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# **Rethinking Folklore, Folklife and Cultural Memory**

***A National Seminar***

**January 21,22, 24, 25, 2022**

## Concept Note

As a popular site of social expression, 'Folklore' always has a life of its own. It reveals to an overall cultural understanding of regions and its diversity. However, this diversified idea in the modern time, many ways contested in the process of elevating monolithic entities through cultural policy and projects. The problem however is deep rooted in the colonial past. The emergence of colonial culture and education system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century India, while revolutionized the Indian society in terms of information and awareness, then it equally erased many layers of indigenous culture, which today we study as 'endangered'. It comprises of rituals, performances, behaviors, beliefs, thought process including various terrains of ingenious knowledge and memory. The emergence of Indian middle-class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the direction of colonial masters have also added color to the formation of civilized 'anglicized' society (Sarkar 2008). This class was keen to adopt the language and culture sensibilities of the west, by removing their indigenous-social identity comprises intricately connected to the folk life.

In the case of North East India, while this did not have a direct impact, but growing middle-class sensibilities in colonial India had elevated the space for a civilized, upper-class/ caste culture and language. For instance; the construction of *Assamese middle-class* under the initiatives of some educated youth studied in Calcutta, tells the story of the emergence of middle class in North East Indian region. To promote the language practice such as *Assamese*, this group of literary enthusiasts took help of various mediums like folk theatre, myths and stories and published them extensively in *Assamese* language. Significantly, many of those folk tales, myths and stories were originally evolved from the indigenous folk-life. Thus, while language occupied the place of performativity, orality and mode of presentation, then it instantly devalued the idea of 'folk'. Thus, it also failed to highlight the democratic idea of 'folk', besides promoted a 'monolithic' 'homogeneous' entity. Similar historical instances can be traced to the other parts of North East India too. The influences of colonial India's education policy in the other parts of the 'region' thus promoted 'anglicized' culture over indigenous/ folk life and thus the concept of 'indignity' and 'folklife' dismissed.

Even, the Independent India's nation making machinery under the projects such as; 'unity in diversity' and 'canonization of classical dance-theatre' somewhere failed to incorporate the folklife and folk practices. Besides the study of 'folklore' and 'folklife', for a very long time had been confined within the academic disciplines like literature and anthropology. Hence, the idea of the conference is to posit a thought process around folklore and folklife in connection the concept of cultural memory. As Paul Connerton defines 'cultural memory' as a significant segment of the 'social memory' studies (Connerton 1989).

The seminar would like to view folklore from a transdisciplinary perspective, which would elevate the diversified region like India's North East. The subthemes are hence decided on, but not limited to:

1. Folklore and the reflection of folk/indigenous lifestyle
2. Orality, myths, tradition as medium of folklore
3. Folklore as a source of cultural memory
4. Locating 'region' through folk lore practices
5. Cultural identity, politics and folklife
6. Cultural policy and state
7. Gender role in folklore
8. Colonialism and folklore
9. Religion and folklore
10. Documentation, Mapping on folklore and folklife
11. Modern experiment and improvisation of folklore material.
12. Politics of naming and name-lore.
13. Traditional games and cultural memory.
14. Folk medium/media

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