

# A REPORT ON A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH ASIAN FOLKLORE

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Let me point out first that when I reported previously on this project<sup>1</sup> I used the title, "A Bibliography of the Folklore of India." About seven years ago I began to prepare a bibliography of the folk literature of India to further my own interests in this vast amount of material going back to the Jatakas and other traditional tales in Sanskrit some two thousand years before the Grimm brothers made their collection. These tales have not entirely disappeared today as "Br' Rabbit and the Tarbaby," an analogue of Jataka 55, testifies. An oral version was found recently in Florida, USA. During the second half of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century many books and articles on Indian folklore appeared. Since Indian independence a number of books, many in the languages of India, and several new periodicals have shown an increased interest in Indian folklore.

My project, started several years ago, expanded as so often happens. I soon saw that publications in all types of folklore, not just folk literature, were coming to my attention, and in order to make the most of my efforts I included all folklore. Furthermore, I discovered that the folklore of neighboring countries was also coming to my attention and was connected very closely with that of India. Therefore, I extended the scope so

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1. *Journal of American Folklore*, LXXIV (1961), 413-418

that I included Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet, and Ceylon. Hence, the earlier title was no longer adequate, and although I am not including Afghanistan, I am now using the title "A Bibliography of South Asian Folklore."

When I published in the *Journal of American Folklore* for 1961 a statement that I had then fifteen hundred items and expected to have over two thousand when all available had been collected, I had no idea that the total would run to over five thousand. Had I known I might never have started the project. I do not now claim that all available items have been located, but with my work over a number of years beginning at the University of Florida, moving on to the Library of Congress, then to the libraries in India, and coming to the British Museum and the Library of India Office,<sup>2</sup> I feel that the work is sufficiently complete to justify publication, with additions or supplements to come later if such appear justified.

I have included all types of folklore and publications in all languages. For each item I have attempted to give four kinds of data: the geographical area covered, the linguistic group, the tribal group, and the type or types of folklore. If the article or book deals with the folklore of Assam, or of Kashmir, or of some other specific geographical area, I have made a notation to that effect. I have used the geographical location indicated by the author. To adjust all of the early geographical divisions to the present ones is a piece of research in itself, and I have not attempted it. Just recently India has reorganized its states according to "so-called" linguistic lines. Actually no political divisions into states or districts, whether it be the present ones or not, are as important as cultural areas which quite often cut across state lines. But to map out these cultural groups is a major study. Therefore, I have given the geographical area indicated by the author at the time he wrote.

As far as possible I have listed for each publication the linguistic group covered, such as Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, etc., and also the tribal group, such as Naga, Ho, Toda, etc. Few publications have both of these areas indicated; that is, the author may indicate either the linguistic or the tribal group but not both. Any scholar who is studying a particular tribe will

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naturally know the language or dialect spoken by the people.

Then I have listed the type or types of folklore covered, such as art, ballad, belief, custom, charm, crafts, dance, demonology, drama, fable, festival, gesture, epigrams (such as tombstone inscriptions), games, legend, magic, medicine, music, myth, omen, place names, proverb, rhyme (for poetry of any kind not covered by other categories), religion, riddle, song, superstition, tale, and witchcraft. I have not attempted to make a distinction between **legend, myth, fable, or tale, but have taken** the form indicated by the author. Under tales I have listed items which have either texts or criticism or both, and I have followed the same practice for other genres of folklore. This planned analysis is an ideal which I have not been able to achieve for all items. Some of the publications I have not been able to locate; these I have marked "Unverified." Nevertheless, when the title seems to indicate clearly what the content is, such as *Folk Tales of Pakistan*, I have taken the risk of making notations according to the titles although I was unable to examine the contents. Even when I have examined a publication, I have not always been able to determine the categories I have planned to list. Some books have no preface or introduction, or if they have, make no mention of the facts which I wish to find, and their title may be something like *Folk Tales of India*. Finally some of the omissions of these facts in the bibliography must be charged to my own failure to find what was given, or to the failure of those who so generously assisted me.

The main body of the bibliography will have one list arranged alphabetically according to the authors' surnames and numbered from one up. If additions or supplements are called for, items can be put in proper alphabetical order and given a number with a decimal point. In the index I shall give all the geographical, linguistic, tribal, and type notations found under the items in the main body. For example, I shall have Assam: 9, 24, 27, 156, etc. This will indicate that items 9, 24, 27, etc. deal with the folklore of Assam. Also under Assam I shall have such subheadings as Bengali, Naga, tales, songs, etc. And under each such subheading I shall have numbers of items which deal with that particular subdivision under Assam. Then I plan to take the linguistic groups, Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, etc., and have subheads under each for geographical, tribal, and type categories. Again I shall take the tribal and type groups and have subheads for each. Thus if one wishes to see what

has been published on the proverbs of the Tamils of Madras state, he may look up Proverbs and see the subheadings Madras and Tamil, or he may look up Tamil and see subheadings Proverbs and Madras. Or he may also look up Madras and see the subheadings Tamil and Proverbs. Thus regardless of what part of the folklore of India a scholar wishes to examine, he will probably have a bibliography for that particular limitation. This plan is an ideal which I shall approach as far as possible.

Many problems have arisen in preparing the bibliography. One which is largely mechanical yet most frustrating is the matter of spelling and transcriptions. The least important is the spelling of the last syllable of such Bengali names as Chatterji, Bannerjea, and Mookerjee. Shall it be ji, or jea, or jee. All of these spellings are used. More important is how to spell the first syllable of surnames such as Mookerjee since looking for this author in a library catalogue or index may be most frustrating. Shall the name be spelled Moor, Mur, Murk, or Mork? I asked one Bengali how many ways there are to spell Moorkerjee, and he said, "There are thirteen." I repeated that several times until one Indian said, "You are wrong; there are twenty-eight ways." Published articles and books by the same author may have different spellings for his name. I have had letters from the same man, and observed that in one he signed his name with a spelling different from the spelling he used in another letter. When an Indian is asked how a certain word should be spelled, even if it is his own name, he may shrug his shoulder, wave his head from side to side and say, "As you like; there are so many ways." Now lest you should begin to think that Indians have no concern for such details, or that I think they have no concern, let me point out that we are asking them to put into Western Roman script what they have in Devanagari script. Furthermore, English has a most unphonetic spelling. An accurate transcription from Devanagari to Roman script exists, but after talking with Mr. K. B. Roychoudhury, the Head of the Cataloguing Division of the National Library at Calcutta and Assistant Librarian, I decided not to use it. If we are recording the texts of Indian songs, tales, rhymes, or proverbs, accurate recording either in the original script or in transcriptions is definitely most important. But since the purpose of the bibliography is to make available to scholars what has been published, transcriptions could well be more confusing

than helpful since few libraries even in India use transcriptions for their catalogues. As far as the bibliography is concerned, a scholar who knows the transcriptions does not need them to locate the publication, and a student who does not know the transcriptions cannot use them and would probably be more frustrated than helped. Therefore, I have followed the advice of Mr. Roychoudhury who suggested that I use popular spelling. This also is frustrating because I have found from working in some fifteen libraries in India that they have no one popular spelling for many authors. Sometimes looking up an author in a library catalogue is like looking up in a dictionary a word that we do not know how to spell. We must use our imagination and come up with a number of spellings that might be used.

Another major problem was the method of getting the items in the major languages of India: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kanarese, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjab, Tamil, Telugu, Uru, and Sanskrit (still a major language as far as libraries and research is concerned). I have a few items that are in languages other than these main ones or are in dialects of these. To omit publications in these languages would make the bibliography most inadequate and would overlook a vast body of material. I have made no systematic count, but I estimate that publications in the languages of India are not fewer than ten per cent or five hundred and not more than thirty per cent or fifteen hundred. The authors who wrote in these languages were, or are if they are still living, much closer to the folk than many who wrote in English or other European languages, and what they have to say about the folklore of India is most important, not to mention their qualifications for collecting accurately and fully. No one person, not even an Indian, knows all of these languages. The Cataloguing Division of the National Library at Calcutta has a specialist in each of the languages mentioned above, thirteen different persons. I was talking with the Head of the Cataloguing Division about my problem with nothing more in my mind than groping around for some rare, unseen possibility. My heart skipped a beat when he said, "Can we help you? We have prepared bibliographies in various areas of Indian culture and were planning at some time to do one on the folklore of India. Now that you have done so much on it, we shall be glad to help you." He called in his staff of thirteen; I told them what I wanted and in three or four months they handed me the items that they had col-

lected and an analysis of those they could locate.

Another windfall came from Dr. K. D. Upadhyaya, Secretary of the All-India Folk Culture Association. Just as I was leaving for India to take up the Fulbright grant, I read in an Indian journal a statement that this All-India Folk Culture Association was starting to prepare a bibliography of the folklore of India. I knew not what conflict of interests might arise or how far they had progressed. I wrote to Dr. Upadhyaya telling him about my research and asking his assistance but saying nothing about the bibliography that his group was preparing. After several letters I received one from him in which he said, "You have made so much progress on the bibliography and I am so busy with full-time teaching that I wish to turn over to you what I as Chairman of our Bibliography Committee have assembled." Shortly I received, and now have, forms filled out by eighty-one Indian scholars. A few of these had no published works, but some had as many as fifteen or twenty, about seventy per cent of their work in the regional languages.

My problem of including items in the regional languages was further taken care of by a number of individuals whom I visited in Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, Bombay, Poona, Delhi, and Kathmandu, Nepal. Again, some of the analysis, like that which I have done myself, may not be complete, partly because the authors did not give specific information, and occasionally because those who were assisting me, again like myself, missed some information. I cannot say too much in appreciation for all of those who so generously gave assistance to a project which is obviously too big for any one person. Obviously I did not know all that lay ahead when I proposed to include all publications on the folklore of South Asia, including the regional languages of India.

The greatest problem, however, and the one I am sure you have been wondering about, is the one that confronts practically all folklorists and that no one has been able to settle satisfactorily. That is, what is folklore? At the present, I would like to avoid taking a position on this controversy, but by including or excluding items from the bibliography, I am forced to take some position. In a "primitive" society where no one is literate, many folklorists call everything folklore. Since in India less than half the population is literate, everything about the others may be classed as folklore. I have not gone this far. According to others everything that is handed down orally is folklore, but

written literature is suspect. In India it is most difficult to separate the oral from the written tradition. As Durga Bagvat says in her book, *An Outline of Indian Folklore* (pp. 1-2), "Indian culture, as represented in folklore, has been of one and the same quality, texture, and strength since Vedic times.... Whether you study a proverb, or a myth, or a riddle or a song, you almost certainly find its prototype in Vedic, Buddhist-Jain literature, or in the epics and the Puranas." When we notice in the *Jataka*, the Indian collection of stories of Buddha's other births, an analogue for "Br' Rabbit and the Tar Baby," we see that some of the classical literary works have a bearing on folklore outside of India. I have included popular editions of such things as the *Jataka* and the *Panchantantra* as well as the best scholarly editions because through popular editions the stories are apt to filter down into oral tradition and are thus important to folklorists. As far as Indian scholars are concerned the Great Tradition, the classical and literary, as well as the Little Tradition, the oral and unsophisticated, are considered folklore. My position is that I shall include whatever authors of articles and books have considered as folklore.

When I think of not only folklorists but also anthropologists, sociologists, and archaeologists, I become more frustrated on what is folklore. Physical anthropology—the bone structure, the shape of the skull, the texture of the hair—is obviously not folklore. Cultural anthropology and cultural sociology are generally folklore. However, certain customs are folk and others are not. Superstitions, beliefs, and religion are difficult to judge. As far as possible I have followed my plan of taking what the authors have considered folk. I have not attempted to pass judgment on the authenticity or the merit of any of the publications. My criteria for including an item has been this: Will the item be of any use to those who are studying the folklore of South Asia? Some scholars may say I have included too much, and others say I have not included enough. Right now a folk jingle that seems to have anticipated the discussion over lung cancer rings in my ears:

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust;  
If the Camels don't get you the Fatimas must.

If the sociologists and anthropologists both press me too strenuously for what I have, or have not, included, I may change the

folk jingle and sing my own variant.

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust;  
If the sociologists don't get me the anthropologists must.

My chief regret is that with all my regular work plus the mechanics and details of getting the bibliography prepared for publication I have not been able to study thoroughly all of the inviting and intriguing publications, such as a book of songs called *Meet My People*, and a book of tales entitled *In the Indian Twilight*. Most intriguing is an article on the headless man in North Bihar; I wonder whether we have an analogue for Washington Irving's tale. One Indian author has written about King Lear in Punjabi folklore. I must learn more about the Jonah legend in India, and also study the book entitled *Scripture Truth in Oriental Dress or Emblems Explanatory of Biblical Doctrines*.

East is East and West is West  
But long ago the folk did meet.

There are many similarities in the folklore. Where they met, when they met, and what paths they traveled to meet, are questions which need to be studied. Dr. W. Norman Brown in his *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water* has led the way in such studies by demonstrating that the legends of walking on the water have an Indian origin, "were carried to Syria, presumably by Buddhists,"<sup>3</sup> and then entered the Christian tradition. We need more studies of this kind. In India one can find a vast amount of every type of folklore in one of the most extensive, most interesting, and most important folk cultures of the world. We need to know more about it and its relation to other cultures.

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3. William Norman Brown, *The Indian and Christian Miracles of Walking on the Water* (Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Company, 1928), p. 69.