



reflections

# Compiling and Editing Folklore

by Ashraf Siddiqui

**T**HE difficulty which most folklorists or field workers face in Bangladesh or India in collecting folklore materials is that there are varieties of people of different ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own beliefs, superstition, folk heritage and culture. This sub-continent which has a long cultural chain beginning from 1000 BC has been invaded, conquered and ruled by outsiders. Different groups of primitive and non-Aryan races have again their own cultural heritages. As a result the folklore of India and Bangladesh has become an admixture of various cultures. It is my personal conviction that the real folklore heritage of this sub-continent to be found in the background of each ethnic or religious group has not yet been presented in a scientific way. Romancers, versifiers or amateur folklorists in most cases have altered and sweetened up the materials to make them folk's literature.

Dorson's *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers* as for instance, I hope, will be helpful to guide the Indo-Bangladeshi folklorists in their difficulties.

Dorson in this book deals with a variety of folk traditions, those of European stocks, of regional groups, of Indian tribes, all of which mingle on American soil. All these folklores have been collected by him in the very midst of folklife, during a five months trip that he made in 1946 to one of the richest storytelling regions in the United States, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Dorson's theory about folklore in this book is that the stories come by word of mouth and these stories are told among closely-knit groups. But Lore, while born in the past lives in the present; the oldstories still entertain, the old customs still please and the old beliefs awe man even today. By folks he means any homogenous group, any group that is vitally integrated; each group are formed by place of residence, by racial and national stocks and by occupations. American society because of its extreme complexity is divisible into many such folks.

Similar to the case in the United States, different cultural traditions of Persia, Arabia Turks and Dravidians mingled on Indian soil. Arabian traditions for example, take us back to their dreams that Arabians brought with them to India. But this tradition, too, has been mingled with other local tradition. The task of the folklorists should be to evaluate and study these traditions against the background of history, anthropology and religion. It is possible only when a trained folklorist goes to the field himself, he observes everything of the cultural background, he records from the informants and above all he respects the people with whom he works.

The success of Dorson both as a scholar and a collector lies in his close contact with the folk. In regard to collecting, Dorson says that a professional folklorist must always remember that collecting is very much a matter of timing, chance and circumstances. Spike Horn, the Indian informant, as mentioned in his book, can be cited as an example.

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Again, different kinds of tales require differing methods of collection. For marchen the collector has to remind the informant about the episodes if he forgets them. For local legends, the collectors has to ask several questions to an informant in order to connect and establish the whole life history of a story. I fully agree with Dorson that many stories which come from a particular ethnic group, sometimes undergo such peculiar changes in a different culture that it become difficult to identify. Repeated enquiries and interviews among the various informants may prove to be fruitful in discovering the whole chain of such story. Folk traditions follow their own courses much like parallel rail tracks. Dorson in this book has successfully located many of these tracks. Tribal talks have their own particular traits. Their animistic view is sure to be reflected in their tales. In the same way we can study a Chakma or a Naga tale collected from the deep forest of Chittagong or Assam where this animistic view is sure

to be reflected. On the other hand, the immigrant's folklore shows a different scene. Some of these tales remain unchanged in their earliest forms. Some become naturalised in the American soil, as it happened after 1947 in our country as well.

What is new, what is unique that one will mark when he will go through the pages of this book?

The unique thing probably is the method of presentation. This is the first time that I saw that first rate research work can be made as interesting as a novel or a travelogue. The Upper Peninsula, which has three centuries of history did playing the varieties of frontier experiences, reappears in this book in its authentic tradition, history, varied culture, joys and sorrows.

Who speaks in this book? Who are the witnesses of the drama that take place in the everyday life of Upper Peninsula? They are Nancy Picard, Alec Philemon, Mrs. Elizabeth Herbert Walsh, Aunt Jane Goudreau, Krank Valin, George Cota..... and many others.

We meet them as the author met them, sometimes by arrangement, sometimes by following clues and even by accident. Tales have been arranged according to each cultural setting. Bearwalk superstition may be viewed in several permutations. Jack and the Bean Stack offers striking comparisons in Indian and other wellknown versions. The tales of Cousin Jack and Finns can take us back to Finland. We know from Dorson's conversation that there is also a language such as 'Finglish' (Finnish and English) — which may be compared, with our 'Bangraji' (Bangla and English). The wild drinking bouts of the Lumber jacks, the cruel working condition of the miners and the Lakesmen and their notions (e.g., 'Lake Superior never gives up its dead — just like our Jala-raksasha) will speak for themselves. Or, 'To kill a rat in the mine is worse than a murder — just like our Bengali belief for not to kill a rat in a paddy-granary) and similar other instances can say about the kind of ideas on which the miners lived in their struggle with the mine and its operator. Dorson's historian's training provides him to explain the historic realities that may lie behind the traditions, not readily available to a folklorist.

The crucial test of folklore lies in its sustained oral tradition and the crucial test of a professional folklorist lies in his presentation of Bibliographical notes and references. Dorson's laborite Bibliographical notes not only reflect his profound scholarship but also refer us to the vast world of the library where one can examine these materials. His notes tell us about the incident or history of Captain Parker's dream,

McDonald Boys and similar others which we have also in Bangladesh. The author's index bears names of informants, place, names of both old country and Upper Peninsula. Dorson, though supplies the tale titles with type and traits, unfortunately does not mention type numbers and motifs. Motifs and type (numbers) are the real tools with which folktales can be traced in their international situations.

Dorson says that he did not face any difficulty in translating foreign texts 'for such bilinguals will always be ready at hand'.

My personal experiences reveal that bilinguals cannot be always relied upon. A storyteller has his own mood as well as his own personality. A bilingual sometime fails to portray the real life of a story. The original text in IPA as well as in English translation along with comments about the nature of language, its intonation and its spoken nature (idioms, patois) could serve the purpose more scientifically. Readers would have been more interested to see one or two texts of such interesting dialect like 'Finglish' as well as those 'Finglish' stories in American soil.

On the whole *Bloodstoppers and Bearwalkers* is a pioneering work in the field of folklore. Dorson has taught us how the alert observation of a field-worker can be presented with the scholastic analysis of a folklorist. He has shown us how a folklore study can be made scholarly as well as interesting. It is needless to say that his instances can easily be applied to our Bengali folklore, and the net result, I am sure will be profitable.

art

# The Museum of Lille Re-opens

by Claudine Canetti

**I**T is a major cultural event for this capital of northern France which has prided itself, for a few years now, on having become a big European metropolis but which finds it hard to console itself for failing in its application to host the Olympic Games in the year 2004.

The Lille museum, created by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1801, at that time had a wealth of fine works seized, during the period of the Revolution, in the town's churches and convents (including the magnificent "Descent from the Cross" by Rubens) completed by other works sent by the state from the Louvre and Versailles and other items seized from the clergy and those who fled at the Revolution. From 1830, the museum experienced a particularly flourishing period, thanks mainly to a painter born in Lille who was a pupil of David, Jean-Baptiste Wicar, who bequeathed his exceptional collection of mostly Italian drawings, but also to a remarkable curator, Edouard Reynart who, for 40 years, led a very active policy of acquiring works while, at the

same time, encouraging donations and bequests. He thus reinforced the speciality of the museum in Flemish and Dutch paintings without neglecting the French school and managing to obtain some of the most highly reputed works for the museum, such as David's "Belle-saire", Courbet's *After dinner at Ornans* and Goya's *Young and old women*, a particularly remarkable purchase at a time when there were few Spanish works in French collections.

This sumptuous period in the history of the museum is crowned by the construction by the Parisian architects Berard and Delmas of the present Palais des Beaux Arts, which was inaugurated in 1892 but which remained unfinished. In the 20th century the museum went through a period of slumber while continuing to enrich its collections thanks to purchases and donations. The latest acquisitions of the present curator Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnee, include two paintings bought with public funding, Chardin's "Silver Goblet" and an astonishing "Vanity" by the 16th century Flemish painter, Jan Sanders van Hemessen, painted on wood.

A century after it was built, the imposing building, which was becoming timeworn and had been damaged by various additions over the years and was hardly suitable for modern museography, had to be renovated and new areas needed to be created to present the collections and to receive visitors. After a competition, the task was entrusted to a tandem of architects who emulated the avant-garde style of the 1980s, Jean-Marc Ibos Myrto Vitart whose main idea was to "open up the museum onto the town".

They thus demolished a huge staircase, cleared the facade onto the garden and turned the central courtyard into a covered atrium, a well of light around which the museographic circuit could be organised. The main architectural innovation was the construction of a 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> 5-storey blade-like building at the bottom of the garden. It is extra flat and long (7 metres wide by 70 metres long and 22 metres high) and its glass facade reflects the museum building facing it. This narrow blade houses the various administrative departments, the restaurant, the restoration work-

shops and the superb collection of drawings which, today, numbers some 4,300 works and is particularly well provided in Italian drawings from the 15th to the 18th century and French drawings from the 17th and 19th century which will be displayed in rotation.

Moreover, the architects have created new areas eleven feet underground, beneath the garden and the atrium, and turned the fine vaulted brick cellars of the palace, which used to serve for the reserves, into exhibition rooms. These rooms, which are particularly suited for the newly-created Middle Ages and Renaissance department, are the finest success of the renovated museum. More than 500 works, including an exceptional collection of medieval and Renaissance sculptures are exhibited there in an area of 1,600 m<sup>2</sup>. This department contains 11 of the museum's 35 masterpieces including a low-relief by Donatello ("Herod's feast"), two oils on wood by Dirck Bouts ("The way to paradise" and "The Fall of the damned") and a superb 15th century Virgin and Child.

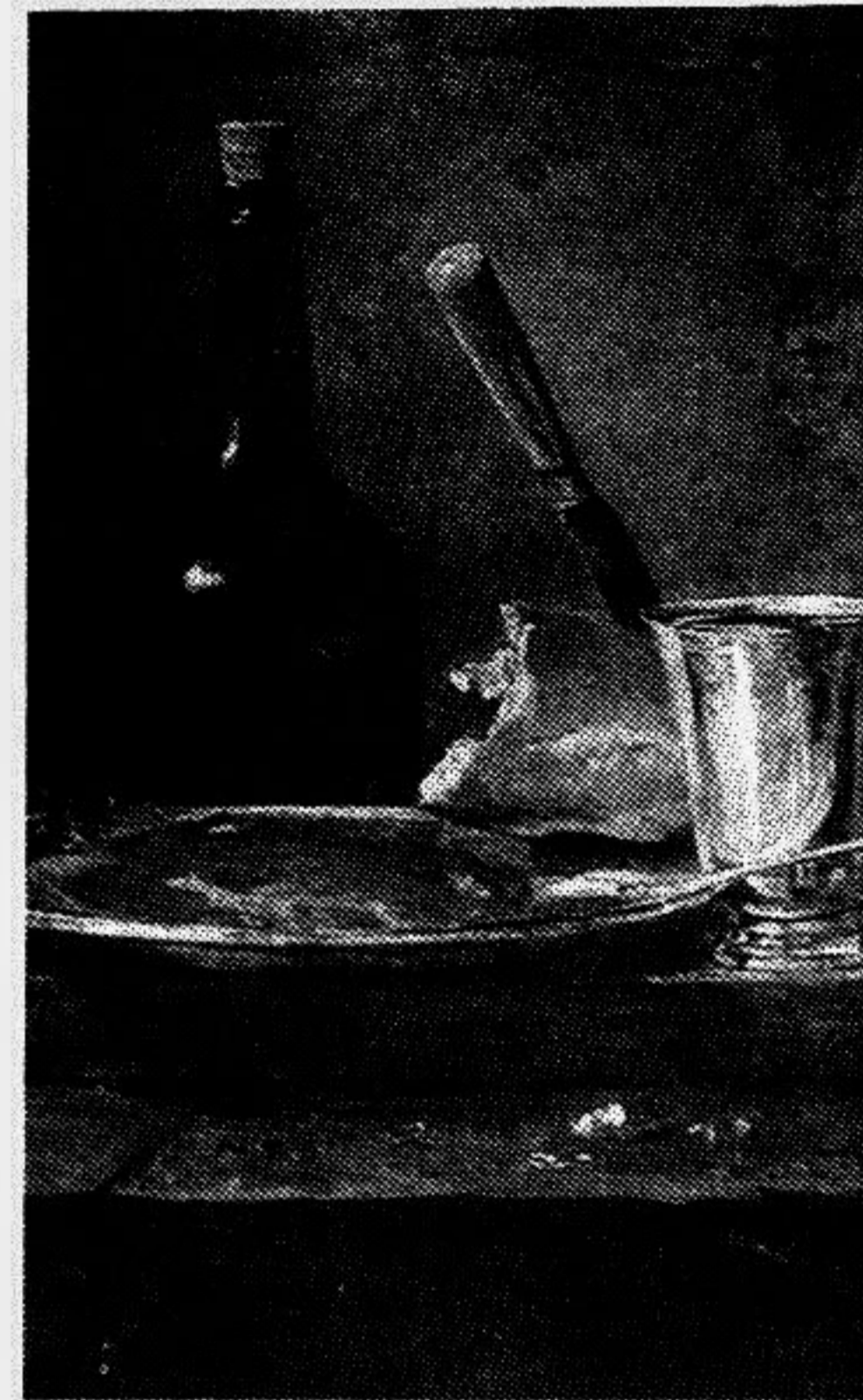
The first floor, which benefits from

overhead lighting, houses the paintings. 550 pictures are exhibited, 400 of which have been restored and a large number re-framed. The most noteworthy items are Flemish and Dutch paintings from the 15th to the 17th century, the French school from the 17th to the 20th century and naturally the famous Goyas which are the ensign of the museum.

A rich collection of ceramics and a newly-created gallery of 19th century French sculpture are located on the ground floor. Another new contribution in the basement is the 17th and 18th century relief maps of sixteen fortified towns in the North, which are part of the collection of the Relief-map museum located in the Hotel des Invalides in Paris.

In all, the renovation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts will have cost 220 million francs (about 36 million dollars) and will have enlarged the surface area of the museum from 17,000 to 22,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

Actualite en France



impression

# Understanding Women

by Mozaffar Hossain

"Frailty, thy name is woman" is the oft quoted remark of Shakespeare. The Indian 'moonis' considered them as 'the gateway to hell.' It was Eve, not Adam, who committed the first sin. In addition to such abusive remarks, women are thought enigmatic also.

**I**remember one handsome young bachelor having a high-brow cultural sense who could not find any justification for marrying a girl (as if it would have been better if he could marry a man) because of the unsophisticated and gross cultural bent of mind of the other sex. However, on the verge of losing the heyday of his youth, he came to sense and had to surrender to the hard realities of life by marrying a young girl. But before that he would often express his attitude thus: 'I cannot think of living with such a creature of so low culture.'

For him, women are generally gross and unsophisticated in taste. They can either love or hate, but cannot judge properly. History could not produce

even a single philosopher from this species of biological phenomenon. In no profession they are at par with their male mates.

This kind of attitude towards the other sex is not an isolated example of that young handsome gentleman of progressive mind. Merciless remarks are rampant in various literature. "Frailty, thy name is woman" is the oft quoted remark of Shakespeare. The Indian 'moonis' considered them as 'the gateway to hell.' It was Eve, not Adam, who committed the first sin. In addition to such abusive remarks, women are thought enigmatic also. In one of his poems Tagore considered them as 'half woman and half imagination'. The poet Richard Savage also addressed "To a

young lady" thus:

Such, Polly, are your sex-part truth, part fiction;  
Some thought, much whim,  
and all contradiction.

It is a common saying that even the angels cannot fathom women, not to speak of man.

Now, what is the reason of making women an object of such a serious research? Is woman really a 'woe-man' whose sorrows and miseries are inseparable from her existence? Is she a special type of biological product to become a general topic of conversation and research? The case may be X-rayed thus:

Hippocrates (460-377 BC), the ancient Greek physician, often called the father of medical science, classified human be-

ings into four temperamental types in accordance with the predominance or subordination of the four important humors of the human body. These are blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Restless, spirited, optimistic individuals have predominance of blood, and they are sanguinous. Such persons are ambitious, self-confident and capable of making proper decisions in proper time. Great politicians and successful business magnates are of this type. Phlegmatic (phlegm dominant) individuals are calm, not easily irritable, perseverant and capable of doing works which need patience, e.g., research work in study. Quite opposite to this are choleric type of individuals having yellow bile dominance in their blood. They are over-sensitive, restless, overambitious,

easily irritable, impatient, and destined to great tragedy. The last one is melancholic with the blackbile dominance. They are sullen who get tired easily. They are basically pessimistic in nature.

This chemical theory of personality, though not tenable in to today, has not lost its importance. It is almost akin to the Ayurvedic theory of the three 'Dhatu' like 'Vayu', 'Pitta' and 'Kapha' present in human body. The chemical theory of personality has paved the ground for the granular or hormone theory of personality supported by the modern science of endocrinology. According to this theory, various endocrine glands of our body secrete various kinds of hormones that mixes in blood and deter-

mines our personality in a number of ways.

We need not go into details of this theory. By accepting the basic conception of Hippocrates IP Pavlov, the Russian physicist and psychologist, took the credit of adding some new ideas. For him, types are real, but not fixed and immutable. The neurone-based physical part of an individual's personality has in it some hereditary influence indeed. But this is not the last word in shaping a personality. Environment and social conditions are the prime factors in determining personality. Hence, every individual is a bio-social entity. Social factors, when prominent, may even change the basic type of an individual.

To be continued