

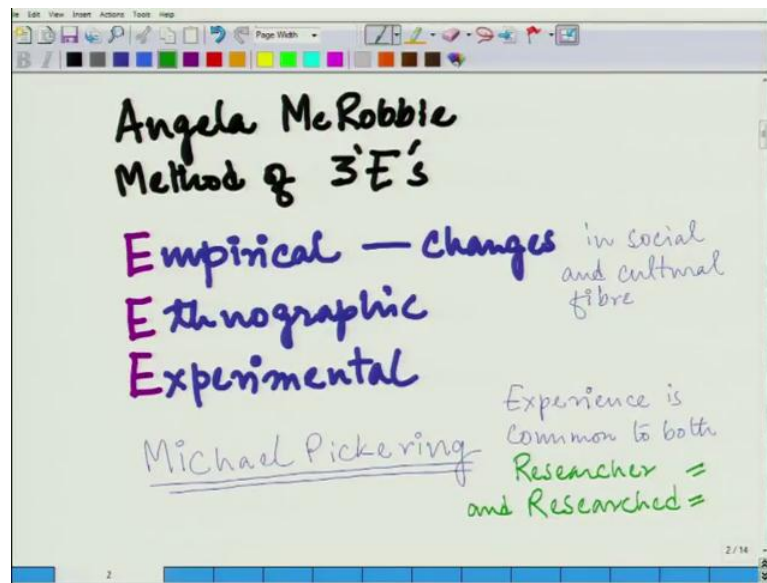
Folk and Minor Art in India
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Lecture - 17
Ethnographic perspective on the study of Folk Art and Culture

We begin our lecture where the topic is taking an ethnographic perspective towards the research in the area of Folk and Minor Art. To understand the topic, we must go through different details about the nature of any kind of cultural studies that has some sociological aspect and when we look at habitual art or folk and minor art that is connected to all these kind of categories which can be better defined as a vernacular art or there can be different term given to that and that is also a matter of great research. So, we will try to understand this from an ethnographic perspective and there are researches that are done in the area from that point of view and that made it even more relevant in the context.

So, according to K G Subramanyam, a culture cannot survive in isolation as a conserved habitual entity or by depending solely on market demand, the society is changing. Individual ethnicity and sophistication might predominate over the community skill and there are possibilities that the way it is surviving in today's context may not prevail for long and it is also seen that slowly, it is focusing on the individual skill, the individual understanding and it is only the visual style that is evolving and still maintaining its identity and I think we have discussed in that matter in detail in the earlier lectures and I provided you with the clue to understand it in a greater detail and after that to understand its ethnographic significance, we are walking in the same route with a slightly different bend.

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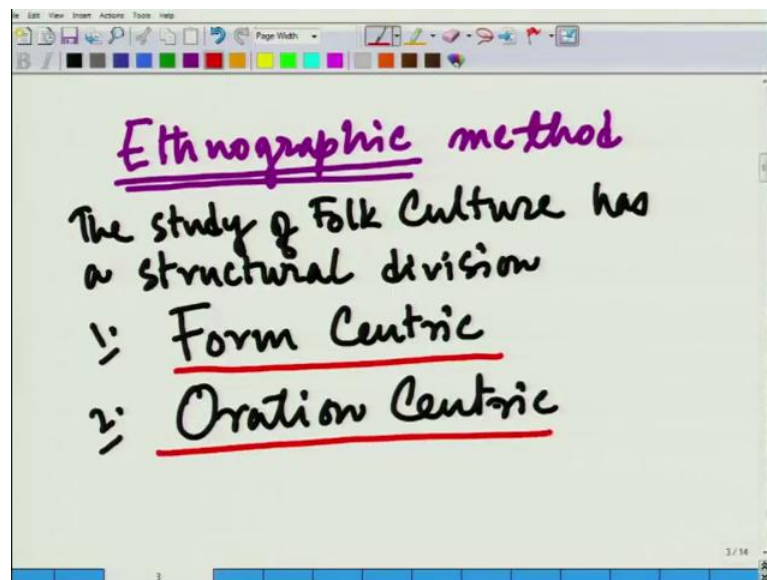
So, if we quote another cultural researcher named Angela McRobbie, she suggested a general method in cultural studies that is popularly known as 3'E's. Angela McRobbie's method of 3'E's are empirical, ethnographic and experimental and that has a sociological angle to the cultural research. Working with living human tradition involves empirical changes in socio cultural fibre. According to Michael Pickering, a cultural researcher, according to him the implication of research methodology is examined as the experiences often common to both researcher and the researched and what he meant by that can take a different perspective as we match that with our previous study where we felt that this is a both way happening in the field of a research where the researcher and the researched object.

When the researched object is also something which is connected to human livelihood or a human being as such then it is a two way process and there it goes through some synergic condition where both are benefitted from each other in the process of research and that makes it more fascinating yet complicated. We talk of live experience, but experiences always interpretation of what happens in life of what makes our perceptions, feelings and actions meaningful and this depends on how they come into expression and are conceptualized, organized and given temporal identity or in other words how experience is given the quality of narrative, Michael Pickering experience and social world page 19.

So, it is all about how we relate to the outer world and conduct research in that perspective in mind which includes feeling, actions and that gives the meaning of our study and we feel the study is worthwhile and can be taken further. It also provides us with vision to connect stories with each other into a frame of narrative. When we say that we are transforming our experience, we represent it into a narrative connection. It gives us the story and we buildup the living conditions and where it is coming from and where it stays how they are living, where it is going to and it gives us the timeless identity of the past, present and future.

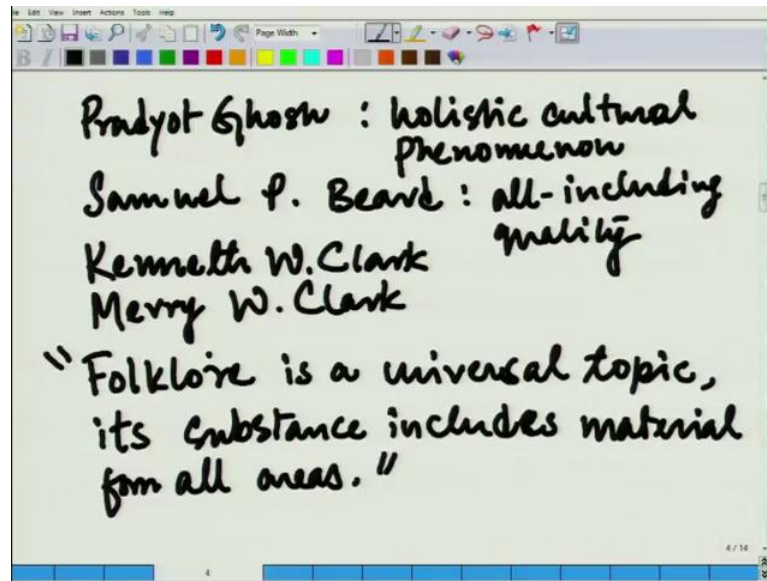
So, for this context we are picking up the second E which is the Ethnographic angle, the methodology that follows the ethnographic perspective for the cultural research.

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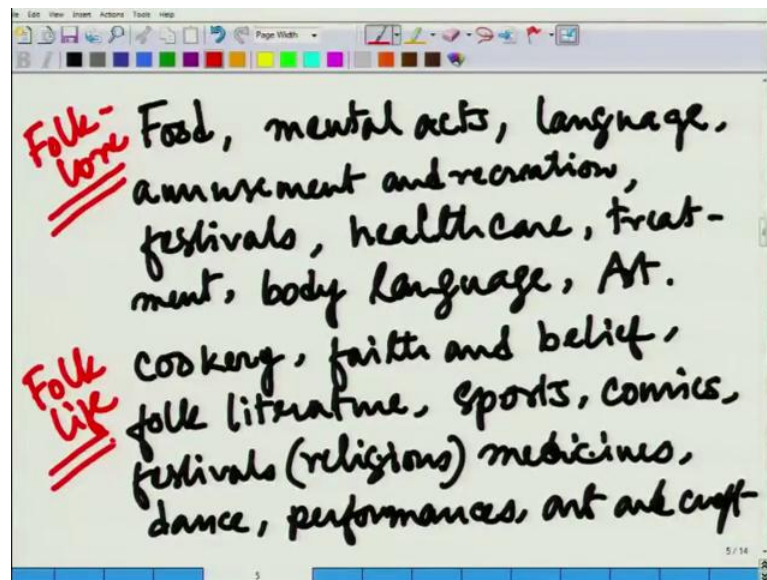
Then what we see is the study of folk culture has a structural division – one, it is Form Centric and two, is Oration Centric. Pradyot Ghosh in his study in the book named Banglar Lokashilpa or the folkloric practice of Bengal refers to a group of anthropologists who embraced a folklore as the holistic cultural phenomenon where as Samuel P Beard indicated that it is all including quality that it includes everything into it and let us see what are the things that it includes.

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Pradyot Ghosh looks at it as the holistic cultural phenomenon and as I said Samuel P Beard calls it the all including quality which is emphasized in his writing.

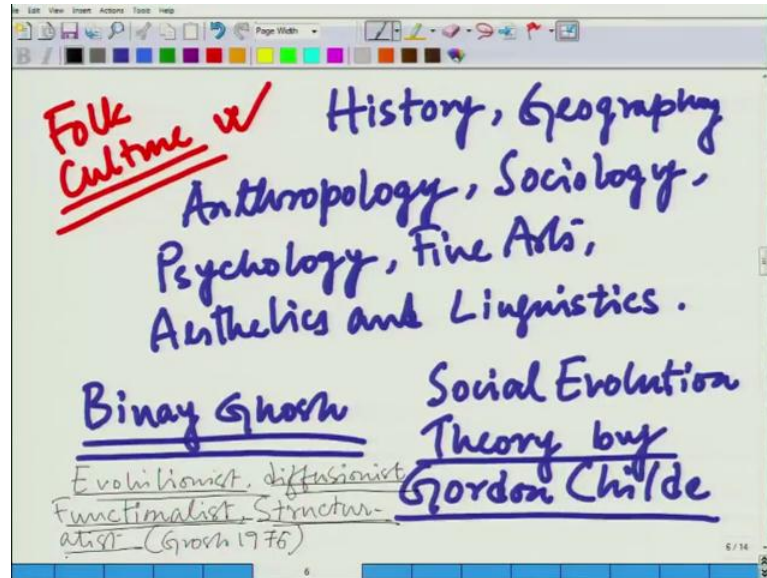
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Kenneth W Clark and Merry W Clark quotes that folklore is a universal topic, its substance includes material from all areas. Study of folklore according to Pradyot Ghosh include food, mental acts, language, amusement and recreation, festivals, health and treatment, body language and of course, Art. Folk life includes Cookery, faith and belief,

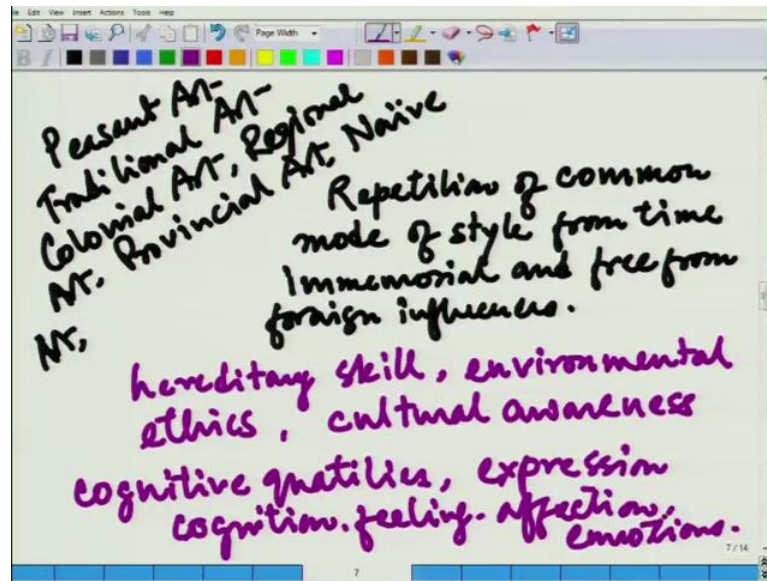
folk literature, sports, comics, religious festivals medicines, dance performances, art and craft.

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Folk culture that is our course of study for now that includes domains like history that turns into cultural History, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Fine arts, Aesthetics and Linguistics. Folk art follows the need of local inhabitants in terms of taste and the use of method and material. Folk art is seen as a successful culmination of complex primitive emotions. Binay Ghosh is a very important name that in his book Paschimbanger Sangskriti, the culture of West Bengal refers to Gordon Childe's social evolution theory by Gordon Childe, where he says that there is a prescription of another model of classification in the area of folklore as being Evolutionist, diffusionist, Functionalist and Structuralist in nature.

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In Europe, this kind of art practices are recognized as Peasant Art, Traditional Art, Colonial Art, Regional Art, Provincial Art, Naive Art and so on, but the art forms have fine differences between them and they flourish in a unique but restrictive conditions such as isolation, lack of academic education, lack of material wealth, regional confinement, local medium mechanically simple process characteristically accomplished and non-mechanically done the lack of accuracy, uncommon imports, single craftsmanship, orthodox style, repetition of common mode of style from time immemorial and free from foreign influences. So, the artistic impulse is matchlessly mingled with elements of natural endowment, hereditary skill, environmental ethics and cultural awareness which also ensure its cognitive qualities and art is all about expression and in folk art, expression is based on cognition, feeling, affection, simple and complex emotion.

It remains a crucial question as how classical norms rule the elementary compositions of folk painting. When we look at them, we feel that there are lots of traditional canons or compulsory examples that they are following in a regular basis and we often wonder what must be the reason but it is not very difficult to also understand that when they belong to a culture and getting exposure to the classical text through many different reasons because their work is constantly connected to the religious and cultural texts throughout and they are exposed to many different text and that way they are illustrating they are interpreting all those things. They will be influenced by the basic content of

them and will definitely be curious about finding out the main resources, the sources rather.

So, in a way when we look at the compositional aspects, we see a local traditional temple which is patronized by a local ruler which is coming up in some places and the folk artists are watching them, also picking up motives and the forms which are highly classical or may be it has a eclectic quality into it but they are picking them up and personalizing it. They are representing it in their own typical style and that is a beauty of it of this personalization making it your own and re representing it several times in your own way that makes it very unique.

However, we will just try to see that how they got influenced by some of the old texts and that worked as a operational factor behind setting up the rules for the folk arts and its practice. So, as we see that the paintings are rich in mythological content and that seldom have arbitrary notions and the conception and execution, the myth moral grammar, cosmology genealogies, metrics and rhetoric of Veda, Purana, Upanishad and similar ancient texts as a passing knowledge are periodically influenced the fibre of Indian folk paintings.

Vishnudharmottara Purana that I was mentioning which has worked as a source for their work for a very long time, in the third khanda of vishnudharmottara purana, we see there are information that governs all traditional and ritualistic activities of ancient times because this is one book where some rules were written and the rules were also followed and that is quite evident it is quite obvious that those rules were followed later and the principles that are written there in a conversational form where there are characters like Markandeya and Vajra who are sitting together in a conversation and it is a discourse that is taking place and through their dialogues their conversation, they are teaching the traditional painters the methods of art, what has to be followed and which are the compulsory rules and they are also going to the core of the ethos of image making and picture making.

So, let us a read small part from there that is translated by Stella Kramrisch that is Vishnudharmottara part three, a treatise on Indian painting and image making, second revised and enlarged edition. Calcutta university press printed in 1928 like I am reading from page 3 to 5, Vishnupurana may not have been there earlier than the second half of

the fourth century CE, the chapters of Vishnudharmottara that deals with painting must have been compiled in the 7th century ECE, the text canonized the measurements of body, leg, face and proportions through a conventional discourse between Vajra and Markandeya. Markandeya said, without a knowledge of the art of dancing, the rules of painting are very difficult to be understood and hence no work of this art oh king should be done even with the help of these two for something more has to be known, Vajra said please speak to me about the art of dancing and the rules of paintings, you will tell me afterwards for oh twice born one, the rules of the art of dancing imply those of the art of painting. Markandeya said, the practice of dancing is difficult to be understood by the one who is not acquainted with music and without music dancing cannot exist at all.

So, it gives us another clue that it talks about a completion that takes it to the level of performing art which has all these different mediums of expression complementing each other. Without the knowledge of music and rhythm, dance is incomplete and without the knowledge of dance, drawing is incomplete. It is almost like if a person is dancing that means, they are creating form and those forms are highly ephemeral, they are just creating getting created and disappearing during a performance and when they are creating the same form with the help of brush and ink, it is just staying in that place for a few more time and that is the relation between all these things and they are so well synchronized and the whole idea that is perhaps working as a guiding factor which gives it the source of sustenance and it is the completion of knowledge and that indicates to the multi disciplinary aspect of it.

So, the expression of painting is not self sufficient according to Vishnudharmottara Purana and gets multiplied in effect with performance and reaches completion. Ultimately, the text uncovers rule of color application, composition, scale, proportion and style to achieve the aesthetic parameters to strike a balance between the subjectivity and objectivity of artistic expression. In order to analyze the contemporary range of folk paintings, it is considered important to link them with the ancient text to follow the thread of changing in the execution and the truth of conformity to traditional roots.

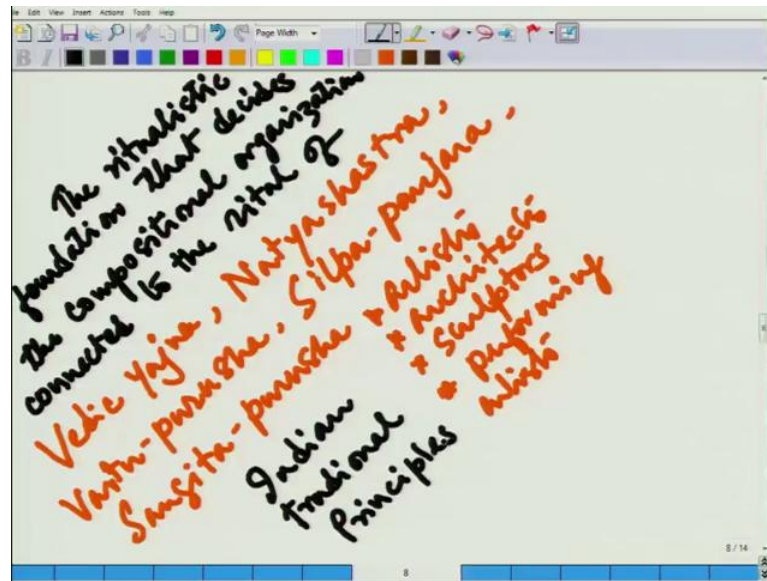
Bharatshilpe murti that means, form or idol the form in Indian art translated by Sukumar Ray, some notes on Indian artistic anatomy written by Rabindranath Tagore and another book Sadanga or the six limbs of Indian painting. The Indian society of oriental art has

published it in Calcutta, 1921, are the two very good sources of information related to the rules of traditional art in Indian and Chinese context and this is purely for your reference.

If you really want to know what were the written rules in classical art forms, these are the two sources and I would like to share some of the information to you additionally and the square and circle of Indian art by Kapila Vatsyayan, the second edition 1997 that book is available by Abhinav publication is another very important source where the doctrine of Indian art and aesthetics is duly documented and the practice of folk painting is regional and grows in isolated locations that we know and it varies in style and execution.

Sometimes the style is very consciously protected into the community or into the state and they have their own policies to protect them within the state and it is also an experience for many that when we talk to the folk artists of today's time who visit galleries, who participate in different workshops, who interact with each other, they sometimes feel that when they work with another craftsman or another folk artist from a different culture, from a different region which is not very far off, they belong to a same country and they share the same ethical value, they feel that the style that the other person is following there are lots of things to take from there, but still they try to maintain their own identity as their style like any other fine artist who appreciate the other style, but still stick to their own style of expression that gives them their own identity which keeps them rooted and grounded.

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So, I will mention quite a few points that you note down. The ritualistic foundation that decides the compositional organization connected to the ritual of Vedic Yajna, Natyashastra, Vastu-purusha, Silpa-panjara and Sangita-purusha that is largely followed by the artists, architects, sculptors, performing artists who work with Indian principle which is traditional and they are studied to realize the holistic connection, the connection with the holistic principle that connects the streams together despite multiple diversity and that is a realization which works as a outcome of a ethnographic study.

So, we look at them from a purely ethnographic perspective at times that includes all these things. Looking at them from the aesthetic perspective is just a part of it and it is part of cultural study. We need to also incorporate a little bit of a cultural, historical methods to understand it fully and there we follow a mixed method where it is not just experience as we said because experience is also work in both ways and it is also very important to know that experience cannot just happen because experience is also an outcome of observation that happens with a whole lot of pre conceived notion into us. We discussed earlier also that even if we go from a free flowing and total original mind then also we cannot be totally free from our previous experiences because the present now is just becomes past within a second with the blinking of an eye.

Apart from those ideas, we can simply understand that the moment we experience we have the urge to interpret and that happens as a natural process and there is no point

dividing them and restricting the natural processing that our brain does as a natural activity. So, their experience, documentation observation quickly gets translated or transformed into interpretation and the interpretation builds up narrative by connecting all the experiences together into the form of a story and that is a beauty of this study and that keeps us excited to go into the field of this research over and again.