CHAPTER - II

FOLKLORE

(A) ORIGIN HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT -- A GENERAL SURVEY:

Folklore is as old as human being. But the scientific study of folklore started only in the 19th century A.D. The term folklore was suggested by John William Thoms, a British antiquarian in 1846. Thoms had realized that scholarly work on materials of folkloristic nature was being carried on under various labels such as 'Popular Antiquities' or 'Popular Literature' and therefore needed a single label to designate this area of inquiry. He therefore suggested 'a good saxon compound Folk-Lore - the Lore of the people' to replace all other somewhat cumbersome terms, in a letter to the Athenaeum.¹ The term Folk refers to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor.² The term Lore means knowledge. The literary meaning of the term folklore is knowledge of the people.

Thoms' coining of the term folklore, as he himself accepted in the same letter, does not mean, as some people believe, that work on materials of folkloric nature began with the coining of this term. The

². Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore, p.2.
truth is that materials of folklore had been studied with scholarly interest long before Thoms coined the term. Besides the works of the Grimm Brothers, particularly of J. Grimm, whose 'household tales' appeared in 1812, and was recognized by Thoms himself, and which is very often used as evidence by western scholars to trace the growth of folkloristic studies, scholarly collections of folklore materials were done in Asia, particularly in India.

According to folkloristic studies, it is distinct that the study of folklore had begun much earlier than the coining of the term 'folklore' by Thoms. But he tried to present a definition of folklore by some words and phrases. These are manners, customs, fading legends, fragmentary ballads, etc. Besides, he created close relationship of his view with intellectual currents of romanticism and nationalism in the 19th century.

Besides Thoms, many other scholars tried to define the term folklore. According to Jones Balys, folklore comprises traditional creations of peoples, primitive and civilized. These are mainly accepted by using some sounds and words in metric form and prose. And it includes also folk beliefs or superstitions, customs, performances and plays. From this point of view, it is distinct that Folklore is not a folk

Folklore is a generic term which designates the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs etc. These are some accumulated knowledge of homogenous unsophisticated people. They are tied together by common physical bonds and emotional expression which gives it unity and individual distinction. Probably originally different aspects of folklore were taken by the folk which were produced by the individual and used through a process of recreation and which helped constant variation and repetition in a group production.

According to Bascom's suggestion, the meaning of the term folklore is folk learning which is transmitted orally and different crafts and techniques that are learned by imitation are also important items of folklore. Modern folklore includes generally folktools, folkcrafts, folkcostume, folk custom, folk belief, folk medicine, folk recipes, folk music, folk dance, folk games, folk gestures, and folk speech as well as folk literature or verbal art. It is accepted by all now-a-days that folklore has had its intimate and indispensable relation with the life of a community.

According to Indra Deva:

Folklore is actively shared by both men and women of even lowest
castes. Not only the rural people, but a large part of the population of the Pre-industrial Urban Centres are active bearers of the oral tradition. This wide sharing is brought out by the selection of themes and their treatment in various genres of folk literature. The attitudes of different castes towards each other, including that of the lower castes towards the higher; the nature of the diverse relationships in the particular joint family, the built in tensions in them, and the resentment of the woman operative religions and magical beliefs and practice among the folk and even the impact of modern social forces and ample expression in the folk literature of various regions of India. A systematic analysis of oral tradition can, therefore, yield useful hypothesis about any subtle aspects of social relationships and attitudes of the common people.

Being aware of the confusing state of folklore R.M. Dorson observes:

_The term (i.e., folklore) caught on and proved its value in defining a new area of knowledge and subject of inquiry but it has also caused confusion and controversy._

According to Ramkrishna Mukherjee:

_Reality is a concomitant understanding of the past and the present_

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And in order to draw effective generalizations on social change delving into the past is very essential, without it we cannot draw generalizations.

Naturally from the different view points of different folklorists it can be said that folklore is the pulse of the people. It creates social relationships among the folk which helps the folk to express their originality. Therefore, folklore can play important role in building up the general history of a nation.

Another folklorist Archer Tylore says that folklore consists of some materials which are handed down traditionally from generation to generation without a reliable ascription to an inventor or author. These materials may be either physical objects or ideas or words which transmitted traditionally.

Physical folklore includes the shapes and use of tools, costumes and the forms of villages and houses. On the other hand, the folklore of gestures and games holds a position intermediate between the folklore of physical objects and folklore of ideas. Typical ideas transmitted as folklore are revealed in the customs connected with the rites associated with the life cycle and with remedies for illness and wounds, with agriculture, the trades and the professions, and with

Religious life. Oral folklore includes words considered for their own sake and words occurring as connected discourses. Typical words studied by the folklorist without maintaining special records for their use in connected discourse are place names, personal names and nicknames. Folklore in the form of connected discourse includes myths, legends, tales, folk songs, charms, proverbs and riddles and so forth.

The study of folklore involves the collection, classification and interpretation of these traditional material and all these traditional material may rightly be called folk elements.

Generally it can be said that folklore is an outcome of the creative ideas of the people expressed through verbal art as well as material forms. Evidently, it may originate from a community or an individual. These are transmitted orally or through written process from one generation to another. Besides, it may migrate from one country to the other. It may exchange its position between written and oral traditions. Therefore, without any formal education a person may create verbal folklore and material folklore and at last these materials are accepted by the people. Folklore may belong to either a non-literate or the literate society, to either a tribal or non-tribal community, to the non-elite villagers or the educated elites. Naturally folklore occupies a prominent place in culture among the different groups of people.

Generally folklore includes everything which makes part of the
traditional and environmental equipments of the people which help in
the expression of life and thought. But it is not strictly a behaviour
science. On the other hand it can give us considerable insight into
personal and social relationships as well as motives and sentiments
which seem to influence certain groups of people.

Of course, from today till few years back, folklore was understood
to be Antiquities of common people. Generally during 1812 A.D., Jacob
Grimm and William Jacob together took the work of publication of
German Folktales and Antiquities (Grimm's fairy tales). They used the
word Volkskunde to mean the Folktales and Antiquities of the German
language. The meaning of the word Volk is folk and the meaning of
Skunde is lore.

According to modern folklorists the term folklore is used to indicate
the materials of the study and the term folkloristic is used to suggest
the meaning of these materials. Rightly does observe Dundes:

To avoid confusion it might be better to use the term folklore for
the materials and the term folkloristics for the study of the materials.

Although folklore has been defined by different folklorists:

differently, it is distinct that folklore is mostly related with education. Especially its influence is felt on the rural people in imparting information education which is essential for all types of people. It can be said that dissemination of education is the most explicit function of folklore. Because folklore tries to impart various knowledge to the common people.

(B) VARIOUS FIELDS OF FOLKLORE

Generally the scope of folklore is very wide. Because it is closely related with different subjects which are included in the society. There are various common factors in folklore which are more or less prevalent almost in all parts of our country. These are orally transmitted or through music and dance. It is distinct that some of the traditions are developed orally. Evidently, folklore includes various materials through which literate and non-literate people are educated in different places or different situations or different environments. Therefore, it can be said that folklore is related with various fields of society. These fields are more and more helpful for the Assamese people for their social life. These fields are mainly of four types; viz.

1) Oral Literature,

I) **Oral Literature**: Oral literature or verbal art or expressive literature may be defined as *spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances*. Traditionally it is known as folk literature. Oral narrative is one big sub-division of folk literature, which includes myth, fairy tale or märchen, romantic tale or novella, religious tale, folktale, legend, animal tale, anecdote, joke, numskull tale etc. Besides these, every form has its sub-forms which are dependent on the respective culture of the people. "For example, myths have many forms particularly in India. Etiological myths are very common in our country and so are religious myths. Many of these ancient myths and the religious tales have been recorded in ancient works such as the *Kathāsarit sāgar*, etc. Thus we have the world's best tradition of written animal tales as evidenced by famous *Pāncatantra* and the *Jātaka*. Similarly legends too have many forms, but the historical legends of western India particularly of Gujarat and Rajasthan are very famous. Mythical legends and religious tales of south India are also very well known".¹⁰

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10. *Ibid*
Oral poetry or folk poetry is another major sub-division of oral literature. Oral poetry includes,

*Folk epics, ballads, folk songs, lullabies, work songs and songs associated with ritual and rites (Samskāras), such as birth, marriage and death are commonly found in almost all parts of India. *  

Besides, the rich oral poetry is connected with festivals, occasions, feasts and ceremonies. Holi, Diwali, Pangal, Onam, Durgā pujā and Baisakhi are festivals of India which are well known.

Proverbs and riddles are also an important part of oral literature. Generally oral poetry, proverbs and riddles do not have much multiple existence, but are highly structured set forms of oral literature. Proverbs and proverbial expression have important functions in societies. Riddles have stayed in the folklife and still function in folk societies as important devices for imparting knowledge about cultural semantics, logic and the behaviour paradigms among the younger members of such societies. And different proverbs and riddles in various Indian languages have appeared now.  

Folk speech *embraces the local and regional turns of phrase that deviates from the standard language* generally which is usually taught.
in schools in an informal manner. The most important characteristics of folk speech is that it is more restricted to oral circulation. Besides these major forms of oral literature, there are another minor forms which are chants, prayers, laments, cries and even hollers.

II) **Material Culture**: This branch of folklore implies physical folklore. Dorson defines it as *material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art.*

This aspect of folklore and folklife is visible rather than aural. The kind of questions that concern a student of material culture are varied. He might want to know how men and women in tradition-oriented societies construct their homes following the traditional norms of folk architecture. He might as well want to know how people in traditional societies make their clothes, prepare their food, farm and fish, process the earth's bounty, fashion their tools and implement and design their furniture and utensils.

A student of material culture knows that this kind of folk behaviour existed prior to and continues alongside mechanized industry and therefore he might also compare the two traditions -- the folk and the modern -- and try to establish correlations.

Folk arts and crafts are objects of material culture. These materials simultaneously give more pleasure and serve different practical, social and economic ends. Observes Glassie:

*If a pleasure giving function predominates the artefact is called art; if a practical function predominates it is called craft .... the interior of a house is designed primarily to be used and its function may be classed primarily as economic, its exterior is designed primarily to be seen, and its function may be classed as primarily as aesthetic.*

Generally one of the most interesting and fascinating aspects of material culture of India is specially arts and crafts. These arts have followed definite continuity in the history of folk art of this country. In India these arts and crafts besides having aesthetic and practical functions, have at times a ritualistic-religious functions as well. In this sense the study of Indian folk arts and crafts falls under both rubrics: material culture and social folk custom.

**III) Social Folk Custom:** Social folk custom is another important area of folklore and folk life which is very close to material culture in the field of social custom. Says Dorson:

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Here the emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performances.  

Generally investigations are more concerned about the family and community observances of the people living in villages, tribal belts, and even industrial areas of Indian cities of special importance are the rites de passage of birth, initiation, marriage, death and similar rites. These rites have special significance in Hindu life and therefore have a well-spread field. Songs and tales and other forms of oral literature associated with these rites form an essential part of the first sector, i.e., oral literature, whereas social custom and ritualistic observances are studied in social folk custom. Thus ritual and custom associated with the festivals, such as Holi, Dipavali in north and central India, Durgā pujā in the east and south.  

Generally the different religious aspects of social folk custom in India are very multidimensional and highly complex. The different aspects of social folk custom naturally become the concern of a student of Indian folklife and folklore.

IV) Performing Folk Arts: The performing folk arts constitute the fourth and the last sector of folklore and folklife. The performing folk

18. R. M. Dorson, Op-cit., p. 3
arts are mainly concerned with traditional music, dance and drama. The word performances is associated with every item of Folklore. Evidently performance means the conscious presentation of these arts, dance, drama, folk music etc., by individual or groups who carry these art forms one generation to another.20

While the renditions of a folktale or a folksong, Says Dorson are now usually referred to as performances, they are more casual in nature than the conscious presentation of these arts by individuals or groups with folk instruments, dance, costumes and scenario props. The performing arts intersect each with the other and often appear in conjunction.21

The most important thing of performing folk arts is the traditional music, which is passed on by ear and performed by memory rather than by the written or printed musical score.22 Besides having its limited independent place in the genre of performing folk art, traditional music crosses generic, barriers and forms part of many other genres. Such as folk dance, folk drama, oral poetry, ritual and prayers always carry some elements of music.

The position of Folklore within anthropology has been considered.

22. Ibid., p. 336.
by William R. Bascom in his numerous articles. According to Bascom if folklore and oral tradition were classified as one entity, all information in non-literate cultures would be included under the term folklore. Differentiation between the terms is advantageous, also, because it is not necessary to attach the criterian oral of folklore. Generally in practice, a folklorist confronts literary traditional (booklore) as well as either wholly or partly non-verbal material. The meaning of oral tradition bases crucially on what is understood by the words oral and tradition, whereas the meaning of folklore consists of the meanings of the words folk and lore. The task of a student of folklore is both wider and narrower than that of one who deals with oral tradition. Students of oral tradition study all orally transmitted tradition information, the former study only a part of it, but folklore student may, in addition to verbal tradition, also consider non-verbal material and written material as well. The main problem of the study of oral tradition is the process by which tradition is transmitted in speech from speaker to hearer.

A holistic view of the transmission process is an attempt to arrive at a synthesis by analysing systematically the variables of oral communication. In this way, scholars must direct their attention to all the factors that can influence the transmission of tradition, those factors that concern the culture, the community, the individual, or the deep structure of the tradition itself, and they must further examine the interaction among all those factors.
In the Soviet Union in 1936, the Communist Party discovered the effectiveness of folklore as a political weapon. Russian Scholars reversed earlier theories that regarded folklore down to the lower classes, and claimed that the working people were the creators of Folklore.

Folklore and songs have been used to advance the theme of the class struggle in the Soviet Union, in China, in Cuba, and elsewhere. The Nazis used Teutonic mythology to promote their idea of a master race. In earlier times Krylov used fables to needle the Russian aristocracy and the first Chinese edition to Aesop's Fables was suppressed by officials who recognized their satire and suspected that they had been invented locally. Further study of the political uses of verbal art, which have only recently been recognized by folklorists, will undoubtedly reveal other instances of this kind.

The recording of verbal art is a well recognized field technique in linguistic and anthropological research, and it can be helpful in studying political attitudes. Verbal art provides useful materials for school curricula and important data for the study of law, values, psychology and history in non-literate societies. Writing and industrialization have undermined its social significance for more in urban united states than in most literate societies, but they have never destroyed verbal art or the other segments of folklore.
Performing art forms include mainly song, dance and drama. Every form performs different functions in various situations. The traditional folk music which is known as folk song is a rich tradition of ancient India. The term folk music is often loosely applied to cover all traditional or aurally transmitted music. Folk music is passed on by ear and performed by memory rather than by the written or printed musical score. Rightly does observe Dorson:

In a specific sense the term refers to aurally transmitted music found within a society that also has art or cultivated music that is transmitted through the musical score.\(^{23}\) Further he says:

An interest in folk music as an aesthetic phenomenon or as a basis for musical composition has existed for many centuries.\(^{24}\)

Folk music has some of the classical forms of music which are seen in India. A particular kind of folk music is identifiable by its instruments only. Folk song is passed on from one generation to another by word of mouth; so is the instrument and the kind of music associated with it from one generation to another.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 365.
Generally folk dance is performed by the folk. Folk dance is traditional, but that not all traditional forms are folk dance. Folk dance is an integral part of the life of a community. Folk dance is comparable to an oral tradition in depending upon a one-to-one relationship between the transmitter and receiver. Folk dance is more fixed or less dynamic. Naturally folk dances are very vast like folk music in India.

Says Handoo: Most of the time they go together and share many important characteristics. Furthermore, these art forms not only require the keen eye of an expert as far as the ear and action is concerned; they also need equal attention for the costumes, stage, instruments, the audience and the overall interaction of all these aspects, which are essential for the totality of the performance.

Folk drama is another important genre of performing art forms. The traditions of Indian folk drama are vast. Most of the forms of folk drama are associated with ritual and festival and have close affinity with music and dance.

Folk drama is a traditional play activity that relies primarily on dialogue to establish its meaning and it tells a story through the combination of dialogue and action. Drama is by its nature essentially

26. Ibid., p. 386.
28. Ibid., p. 28.
a public performance - it must be capable of being understood by the audience with a minimum of reflection. Generally drama must deal with publicly understood motives and symbols. It is seen that folk drama exists on a village or small group level. So the performers are members of the community and therefore known to most of the audience. The most perfect character is that folk drama can be performed anywhere. Folk drama always carries the elements of dance and music within it so much so that it is possible to draw a line between the dance, the music or the drama of it. Evidently the elements of dance and music are inseparable of Indian folk drama.30

Says T.F. Ordis: The shaping factor in folk drama was the sword dance with its circle, chorus and carefully concerned movements 31.

Generally it is seen that the performing artforms are closely related to formal performing arts. Because different important elements of high culture seem into folk repertoires.

From above points of view it is distinct that folklore is not a simple thing. Its range is very wide. It composes different materials of traditional culture.

Rightly does observe B. Makinowski: The text, of course is extremely important but without the context it remains lifeless.\textsuperscript{32}

Giving emphasis on the context of the folklore items Dan-Ben Amos observes:

\textit{For contextual folklore studies a text is necessary but not sufficient documentation, they require proxemic, kinesic, paralinguistic interactional descriptions, all of which might provide clues to the principles underlining the communicative process of folklore and its performing attitudes.}\textsuperscript{33}

From the above discussion it is clear that contextual analysis is too much profitable for the study of folklore. Besides various important elements of folklore are included in the contextual study.

Therefore, to know perfectly folklore every person should study the origin of culture which are interacted with different situations in our day to day life. And we should try to preserve these estates for our future generation.

\textsuperscript{32} B. Malinowski, \textit{Myth in Primitive Psychology}, p. 90.

\textsuperscript{33} Dan Ben Amos \textit{et al.}, :\textit{Folklore Performance and Communication}, p. 5.