CHAPTER II

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FOLKLORE EMERGED AS A new field of learning in the 19th century when antiquarians in England and philologists in Germany began to look closely at the ways of lower classes. In 1812 the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm commenced publishing influential volumes of oral folk narratives and interpretation of Germanic mythology. Then on 22 August 1846, an English antiquarian, William John Thomas sent a letter to the Athenaeum, a magazine catering to the intellectually curious, suggesting a new term “folklore” for the studies that were being done under the title “the popular antiquities.” The new term has defined a new area of knowledge and subject of enquiry. “The term caught on and proved its value in defining a new area of knowledge and subject of enquiry, but it has also caused confusion and controversy”. ¹ To the layman and the academic scholar folklore suggests, “falsehood, wrongness, fantasy and distortion. This is partly because of the non-elite nature of the subject itself and partly due to the absurd misconception, which prevailed (and still prevails in certain quarters) that folklore theories lack ‘scientificness’. ² It may also include “the pictures of granny women, spinning traditional tales in mountain cabins or gaily costumed peasants performing seasonal dances. Thus folklore means both the field of learning and the whole subject matter of that field.”³

¹ Dorson: An Introduction in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, ed. R.M. Dorson, p 1
² Handoo: Current Trends in Folklore, p1.
³ Ibid
In recent years, the term folk life has also vied with and even threatened to dominate folklore. The supporters of folk life studies claim that folklorists are too narrowly preoccupied with verbal forms and neglect the tangible products of folk artisans. They maintain that folk life embraces the whole panorama of traditional culture, including oral folklore. The champions of folk life studies stoutly maintain that their term includes traditional arts and crafts.4

Diversified opinions have been put forward as far as the meaning of folklore is concerned. Though a tendency to link it with “verbal art” prevailed, modern folklorists were of the view that folklore studies covered physical folklore, social customs and performing folk arts besides verbal art or oral literature. Most of the folklore workers while collecting folklore material with the humble aim of tracing the most original of texts in isolation are somewhat meaningless and are better understood only when the surrounding environment in which the text is alive is taken into account.

Alan Dundes rightly observes, “Folklorists must actively seek to elicit the meaning of folklore from the folk.” The new term folk life emerged when confusion over the meaning of folklore continued and in the words of Richard M. Dorson, it “vied with and threatened to dominate folklore.”5

Dorson has outlined the four major sectors of folklore and folk life studies as follows:

5. Ibid
1. Oral literature
2. Material folk culture
3. Social folk custom
4. Performing folk arts

The above-mentioned oral literature is sometimes called verbal art or expressive literature. Under this rubric fall spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterance that show repetitive patterns. One large subdivision is folk narratives, which has manifold distinction.

It has been noticed that folklore has a multidimensional area that seems yet to be unexplored. It does not only keep itself confined only in collection and explanation but to analyze them from different theoretical point of view to which it has shown a great demand for different scholars and folklorists as well. There are of course, various schools of scholars and folklorists who have looked through folklore materials from different perspectives. The following are the different schools that have analyzed folklore material from different aspects:

1. Mythological school
2. Migrational theory or Benfey’s school
3. Anthropological school
4. Historical-Geographical or Finnish school
5. Psychoanalytical school
6. Structural school.

Besides, there are other major schools of thought whose theoretical advances shaped folklore studies. Dorson has suggested about the following schools of folklore studies:

1. Historical reconstruct ional
2. Ideological
3. Functional
4. Oral formulaic
5. Cross-cultural
6. Folk cultural
7. Mass cultural
8. Hemispheric
9. Contextual

Although folklore studies include a variety of oral materials and their various genres and sub-genres, obviously, it is the narrative, which has been studied in a “scientifically advanced and academically sophisticated manner”. Therefore examples have been drawn for discussing the theoretical aspects of various schools from narratives only. The present day theoretical environment is such that it would seem that we are waiting for a discovery through a perspective that can reveal the significance of tradition studies. Folklore (the data) and folkloristics (the theoretical science) stand in such a situation today. On the one hand there is a large amount of folklore material, which is found anywhere in the world and on the other hand there is only the bare rudiment of methodology and theory to motivate its collection.

8, Handoo, *Op-cit*, Pp. 3-11
Among all the theories mentioned above, psychoanalytical theory has fascinated many folklorists throughout the 20th century. This is the most speculative body of current folklore research. The folklore of Assam conveying different massages and information of the Assamese people too needs to be analyzed psychoanalytically, which will reveal the hidden structures of the Assamese society. Certain collections of tales, ballad, love songs, marriage songs, proverbs and even beliefs and jokes, different rites and rituals and taboos that have certain appeal to the Assamese need to be subjected to psychoanalytic interpretations in a scientific manner to accomplish this task. To speak in the voice of Alan Dundes “what is unsaid is more important than what is said.” The psychoanalysis brings the unsaid matters into light giving a cathartic effect, for example, to the sufferer so-called the neurotic.

Some tales, although the themes are the same, have different variants. As for example, the tale “Champavati” in our study deals with the subject where the snake devours the girl. It becomes clear then that snake symbolizes male genital organ that is designated and spoken in different ways in both Nalbari and Tezpur areas. It depends upon the individual taleteller’s own style and his/her command on the tale, or looking at the subject matter from different perspectives besides the teller’s emotion, spontaneity, linguistic variations etc. They are numerous and may be found in widely separated cultures. Some tales are found in all cultures because of some common denominator in human experience or human mentality due to the presence of psychic unit or a collective consciousness. The tale “Tejimala” has been found as a Cinderella tale almost all over the world with little variation due to the universal commonness of human behaviour
and abnormalities of the same. In India a typical Oedipus tale is not usually
found, however the complex exists and it is mostly reflected in tales having
a kind of reversed order.\textsuperscript{9} For example one finds in such tales the father
killing the son but not vice verse. The story of Shiva (Parvati) and Ganesha
besides many examples in popular culture\textsuperscript{10} is a typical example of this
order. However the tales in which, the heroine is suffering from Electra
complex seem to match the European types. Here as a reference I would like
to mention one folktale in Assam known as "Panesai"\textsuperscript{11} which starts with an
Oedipus dream—the son wants to be the father of his mother’s child.\textsuperscript{12} The
tale is introduced with the action of a boy, who passes on an egg into his
mother’s hand that he had found when he was cleaning betel nut leaf, which
incidentally seems to be a sexual symbol, and in turn the mother puts the egg
on the loft of her kitchen (the oblique meaning seems that to reach a loft one
has to climb and climbing means a sexual act). In Assam the kitchen is
normally a one-room space but separated by a partition and that small space
is associated with female genitalia.\textsuperscript{13} Thereafter when a beautiful girl comes
out of the egg she eats the old cooked rice leaving the freshly cooked one
untouched. Later, the tale moves ahead with an Electra and incest
complexes, as the hero of the tale wants to marry his sister, a diminutive

\textsuperscript{9} Ramanujan, 1984, \textit{An Indian Oedipus}, in Lawell Edmunds and Alan Dundes
(eds.): \textit{A Folklore Casebook}. New York: Garland. Pp.234-61

\textsuperscript{10} Bollywood film "Shakti"

\textsuperscript{11} L. Bezboruah, \textit{Burhi Air Sadhu} p. 81


\textsuperscript{13} (cf. "Freud’s symbols" such as “room = woman, a row of rooms = herem or
brothel, key and lock = sexual act etc. in the next Chapter)
The variation of folk materials from place to place and person to person implies new elements and is a widespread phenomenon in all-folk societies. In this way the study of folklore becomes more important in terms of the variants and versions this phenomenon generates. This time and space relationship of folklore items reflects multiple dimensions of folklore that provides more freedom to the creator as well as to the listener. One must note that this freedom in generating oral discourse is enjoyed both by the tellers and the audience for achieving the objectives of the both. Written discourse as we know does not have this freedom. This freedom to generate versions and yet retain the basic structure and the content in oral discourse leads one to realize that some common psychic denominator may be shared by all kinds of people. A tale can communicate many things at once like the socio-cultural background of the society, its economy, food habits, ceremonials, taboos, rites and rituals, amusement, recreation, religious edification etc. When analyzing a narrative the analyst has to keep all these aspects in mind. It depends upon the analyst’s speculative observation in a multifarious ways. To interpret a tale from the psychological point of view, the folklorist would need knowledge and expertise such as possessed by the psychologist, the student of human mind and psyche.

Moreover, it needs to be kept in mind too that human behaviour is a dynamic phenomenon and keeps changing. Naturally these changes
involve the changes in their collective anxieties and the sources of these anxieties. We realize that many social relationships of human beings have been defiled and have been threatened and the totality of the societal effectiveness has been minimized. Many of the undesirable incidents have been regarded as fatalistic. There is maladjustment in relations like husband and wife, mother and son (married son), daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, or sister-in-law etc. People in many respects now educated and in many ways highly educated. Life has become hectic. The change in the economic order of the modern societies due to industrialization and the resultant consequences has certainly affected the collective behaviour of the modern communities. People for example have no time to look into their past. They are sometimes able to pay attention to their children’s needs, these children represent the next generation, but they cannot afford time for their former generation. The old parents are suffering and struggling with disease and death, there is nobody to look after them. Even they have been deprived of their pensions and the son is learning to live a luxurious city life. The term "education" has been misinterpreted. People are trying to forget the old and ready to receive the new, but they are not trying to keep the balance between the two. This kind of behaviour and its resultant consequences in poor societies, I am sure might need thorough investigations that at the present point of time seems possible by examining the shared oral narrative discourse of such societies.

At the same time, the way women in this country suffer does not qualify our society to be called educated. For example more often than not the pregnant woman who are carrying and bearing the future hope, are starving and are accused by their husband himself, his brothers and sister-in-
laws and parents and then banished, even tortured in different ways by the so-called male-dominated Indian society. Indians have role models readily available to them in the form of epic heroes or heroines to justify these syndromes. However, besides other cultural problems, these attitudes seem to be responsible for creating deformities based on prenatal collective anxieties among the newborn children. Women give birth to infected children, which might be the cause of different physical abnormalities in children for which they suffer the whole life. In later life, these anxieties can become the cause of neurotics. The mothers-in-law makes their daughters-in-law suffer as they were made to suffer by their mothers-in-law long time ago, which they have been carrying on as neurotic anxieties in their sub-conscious for all these years. Needless to say, how many women have died and are dying due to dowry harassment in India. Without deviating from the main point and the purpose of this brief chapter, it is necessary to emphasize the anxiety syndrome of the Indian society as a cultural construct to justify a psychoanalytic treatment.

Even the situation has become more challenging in the beginning of the 21st century. Rapid industrialization, displacement, migration, pollution, and the fear of wars and bloodshed, and the fast-growing merchandize culture seem to have collectively increased the mental anxieties of the mankind. These conditions therefore demand that human societies may need the application of psychological techniques so that these ills may be remedied. The application of Freudian psychoanalysis to oral traditions, pedagogical situations, and many more aspects of human behaviour may help us to discover the sources of these anxieties and also reveal the historical aspects of these anxiety complexes. In the context of the Indian
society folklore and oral narrative can be analyzed to trace the historical sources of the anxieties so that these could then direct us to provide appropriate treatment if necessary or possible.

A proper application of a given psychological technique can, in my opinion, reveal the deep rooted anxiety complexes in the Indian collective subconscious very much related to social stratification such as caste system, social structure, kinship systems, feudalism, management of resources and the gender roles etc. Indian society has also, just like many other societies in the world, strong anxiety complexes related to the deep structure conditions of the society. A psychological investigation of the collective subconscious of the Indian society will reveal many hidden things and offer a clear understanding of the collective mind and its functioning. This will provide knowledge to the mothers too as she herself, her breasts, and her body is the first object of our desire. The meaning of the mother implies that through which we can satisfy our sexual awakenings. And the old saying, “treat the patient and not the disease” will be of great value. This kind of knowledge should be applied from the grassroots level depending upon the psychosexual development of children. In fact the government has taken care of it with a little success. Instead of merely looking at things from socio-cultural and economic viewpoints, teachers should be taught to look at things from the psychological perspective too. In such a manner, I think, people will inculcate new ideas and innovative thoughts to look at things and their minds will be more reformed than ever. Nevertheless such is the way to arouse individual’s potentialities to adore humanity. Thus the psychological dimensions might include any number of aspects of the human psyche not simply memory on its own sake.
A psychoanalyst’s job is, according to Freud, to discover how people suffer mental sickness, how they take up the characteristic neurotic attitude towards life and finally, how they develop the morbid symptoms under the stress of the mental dynamics or forces. In brief, the psychoanalyst transfers all that is unconscious in the person’s mind to his or her consciousness, feeling up the amnesic gaps in the memory. The views about psychoanalysis according to some critics are as follows.

C. G. Jung severed his intellectual relations with Freud in 1913 and set up his own school of analytical psychology in Switzerland. Rejecting the name and the sexual symbolism of psychoanalysis, he and his followers grouped themselves under a distinct branch of psychology. From the folkloristic viewpoint, Freidians and Jungians have much in common. Both circles regard folklore as an integral part of their discipline. Both Freud and Jung interpret myths and fairy tales by the method of symbolism. The Freudian pairs of opposites are male-female, phallus-vagina. But in Jung they are used metaphysically rather than nakedly as sexual terms. For example, here lies consciousness–unconsciousness, life-death, God-Satan. Both schemes of interpretation employ the key concept of the unconscious. Jung analyses the trickster as God, animal and man all are one, at once sub human and super human. But for Freudian interpretation the trickster is the phallus. While Radin combines Freudian and Jungian concepts and explains

that trickster implies all things to all men, interpreted a new in every generation (Dorson).

Freud's "every mental act begins as an unconscious one" which, seems to lay emphasis upon the mental sources of perception. The nature of perception is such that external realities of mind try to find out meanings in the mind and internal realities of mind try to find out meanings in the external world. It may also be pointed out that Freud considers that the unconscious is in essence all that is bad in us, all that is repressed in us. They are also incompatible with the demands of culture and higher self. This may be true to the abnormal one but not so in normal persons. 15

Karen Horney observes Freud's pessimism in regards to neuroses and their treatment. It was for his disbelief in essential human goodness and human growth. She believes that man has potentialities of becoming good and descent by working continually with deeper understanding of his own nature and true relationships with others. Man has proper freedom of choice and decisions. Conflicts and complexes originate from incompatible human attitudes and disturbances in social relationships. 16

Another critic of Freud's psychoanalysis is T. P. Nunn who has pointed out that in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" Freud set forth a pessimistic philosophy of life, which is difficult to accept. His scientific determinism has also left no room for asserting a creative factor in human

15. Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religions, p 102.
16. K. Horney, Our Inner Conflicts. p. 19ff
experiences. From the point of view of the Freudian psychology, it is evident that the goal of all organic life is annihilation and his “death instinct” is the root of masochism and sadism. The goal of biological evolution is creative, constructive and purposive which mustn’t be ignored. Freudian conception also is alleged to have overlooked the physical basis of psychic phenomenon. Many blame Freud of neglecting moral and spiritual side of human nature. 17

Philip Reiff in his book *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*, has made important comments on Freud. According to him, the fundamental claim of modern science: the power of prediction needs reexamination. He maintains that psychoanalysis is a retrospective science, never a predictive science recognized with certainty if we follow the line of analysis ....to predict it along the line of synthesis is impossible. One cannot foretell the adult sexual disposition of a five-year-old child. He says that according Freud’s belief, the determining factors of health and neurosis are already present in a young child. For Reiff however deeper the psychoanalysis of a character goes, it never make predictions to impair our confidence in the determinist principle. Neurotic state of mind is systematically meaningful, but what Freud means by causation and whether we can predict that or not is an issue that cannot be put aside. Nevertheless Freud’s honest stop, sort of prediction claims or suggests a general caution with respect to the style of explanation needs a serious consideration. But it seems that the version of the determinist does not support, neither does it contradict the total explanatory ambitions of psychoanalysis, particularly the goal of minute explanation for every element of verbal lapse, an error or a dream.

17. C. Miller, *Psychoanalysis and its Derivatives*. Chapter II.
Thus psychologists, anthropologists, historians and folklorists too have criticized Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. His ideas have been modified and developed in many different directions. Many of his suggestions have been discarded all together. Different disciplines including psychoanalysis accept or reject different positions of overall theory. The most important contribution probably will be the most general according to Peter Claus and he proceeded by saying that "the mind consists of different levels of consciousness, that there are processes of symbolic communication between the different levels and that the individual human goes through a process of personality development which involves the development of communication system between levels of consciousness". Thus Freud has made a new renaissance, a new epoch to the understanding of the feelings of human being.

Again he has added that, "there is considerable disagreement amongst psychoanalysts as to how this process of the development of sexuality and sexual identity applies to girls. Most distinguished is the Electra complex (taking the name from a figure in another Greek tragedy). This mirrors the Oedipus complex in some ways. (Tales such as Cinderella AT 510 and AT 511 about a girl's adventurous leading up to marriage are easily related to Electra complex). However, the control of sexuality falls more heavily on females in most societies including Assamese. Repression of their sexual desires is more severe denial.

18. Claus, Peter J and Frank J: *Folkloristic and Indian Folklore*
Some of the areas of agreement and disagreement between Freud's theory and the majority of neo-Freudians

Freud
Special emphasis on sex "instinct"; universality of the Oedipus complex; theory of infantile sexuality; reification of ego, superego, and id; emphasis on nineteenth-century materialism and determinism.

Agreement
Importance of unconscious motivation, repression, and the other defense mechanisms; the concept of anxiety and defense; early childhood as a formative period in personality development.

Neo-Freudians
Stress on social and cultural influences and on importance of interpersonal relations; acceptance of holistic view and freedom of action.

or Harold Martin (et-al): Psychology: Understanding Human behavior, Chapter 2, theories of personality, P. 42]
To conclude in the words of folklorist Jawaharlal Handoo: “Anthropologists and Folklorists have reacted very sharply to the findings of psychoanalytical school. They believed that the explanations this school tries to give are more based upon speculative assumption about modern man. But whether or not human ancestor or ancestors who devised the folktale or game had the same psychological make up, as modern man is hard to prove. However, in spite of the controversial debates the psychoanalytical theory generated in the wide academic circles, it still remains the only non-formulistic way of deciphering the meanings, if any, of folklore materials and as such has not been discarded completely”. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, we must unquestionably accept Freud when he says; “There are three sources of man’s suffering the body, the eternal world in the man and his relation with other men” .²⁰ And so do we agree with the universal acceptability of his theory, the theory of psychoanalysis?

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¹⁹. Handoo, Op-cit, p.10