



## Observations

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**Kaushal:** First of all, I would like to thank the National Folklore Support Centre and Muthukumaraswamy for inviting me over. For me it has been a continuation of the dialogue we began in New Delhi at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts at last year's symposium on *Folklore, the Public Sphere, and Civil Society*. There also folklore was appearing as a discourse of a certain kind, and what I have experienced in these past three days makes me think of the linkages and the continuity between the two conferences. Definitely what emerges here is that folklore is a specific kind of discourse, and that this discourse needs to be investigated on its own terms. Probably we do need to develop new paradigms in order to understand this discourse in its context.

There was lot of information pouring in, a lot of new ethnographic materials, and a lot of interesting discussions were taking place. What kept emerging was

that — even when we were talking of this discourse in terms of alternate discourses, and in terms of discourses of different competing voices — there is a strong tendency for negotiation of space by the different communities, caste groups, or competing ideologies involved. So, rather than looking for some exclusive space, the effort seems to be to find one's own place within the broader framework of the general community.

And then if we move out from there we found, in Bharathi's paper, a mention of negotiation between modernity and tradition. And emerging new forms — when you talk about advertisements, those are emerging new forms. I also think that whether one is talking of colonial or post-colonial interpretations, we need to discuss the whole construct of Folklore as a discipline, and categories such as folk, tribe, orality, textual — these are constructs and they have their own socio-political and historical baggage, some of which is very much rooted in the ways practitioners of colonial methodologies were creating new disciplines as they were encountering cultures outside their own countries — and maybe even within their own countries — that seemed involved with different levels of discourse than what industrialization was engaged in.

Probably at some level there is a need for us to unlearn our categories of discourse. And, as was very well put by Prof. Peter Claus, there is also the need to go nearer to the discourses of the communities that we are discussing. We should be aware of academic agendas and discourses, and of the discourses in and around particular disciplines, be they Folklore or Anthropology or Cultural Studies and so on. Whether it is structuralism or psychoanalysis or post-colonialism, intellectual frameworks tend to remove us from those who are practicing the tradition. While deconstructing and decoding folklore events, we must take care to keep sight both of the empirical data and of local community members' ways of looking at that data.

These are some of the very fundamental issues that this conference has thrown open. Hopefully we will continue to engage in this discussion, and eventually arrive at some better understandings of the discourses of the communities with which we are engaged, as well as of our own discourses.

**Harishankar:** I came to this conference from a different perspective: that of a literary theorist. During these days of deliberations, one thing that became clear to me is that we should look into those inter-disciplinary nuances that can provide better insights into the specificities. Another point that interested me is that even though we had multiple voices, they were still mostly talking from one end of a binary or the other. My commitment — both in terms of theory, and in terms of the way I look at folklore — is to an interstitial position. This doesn't mean that I am avoiding commitment to any one binary, but

rather than I am focusing more on the 'how' of things. If we juxtapose, rather than oppose, polarities we can learn a great deal. This is an approach that I would like to see much more of at such gatherings and meetings.

I have been working for some time now on cross-cultural influences. This has involved my personal engagement with native peoples of Canada, the Mauritius islands, Australia, and New Zealand. While some similarities are emerging, the differences are equally drastic. Thus, it may be a good idea to include discussion of more cross-cultural approaches to folklore in the near future. But overall it has been one of the most rewarding conferences that I have attended in recent times.

**Gurumurthy:** Initially I should thank Muthukumaraswamy, Professor Sudersen, and Eric Miller for inviting me to read a paper on *Katha Kalaksheba*, also known as *Harikatha*. This is a form of religious discourse, and can also be considered a form of storytelling. I became acquainted with the term, discourse, when I first started working for my Ph.D. on *Katha Kalaksheba*. Discourse is understood differently in various contexts, and it was good to hear about this at the conference.

On the second night of the conference, I gave a brief demonstration of *Katha Kalaksheba*. Demonstrations of two other storytelling traditions — *Villupattu* and *Therukoothu Kathakalaksepam* — were also on the programme, and this gave me the opportunity to see some of the differences between these various genres, and how the story is depicted in the various styles.

It was also very interesting to hear about other cultural styles of story narration, which are available in states like Assam. And also, about other ways of approaching the epics. Many traditions are trying to interpret the heroes and incidents of epics in different contexts, although some traditions are not open to critical comments in certain areas. This has made me more aware of the importance of anthropological and other points of view, regarding both the study of oral folklore, and of traditions that involve written texts.

In general, I felt that there could have been a little more time for discussion. Because, after all, we are coming here to take part, not just to listen. So I felt that sometimes you can just read the synopsis aloud and then open everything for discussion. That's what we did recently in one of our seminars in the Department of Indian Music. We already had the papers, so people could read them in advance. We need time to digest the information — there is so much coming up.

One point I want to put forth pertains to what Mr. Theodore Baskaran was saying yesterday about research regarding Tamil films. Anuradha Sriram was one of our students. She went to Wesleyan University, and there she has worked on Ilayaraja's *Mannan*. She took it up there. So you see, the American universities are giving equal importance to the areas of film and classical

music. I also have started to guide students to give equal importance to film music, and one of my students from Kerala, she worked on Devarajan as a music director in Malayalam films. So, we have to have an open mind — every aspect of culture has to be viewed in the context of the whole.

Another point was that traditional themes in *Harikatha* were also presented in dramas, and in the early films. *Srinivasa Kalyanam* is one theme which came as a film also. So, the technology and contexts have been advancing, but aspects of the texts remain the same. I would like to point out that Carnatic musicians have contributed a great deal to the film field, especially in the early days of the film medium. For example, in 1932 my father-in-law, who was a Carnatic musician, acted in the film, *Seetha Kalyanam*.

So, in these ways these sessions were very useful, and I hope we will all be interacting more in the future. We would like our students — they also performed here yesterday — to understand and appreciate, and really feel the importance of folklore.

**Naithani:** The seminar was good. It was very heartening to see that there are so many scholars, especially younger scholars, in the country who are working on folklore as defined traditionally and also in post-modern terms. Folklore has been defined for the last 200 years across the world, and it continues to be defined and redefined today. I think its definitions will always remain important, because they have political implications. Because the moment we are talking about folklore, we are talking about the folk — we are talking about majority populations in any given cultural zone. And folklore as discourse is an important subject. In the context of our own country it is especially so, in reference to the widespread orality and oral cultural expression, as well as to the problem of illiteracy.

