

ANTHROPOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

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Anthropology began its voyage exactly on the day human beings were evolved way back to millions of years ago but, it took several centuries to get its' name well established. The *official recognition* only came about 1859, just after the institution of the *Society of Anthropology in Paris* by the efforts of Broca (Reddy 1987, 65). Since then, anthropology marched ahead as, a *Discipline of infinite curiosity about human beings* (Ember et al. 2002:2), and became the *Science of human beings*. Goodenough (Goodenough 2002, 424) puts this character of anthropology very clear as, that *Covers all facets of human struggle, human existence, and human history, from the beginning*. Eventually this will crop up a question in our mind, how does anthropology become a unique subject discipline? The answer is something strategic as, Damodaran (Damodaran 2014, 12) proclaimed that

A search for new ways to understand the human condition, and which also includes the non-human world.

Consequently, anthropology provides a new window of wisdom by travel upon the physical, the social and the cultural facets of human beings. It also explores answers to the questions about where and how humankind fits into the natural order? (Goodenough 2002, 424). Naturally, this kindles a scientific perspective for investigating the human nature, a complex amalgam, which interacts continuously throughout one's life and history, by cutting across the pre-historic, historic, and contemporary knowledge, societies, and culture (Damodaran 1999, 36-37, Majumdar and Madan 1986, 5).

The doyen of American anthropology Boas (Boas 1904, 522) once explicated that anthropology as an act of *appreciation of the necessity of studying all forms of human culture*. This idea of Boas hints at *high concern* of anthropology; its' great efforts to observe, examine, study, analyze and understand human society and culture in a *holistic perspective*. The famous definition of Herskovits of anthropology as, *the study of man and his works* (Majumdar and Madan 1986, 2; Doshi and Jain 2001, 17) further ignites the thoughts about human culture and those of their works. Here, the work is, *an activity or, engagement involving mental or, physical effort done*. This working explanation takes straight away to the idea of Bauman who has seen *folklore as action* by giving great concern over *the doing of folklore*.

The Concept of Folklore

Generally, *Folklore* means those things that have been disseminated in an informal manner mostly by word of mouth such as the traditional beliefs, myths, tales and practices of people living as a group. It is generally agreed that

*The history of modern Folklore studies began with the publication of the volume of German Folktales under the title **Kinder und Hausmarchen (Children's and Household Tales) in 1812 by the Grimm brothers.***

(Datta 2002, 15-16)

In England folklore was previously known as *Popular Antiquities*. A British antiquarian, William John Thomas first coined the term *folklore* in a letter written in 1846 and sent it to the Magazine *The Athenaeum* in which he suggested the new word *Folklore* in place of either Popular Antiquity or, Popular Literature. He wrote,

Your pages have so often given evidence of the interest which you take in what we in England designate as Popular Antiquities or Popular Literature (though by-the-by it is more a lore than a Literature, would be more aptly be described by a good Saxon compound 'Folklore'-lore of the people) that, I am not without hopes of enlisting your aid in garnering the few ears which are remaining, scattered over that field from which our forefathers might have gathered a goodly crop

(cf. Dundes 1965, 4)

Thereafter, the term folklore replaced various awkward usages around at that time. It gained immediate popularity and currency not only in the English speaking countries but also across the world. However, the original terms such as, *Volksunde*, *Popular Antiquity*, etc. were also being in use.

Usually, the *folklore* of a people consists of two kinds of activity. What the people - *folk* traditionally *do*, and what they traditionally *say* by word of mouth or, *orally* (*see*).

Even William Thomas indicates the folk as, *the illiterate peasantry of a given region*. Dundes (1980, 4) said,

The term folk in its initial meaning referred to European peasants and to them alone.

Subsequently, folklore primarily confined with Europe. The study of folklore has changed over time. Founders of folklore, they called it as, philology, have always focused on inter-relationship between language, literature, philosophy and history; and since 1960's, folklore has been considered as an *Artistic communication in small groups* (Ben-Amos 1972).

Folklore started to focus upon the relationship of individual creativity with the collective order, however, it is concerned with aesthetic and expressive aspects that make creative acts. For instance, the lore was seen as texts of stories and songs, and later has been taken as any willed, individual, creative expression. So, one can recognize folk as any collectivity, a group or a culture. To quote Dundes (1980, 19) *Who are the folk? Among others, We are!*. This shift reflects the vital importance of folklore to all cultures.

Previously, the folklore scholars worried that their subject, i.e. texts or, culture was dying, and disappearing in an age of high technology, and global capitalism. Therefore, folklorists heavily concentrated on salvaging, and documenting texts such as, tales and songs for understanding the past, and for a while the present. One can see this earlier attitude in the words of Dorson (1961:12, 13),

Folklorists,...at any rate, are not especially history minded, and prefer to examine folk materials by category, such as folktale and folksong, proverb and riddle, rather than by historical period.

Zumwalt (1988, 59) quotes Thompson, who said that a folklorist who

He had spent his time working on indexes and classifications in order to facilitate the process of archiving material.

Now, folklorists shifted their focus to present realities of cultural forms and processes, using fieldwork. For instance, Dorson (1978, 23) presents them as contemporary,

Keyed to the here and now, to the urban centers, to the issues and philosophies of the day.

Therefore, folklore *now evokes* two levels of meaning—one, the materials collected from a group of associated people, and second, the systematic scientific analytical study of such materials as, Dundes (1965, 3) argued:

These materials and the study of them are both referred to as folklore. 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.

On the backlash of the emergence of *new theoretical paradigms* such as, Post-colonialism and Post-modernism. The attention has been turned to the study of native naive tradition by providing non-biased importance to it with a growing realization that folklore cannot be studied in isolation, intermingling of folk and any other culture and fusion of different disciplines like Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Literary Studies, Gender Studies, Education and Linguistics has too significant. That changed the dimensions and perceptions of Folklore Studies, and thus anybody can see today any *item of folklore is a living aspect* which has changed the entire vision. Handoo (1985, 7) puts it as,

Theoretical bias and folklore specialists begin thinking of their areas of inquiry as a living phenomenon with hopes, both for the present and the future.

As a result, today folklore studies have incorporated multidimensional approaches responding to contemporary socio-cultural theories, and methodological concerns. Thus, the horizons of present day international folkloristics has widened its' scope from the analysis of

folklore texts to the study of their performances, functions, and social sphere of impact. Along with these theoretical and methodological shift in approaches, and sturdy in folklore or, folkloristic, it can also add the fact that the remarkable contribution of fieldwork, which really takes and connects folklorists to the society, particularly to the people and confers contextual knowledge. Fieldwork brought conceptual changes in folklore and the scholars started using theories and proving their own theories. It also links the subject matter to the society and people. It provides an affirmative understanding of culture by combining the social, and aesthetic elements of culture which the folklore represents.

Anthropology and Folklore

Since, anthropology has focused on society and culture, folklore has excited considerable interest, with its contents, superstitions, customs, and of popular tales and which must be considered as, Boas (1904, 519) has testified folklore as, *A branch of anthropological research*.

Folklore, the creative expression of human beings reflects respective culture as *a mirror* which reflects values, beliefs, ethos, and many more of a cultural group. Beginning with records of curious superstitions, customs, and of popular tales, folklore has become the science of all the manifestations of popular life (Boas 1904:519). Thus, the 'professed scholars' occupy primarily with the identity of the contents of folklore, and the occurrence of these forms of folklore seems to be in part to the survival of earlier customs, and beliefs.

Present day folklore scholarship seeks to document, interpret, present and advocate forms of undervalued cultural expression and in doing so weave webs of cultural meaning, link past and present through tradition and creativity and also articulate deeply felt values in meaningful ways (Zeitlin 2000, 3-19). Despite the emphasis on cultural meanings, folklore continues to be treated as a layout for making interpretations and drawing inferences about a culture.

Anthropology had a long connection with folklore discourses. For instance, Boas was a founding member and important force in the *American Folklore Society*, as well as an anthropologist. Boas, and his many famous students such as, Benedict, Sapir, Kroeber, Jacobs, Radin, and Mead considered themselves folklorists, contributing to and editing the "Journal of American Folklore", and serving as members and officers of the American Folklore Society. It is appropriate to mention a student of Kroeber, Foster's claim on anthropologists as, *They all did folklore* (cf. Zumwalt 1988, 68). All they did see folklore as reflective of culture, and supplied rich and enormous empirical data. As great fieldworkers, they made great contributions to the folklore discourse through their splendid effort to present accurate, objective ideas about the cultures they observed and understood as participants.

Simmons (1988, 3) words, in fact, tells that these rich experiences let them to come over from certain preconceptions of their predecessors in social theory, Franz Boas was the first anthropologist to sweep evolutionary reconstructions aside and to assert at least partial custody of the sacred in behalf of all indigenous people. Boas (1914, 477) had the opinion that folklore

Give a faithful picture of the mode of life and of the chief interests that have prevailed among the people during the last few generations.

Certainly, it can be believed, such understanding is only possible to come from a *close contact* with the real people through the real fieldwork experience. They used the data they gathered to understand the given cultures, and considered the mythology to be meaningful and reflective of that culture. However, it should be added here that the subject matter in the two disciplines varies greatly but, richly contributed. Both anthropology and folklore studies were greatly indebted to Darwin's *theory of evolution*, and *social Darwinism*. These theories are believed that all humans and human society went through a process of evolution through gradual growth, and progress. Thus, in one way it accepts the growth of cultures from a single point or evolution from single fixed concept. For instance, Frazer the writer of *Golden Bough* opined that all myths came from ancient fertility rituals and he theorized that myth and ritual are based on devolutionary patterns of growth.

Muller has studied common heritage of cultures and the past. Lomax, who has studied folk songs, says that one can predict universal relations in them, with their inbuilt concepts mirroring cultures. Symbolic anthropology has also led to deeper studies in folklore.

Durkhiem studied symbols, and said that they have social meanings (see Durkhiem 1915). Structuralism is another anthropological approach to folklore. Structuralists deal with structures of folklore. Propp, and Levi-Strauss stand tall on this. For Levi-Strauss, Myths have many similar features; they are based on reaction and reflect common ideas that oppose one another like good and evil, male and female and earth and sky. He often said that structures are conditioned by the human mind and they have deep structures which provides with the explanation of the myth (see Levi-Strauss 1955).

Ethnography is another area, a very important component of folklore studies, which systematically written down cultural descriptions. Boas, Benedict, Mead, Brown, and Malinowski are few among those notable ethnographers. From the 1960's onwards scholars have studied the relationship between mass media and folk cultures. As ethnic and rural folk pour into cities, forms of mass media such as television, films and audio recordings employ folk themes. These factors have led to deeper studies in the field of folklore.

The overhead discussion clearly revealed the fact that *Folklore and Anthropology are deeply connected*. If anyone really wants to know the link between anthropology and folklore one should look at the words of Prop (1984) who defined material culture, and customs. He said that

The earliest forms of material culture and social organization are the objects of ethnography. Therefore, historical folklore which attempts to discover the origin of its phenomenon rests upon ethnography. There cannot be a materialist study of folklore independent of ethnography. In any event the folk tale, epic poetry, ritual poetry, charms, riddles a genres cannot be explained without enlisting ethnographic data.

Further, Benedict, a social anthropologist, has greatly contributed to the relationship of anthropological theory in folklore. She held the view that all parts of culture are inter-related,

reflect by different means by the same behavior patterns, values and beliefs. So, for she folklore serves as a *doorway to culture*. Bascom (1953, 289) puts her interest in folklore as,

Benedict has made an extremely enlightening analysis of Zuni folklore along these lines, in which she demonstrates how the interests and experiences of the narrators are reflected in the tales they tell, and other studies have been published or are in process

(Bascom 1953, 289)

Further, to quote the words of Riedl, who interestingly citing the relationship between anthropology and folklore in German tradition as,

National ethnology was first to develop systematically in Germany as a field of study, if not as an academic discipline. As Ethnographie, Folklore, or as Volkskunde it dealt and still deals with the study of all traditional aspects of German culture such as folk housing and building, settlement, costumes, customs and manners...folk beliefs, narratives, songs, dances, etc. Although Volkskunde was originally largely ethnographic-descriptive and rural-oriented.

Not in a similar fashion, Bascom (1953, 285-86) also had strong claim that,

Folklore, to the anthropologist, is a part of culture but not the whole of culture. It includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the texts of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance but not folk art, folk dance, folk music, folk costume, folk medicine, folk custom, or folk belief. All of these are important parts of culture, which must also be a part of any complete ethnography. All are unquestionably worthy of study, whether in literate or nonliterate societies". Finally, I would like to turn on to Bascom who said: "Folklore thus is studied in anthropology because it is a part of culture. It is a part of man's learned traditions and customs, a part of his social heritage. It can be analyzed in the same way as other customs and traditions, in terms of form and function, or of interrelations with other aspects of culture

As mentioned earlier that from 1960's there was a shift in folkloristics, the swing from collection, and categorization to a new way of synthesis on par with the notion *folklore is a living aspect*. Appropriately, the now-a-day student of folklore can recognize the interactions between the teller (performer or, performance), and the audience (or spectator), the reactions and communications and the connections amongst varied expressive elements of culture. Such a scholar also looks at the dynamic relations amid the social, the traditional, and the creative individual. It too focuses on the balance of traditional and the emergent, socially given and creative. This way of synthesis facilitates and is to be deemed a better understanding of the

world by recognizing the circular system of individual, group, and expression. The theoretical, and methodological strategies that are now followed by folkloristics strongly pushes to opine, *Anthropology of Folklore* is still significant and has great consequences.

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