in front of the painted scroll, referring to the illustrated scenes as he proceeds. This style of painting is related to folk-painting. The use of flat colour surface, strong delineation of lines, ornamentations, the pre-determined painting of facial features and other objects in certain set proportions—all these points need to be further examined and scientifically related to the other arts.

Certain Conclusions

(a) Folk-literature and folk-music are an inexhaustible treasure and their study should be subject to certain well-defined priorities rather than to a haphazard tackling of the entire field. In our study of folk-music and folk-tales of Rajasthan we have tried to emphasise such aspects as are in danger of extinction due to social and economic factors. In the course of our efforts our greatest concern and priority was for such subjects as were customary/secular in character. The place of religion—the Vedas and Puranas—in Indian life is likely to continue to be of importance for some time to come. But customs and ceremonies relating to birth, marriage, seasons and festivals and similar spheres are fast changing, due to social and industrial pressures. Hence these customary and secular aspects require immediate attention.

(b) Experience has proved that in any particular region extensive coverage does not necessarily improve, quantitatively or qualitatively, the value of the collected material. In fact it might result in waste of effort.

We experimented by trying to collect the maximum number of songs and tales from one particular village. We were able to collect about 5,000 songs and 2,000 fables, approximately. On review of the collected material it would appear that there are people in this village from almost all parts of Rajasthan. Such intensive and concentrated study of a select village in a particular region, therefore, may yield results that are representative of the entire contiguous region.

(c) In our study of folk-music we have discovered that such music as is accompanied by an instrument has achieved a certain degree of

standardisation. Musical accompaniment (instrumental or vocal) indicates a greater degree of sophistication.

(d) In our study of the folk-music of Rajasthan we have noticed that each type of folk-instrument is exclusive to a particular professional family. The making of the instrument has been handed down and taught from father to son as an hereditary vocation. Thus it has continued as part of a living tradition. This exclusive connection between particular instruments and a caste (or community) may well be found in other parts of India. This inference should prove helpful in the study of the instrument and its technique, while studying the music-communities throughout the country.

(e) Folk-ballads are sung by particular communities and it is an indisputable fact that a fully developed instrument has been preserved along with each major folk-ballad.

Folk-drama and Dance

(f) Transcription of folk-drama and documentation of folk-dance present their own problems. We attempted the recording of complete plays during performance because it was unlikely that the performers could be relied upon to relate (recite) the entire text. Such plays as are available in printed form differ a good deal from the actual performances. It is true that background material and data other than text could be collected and published. But in so far as the text is concerned its authentic form should be preserved to some extent.

(g) In the study and collection of folk-dance the best methods of documentation are filming and photography. In case these facilities are not made available the authentic form of dance is likely to be lost.

Future Programme

Having formulated some of the problems faced in our field-work in Rajasthan we put forward suggestions for future programmes and a plan of work which may be of interest to other scholars and collectors and invite, in turn, suggestions from them to augment our ideas.

1. Since institutionalised methods hamper work and discourage initiative and dedication, the focus of attention and support should be the free-lance collectors and scholars.

2. In our work, we intend taking up such aspects of folk-songs and folk-tales as are in danger of extinction due to rapid socio-economic

changes—important among which are social/customary subjects, forming part of the secular tradition.

3. It is important that regional museums be set-up to house the ethnological and folk-lore collection of each region.

4. To accord the scientific study of folk-lore its legitimate place, such studies should be accepted for post-graduate degrees and doctoral research in the University curriculae. Some Universities have already incorporated this principle. Moreover, aspects of folk-lore should form part of the syllabus for students of such related subjects as sociology, anthropology, literature etc.

5. For preservation five methods could be utilised—transcription; musical notation; tape-recording; photographic documentation and filming. Each branch of folk-art requires the application of different methods of preservation or a combination of them. Broadly speaking, for folk-tales priority should be given to transcription; folk-songs require transcribing of both text and musical-notation; folk-music can be tape-recorded; to preserve a record of occasions and authentic locales and atmosphere, photographic documentation is important. Folk-dance and folk-theatre require to be filmed. In using the right method of preservation the correct priority must be kept in mind to avoid the dissipation of resources, both of money and materials.

6. A programme for issuing gramophone discs of folk-music could be initiated. About 5-10 records could be processed every month and the money for this raised by annual subscriptions from about 300-500 subscribers. The project could then be self-supporting. As such records would be of great value to all experts and scholars, subscribers should be forthcoming from amongst them.

7. Efforts should be made to publish and publicise available material on different aspects of folk-lore.

8. Folk-literature and folk-arts should be recognised as a social necessity and promoted through educational and recreational programmes in order to revitalise the life of the common people and become part of their daily living.

9. The Central and State Governments should be persuaded to support programmes for the collecting and publishing of oral folk-literature in the same manner in which they have undertaken the publication of old traditional and historical manuscripts.

10. Recognising the need to give a unified purpose and direction to the study, collection and preservation of folk-lore the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi should set-up an Institute of Folk-lore which could offer facilities and guide-lines to workers in the field and act as a co-ordinating agency for the whole country. This would provide a valuable link, act as an integrating force and also help to awaken and promote national interest in the vast treasure we possess in the folk-lore of our country.

Komal Kothari and Vijayadandetha have worked as a team for the last 15 years. They have collaborated on a number of books on Folk-arts both in Hindi and Rajasthani, contributed to journals, broadcast and carried out field-study on the publication of Folk-arts. They founded "Rupayana"—a society for the study, preservation, dissemination of folk-arts in a village, Bourunda, near Jodhpur. From here they publish a monthly journal on Folk-Arts "Vani", and have jointly worked on and published volumes of the Folk-tales of Rajasthan. The work now in progress will be completed in 20 volumes. Mr. Kothari is at present writing a comprehensive work on the folk-instruments of Rajasthan. He was Secretary of the Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi for 6 years and collaborated on a production on films, "Documentary on Folk-Arts Volumes of Rajasthan."