

# COGNITIVE DISCOURSES

INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

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ISSN 2321-1075   ISSN 2347-5692

VOLUME 11

ISSUE 1

JULY 2023

[cdimj.naspublishers.com](http://cdimj.naspublishers.com)

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Published Since 2013

## **The Operation of a Folklore Archive - A Special Focus to the School of Folklore Archive University of Calicut Studies**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper mainly focuses on the Folklore archiving and the quality of folklore archive. It is focusing on the folklore archive in the university of Calicut .It is also explaining about the data collection from the field, documentation and retrieval system in folklore archive*

**Keywords:** folklore, archive, retrieval, documentation, field work

### **Introduction**

The complexity of folklore field data makes its archiving a challenging task. The primary goals of a folklore archive are to securely safeguard folklore data, ensure its physical preservation, and systematically organize it for easy access. This article explores various issues concerning the operation of a folklore archive, with a particular focus on the Folklore Archive at the School of Folklore Studies, University of Calicut. The article outlines and contrasts folklore depository archives with research archives, highlighting that depository archives may face challenges in maintaining systematic organization and description, which can hinder effective retrieval of folklore materials. The article explains and contrasts folklore depository archives with research archives, highlighting that depository archives often struggle to maintain systematic organization and description, which can hinder the effective retrieval of folklore materials. Conversely, research archives can more effectively manage collected field data in diverse formats when supported by robust computer programming systems, which enhance data retrieval for researchers. The Folklore Archive at the University of Calicut's School of Folklore Studies is progressing in the right direction.

Richard M. Dorson proposed broad categories for organizing the field of folklore, which include: (i) oral tradition, (ii) folk performance, (iii) beliefs and customs, and (iv) material culture. Material culture pertains to tangible objects and artifacts, which are typically collected and preserved by folklore museums. On the other hand, accompanying elements such as descriptions, commentary, photographs, video recordings, interviews, and various forms of field documentation related to these objects are often housed within folklore archives.

This article does not aim to cover all aspects of folklore archives; instead, it focuses on describing the purpose and role of the Folklore Archive at the School of Folklore Studies on the University of Calicut campus, as well as detailing the processes involved in its development.

The fundamental element of any archive, including a folklore archive, is the raw data itself. For a folklore archive, the raw data consists of folklore in any form other than physical artefacts or objects. An archive, therefore, represents a tangible reality. A series of processes transforms raw folklore field data into part of an archive—this involves collection, documentation, deposition, and categorization. However, it remains secure and unused in the archive unless users actively retrieve it. The operation of an archive inherently requires the possibility for its materials and data to be accessed and referenced; only then can it be considered a complete archive. The proper functioning of an archive requires the possibility of its materials and data being accessed and consulted; only then can the archive be considered complete in itself. The collected data can then be processed, so to speak, for various purposes, such as academic or research applications, commercial use, or other needs of archival users.

Therefore, the primary purpose of a folklore archive is to preserve field data that has been gathered and make it available to people for a wide range of purposes. An archive can be compared to a supermarket in that goods are arranged in a way that makes it simple for customers to find what they're looking for. If the researcher has access to careful and evaluable retrieval techniques,

folklore archives typically offer a vast array of field documentation that may be easily accessible.

In light of this, a quality folklore archive should have the following characteristics.

Quantitative and qualitative folklore data richness.

Data security.

Data in a systematic order.

Retrieval is simple and accessible

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Folklore Data Richness**

Folklore, according to Richard Bauman, is a manifestation of collective identity that takes the form of concrete iconic forms, oral forms, and performances. Folklore can often be highly abstract. The genres of folklore it contains in different formats are systematically stored in safe custody and arranged so that users can retrieve them from an excellent folklore archive. Because fieldwork-derived folklore data has a distinct personality, folklore archives need particular standards, frameworks, and protocols. Folk performance and oral folklore can be recorded separately in written, audio, or video formats, or in a range of formats that support one another. However, beliefs in an abstract form are hard to record in any way and must be gathered and expressed verbally or in writing, either through analysis, field notes, or interviews. Since material culture artefacts are in iconic form and are best preserved in museums, they are typically not included in archives. Nonetheless, a folklore archive frequently includes photographs and audio or video recordings of artefacts as well as their descriptive and contextual elements, such as their form, content, structure, or function.

All folklore genres are included in a comprehensive folklore archive. The distinctive feature of any folklore item is the presence of several texts or variations, which adds complexity to the process of creating a folklore archive. The entirety of the various texts or variations of cultural events and

forms that are available is known as folklore. In light of this, scholarly or non-scholarly archival folklore research of any kind is only feasible if generalizations of some sort can be drawn from a range of texts. A systematic folklore archive should therefore ensure that it contains as many extant texts for a given type of folklore as feasible. The system evolved to, of course. . A systematic folklore archive should therefore ensure that it contains as many extant texts for a given type of folklore as feasible. The aforementioned requirements are obviously to be met by the system designed to establish a folklore archive, which includes documentation, classification, and retrieval.

Since no text can be fully understood without sufficient contextual information, it is necessary to take into account and incorporate not only the diversity of texts but also the various contexts in which folklore texts and their variations are gathered. In addition to dialectical eruptions occurring within a text as a result of contextual pressure, new text is continuously being formed. This is an ongoing process. It is best when a folklore archive, which houses the findings of field documentation of folklore, contains comprehensive contextual information of the various forms of collected folklore because without taking this process into account, no significant academic research activities or archival work of any kind are possible.

A proverb, for instance, appears to be a brief oral folklore form with only one sentence. However, this one-sentence folklore form is merely the beginning of a potentially vast amount of contextual information, without which the sentence would be meaningless. A proverb has the immediate context of its utterance by a specific individual. Such a proverb also has a complex background that evolved over time, gradually becoming new and altered in response to events in the lives of the people who used it. No one can evaluate a specific proverb without knowing these facts. Therefore, having a h would also be beneficial for a proverb that has been gathered and preserved in the archive. Therefore, in addition to the proverb's variant texts, a vast collection of contextual

information would be beneficial for a proverb that has been collected and preserved in the archive.

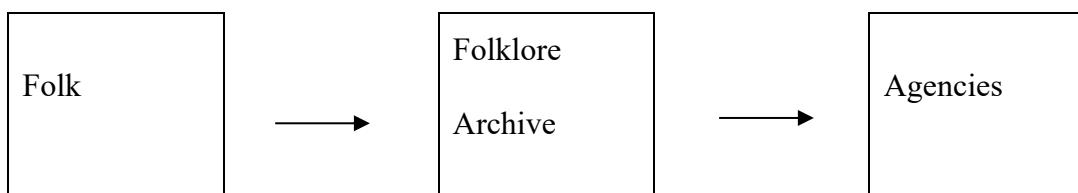
The core of the data is provided by the folklore texts, while the periphery contains all relevant data, including contextual data. However, no center can exist without the periphery, and the two are related while also being mutually exclusive, supporting one another. The roles that folklore plays among the populace can also be used to identify it. As a result, functional data is also crucial, and the functional changes that occur textually within a folklore item must also be properly taken into account. A folklore archive must have all the necessary technical and spatial capabilities to hold any type of data.

A rich folklore archive is one that includes numerous folklore texts, along with detailed and immediate contextual information about each text and details about its many uses. In the sense that it should be genuine and simultaneously backed up by as much supplementary data as possible, richness is both quantitative and qualitative. An image of an oil lamp, for instance, doesn't convey much information on its own. An oil lamp placed next to a deceased person's body is not the same as one used in front of a deity. They are not the same. The goals of a folklore archive cannot be fulfilled by mere data. Similarly, the fact that folklore is found in a variety of texts and variations is one of its primary characteristics. For this reason, focusing solely on the written wording of a specific type of folklore will typically not be sufficient to provide an understanding of that form for scholarly or other purposes. Among other things, a researcher should anticipate finding several texts in a specific folklore form when approaching a folklore archive. The availability of diverse texts and related information can be used to measure the richness of data. Since there is no definitive list of folklore genres, it is extremely difficult to determine exactly what belongs in a folklore archive. The issue is further complicated by the existence of native genres. In any event, a folklore archive's richness is enhanced by the diversity of its folklore data.

## **Data Security**

Folklore data safety serves two purposes: (i) to protect the quality of folklore documentation from deterioration and damage; and (ii) to ensure that no agency misappropriates field data stored in an archive. The main purpose of an archive is to store and preserve information for the future in a way that prevents damage, destruction, or injury. The main formats used to gather data on folklore are typically manuscripts, audio and video recordings, and still photos. Folklore archives must thus guarantee the secure storage of field data in these formats. These days, folklore conservation and preservation are two terms that are used interchangeably. In some ways, it is impossible to preserve or conserve folklore, even though both terms are occasionally used interchangeably. While folklore preservation entails moving folklore from its natural setting into the secure custody of an archive, folklore conservation guarantees the sustainability of folklore in its context and makes it possible to have an unlimited number of texts for the same. Nevertheless, there are restrictions on bringing different types of folklore data to an archive and storing them there. For a variety of reasons, a mango on a mango tree cannot be preserved as such; therefore, we harvest the mango and store it in salt. Folklore stored in an archive undergoes a similar process. A type of raw material that awaits further research to develop into new forms and products, or alternatively, raw material to be transformed into new commodities that could be offered for sale in the public domain, is folklore found in archives. As a result, the quality and safety of folklore material in an archive are major concerns.

The transfer of folklore data from the field to the archive is another facet of field data security. Field data is gathered from the folklore, which is depicted in the box on the left side of Figure. The numerous organizations that receive this data and prepare it for the general public or for different scholarly or research uses are listed on the right. Folklore only has the status of an object that changes in both situations.



These two are separated by the folklore archive. It is important to take into account the rights of the people who have given the field worker the data as well as the rights of the field worker who transfers the data to the archives. Meanwhile, establishing guidelines for who can receive these data and how they can be used to produce new goods is a complex process. Regarding the ownership of folklore, there are no hard and fast rules, but UNESCO and WIPO are working to develop guidelines to control intellectual property rights and safeguard folklore copyright.

### **Data in a Systematic Order**

A folklore archive is created by storing, organizing, and arranging the data that is gathered in the field. It is meant to be used further for a variety of reasons and by a wide range of people, such as researchers, archivists, members of the community, and others. Data gathered directly from the field, as we all know, can be likened to a jumble of materials thrown into a bag without being properly categorized, and it frequently has no use at all. It is therefore necessary to classify field data in some way so that people who visit the archive can search and locate the information they need. . The use of genetic classification to describe folklore materials is still crucial, despite the fact that folklore studies have expanded beyond the study of genres. To do this, the most widely used classification scheme that is appropriate for the particular archival materials being described must be used.

A folklore archive includes related data in addition to folklore texts, as was previously mentioned. Supplementary data will typically be abundant, possibly even more so than the textual data itself.

Since this is typically the case, measures should be taken to make room for these auxiliary data types so that they can be easily retrieved when needed. To support a simple and accessible retrieval system, archival staff must analyze, organize, describe, and maintain all data—core and peripheral—in various formats in a methodical manner.

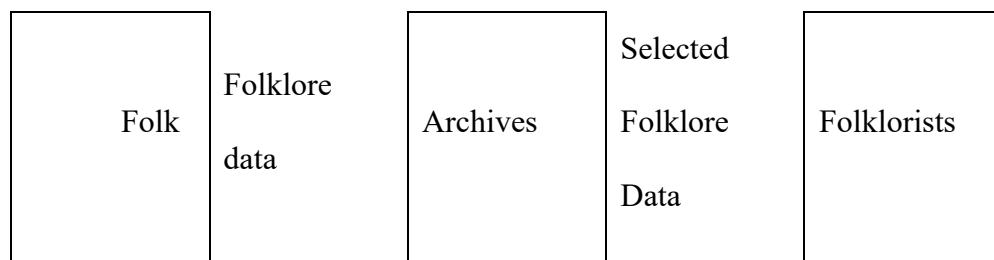
### **Retrieval is Simple and Accessible**

In order to satiate their sense of nostalgia, people were crazy about collecting folklore a century ago. Their only objective was to protect the gradually disappearing folklore. The significance of context, functions, and other characteristics—which are actually the determining factors in determining the identity of a text—were not taken into consideration at that time because they were more concerned with texts of folklore that could be clearly identified as such. The overall perspective of folklore and folkloristics has evolved over time, and as a result, systematic cultural research archives now typically take into account both the context and the purposes of folklore texts at the same time. It goes without saying that the structure and content of folklore archives have grown more intricate, and various systems for their preservation and accessibility have also been created.

Unlike in the past, a folklore archive is more than just a place to store folklore artifacts. A folklore archive's primary purpose is to make its data accessible to anyone who approaches it in accordance with their research interests and needs. Users of archives might be searching for minute details of a folklore event or massive amounts of multi-textural data documenting a specific festival or ritual. Therefore, one of the primary characteristics of the folklore archive should be its responsibility to meet the needs of archivists and researchers in the field of folklore by offering them a simple retrieval system. With multiple unpublished texts, plus background information on the contexts and functions of each text, a sizable quantity of data in various formats frequently is collected in an

archive, making it difficult to serve the specific and individual needs of researches. For this, a folklore archive demands a retrieval system that is well conceived and accessible for users. This is not an insurmountable problem. As computing systems exist that can be adapted for such purpose. At the same time, careful and thoughtful programming is required in order to satisfy the above said needs. To ensure that the system created can suitably handle the types of field documentation that a particular archive contains, data retrieval software also requires extensive analytical work and cooperation between data processors and folklorists. It is hoped that folklorists and others interested in the materials will be able to retrieve any small piece of data by sitting in front of a computer system with a network connection if the field data can be prepared to meet their research needs.

A server can be connected to multiple computer feeding terminals on one end, which allow a wide range of data in various formats to be fed through the use of a specific computer program. On the other end, there are computer tapping terminals from which users can retrieve data in any format they desire. Based on intelligent programming, this type of archival system would fulfill the function of a good folklore archive and aid in improved preservation and simple retrieval. As previously explained, the foundation of a typical folklore archive is the safety and richness of the data, as well as the methodical arrangement and organization of the data and an easy-to-retrieve system.



Various types of information gathered from the folk are frequently stored in a folklore archive, and every precaution is taken to ensure the materials are kept safe. These materials can be retrieved after they have been officially acquired by an archive, examined, arranged, and cataloged in a methodical manner. Thus, a folklore archive is a location where all information gathered from the folk is stored in a methodical and secure manner for convenient access. The two main uses of collected folklore data are (i) for scholarly research and (ii) as raw materials for various types of final products. Folklore archives frequently welcome anyone who comes in for research or other reasons. Nonetheless, in order to safeguard the rights and privacy of people and communities, or to aid in the preservation of the materials, it is ideal if the archive upholds explicit guidelines for granting access to its holdings, outlining what can be done with the materials and who is permitted to access archival data.

The nature, composition, and purpose of the two types of folklore archives—a research archive and a depository folklore archive—differ. A depository folklore archive is one that receives folklore data gathered for various purposes by a range of individuals without taking into account the nature of the data. Such an archive contains folklore data that has been gathered in a variety of formats, such as audio, video, and manuscripts, by various individuals to suit their own purposes without uniformity. These materials include field notes, contextual data, textural data, and other materials. Data in such an archive can be uniformly and methodically categorized. Furthermore, it is challenging to easily retrieve field data because the materials gathered may not be as systematically categorized as other archives to meet research needs. Since the structure and nature of folklore data submitted by different fieldworkers may differ, it is impossible to categorize the data in the archive in a strict way. As a result, computer programming may not always incorporate and represent the data in a way that makes it easy to retrieve. Thus, a "depository folklore archive"

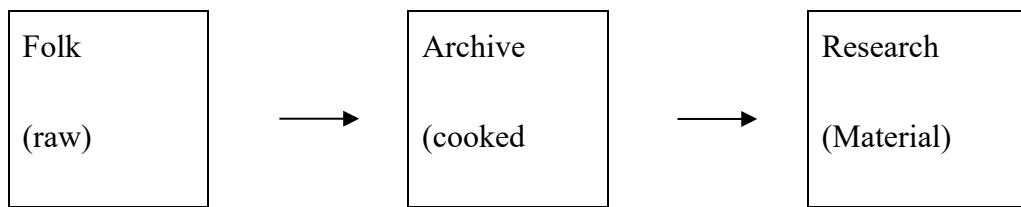
is essentially a location where any type of folklore data gathered by anybody for any reason can be securely stored.

The gathering and recording of folklore materials obtained by a "depository folklore archive" is typically done by amateur folklorists who are interested in folklore for a variety of reasons rather than by professional folklorists. Their own objectives are served by the type of data they gather. The data becomes idle after the purposes are completed, and if the researcher or fieldworker wants to preserve the materials, he donates them to a depository archive, which then owns them. In this situation, the data distribution, the classification of the data, and the rights of the donors, informants, and concerned parties over the data. In this scenario, the classification of the data, the rights of the donors, informants, and concerned individuals over the data, and the distribution of the data are all determined by the archive's authorities in compliance with the archive's policies and procedures.

The nature, structure, and purpose of a "research archive," which is a second type of folklore archive, are completely distinct from those of a depository folklore archive. From the methods used for fieldwork and documentation to the classification, arrangement, and retrieval of these materials within the archive, a research archive is extremely methodical in every way. With pre-fieldwork investigations, systematic fieldwork gathered by a team of skilled folklorists and fieldworkers, and post-fieldwork follow-up to gather materials overlooked during the initial fieldwork, it has a well-coordinated research plan that directs the collection of field documentation. With pre-fieldwork investigations, systematic fieldwork gathered by a team of skilled folklorists and fieldworkers, and post-fieldwork follow-up to gather materials overlooked during the initial fieldwork and to transcribe field notes, it has a well-coordinated research plan that directs the collection of field documentation.

## **Data Collection and Documentation**

Every effort made by a research archive aims to preserve documentary field data for future study by anybody, at any time. The raw field data gathered from the people is cooked and preserved for researchers to use once it enters the archive. After it is no longer being gathered, any text, content, or comments regarding the folklore data are then in the latent form within the community as part of the folk.



It is isolated since it is a part of the folk way of life. For instance, any folktale text that has been recorded in any format is not a folktale since it has been removed from the actual setting in which it was originally part of a larger conversation. A fieldworker will look for examples drawn from the original context of a given text or type of folklore in order to comprehend, assess, or interpret it. This isn't feasible, though. The researcher gathers as much information and contextual data as is practical in order to get past this obstacle in the field. Despite the fact that the living text is no longer in existence, this is in a sense an attempt to comprehend the text in its true context. Folklori is unlike any other subject. Despite the fact that the living text is no longer in existence, this is in a

sense an attempt to comprehend the text in its true context. Folkloristics requires contextual information, both immediate and distant, for text analysis and interpretation, unlike any other subject. The field of folkloristics seeks to understand the identity of the people by interpreting their lore, and since lore is more than just a text, it also reflects the entire context in which a text originated, making data collection and documentation challenging. . When it comes to folklore, it can be dangerous to count the number of genres, identify the native genres, and then compile all of the texts that are available. Indigenous genres are not isolated. Among the same groups and in a range of settings, they are supported by other genres. A folklore text loses its vitality and becomes antiquated in the absence of important supplementary information, such as background information and field descriptions. In light of this, gathering information for a folklore research archive is a drawn-out and ongoing process—possibly endless in that every text is continuously undergoing a process of fusion that results in the creation of new texts.

### **Archiving**

The first problem with archiving materials gathered from the folk is that there is currently no agreement on which and how many genres fall under the umbrella of folklore. The second problem is that numerous texts are typically gathered in the field, and each text is accompanied by copious amounts of supporting information that are frequently recorded in various formats. Format will be the first basis for classification because all of these formats—including audiocassettes, videotapes, CDs, manuscripts, and photographic images—are physical realities. The cassettes can then be rearranged in accordance with their contents when they are being transferred to CD or DVD formats.

However, retrieving such field materials is frequently problematic. When visiting an archive, researchers frequently anticipate thorough and easily accessible classification, cataloging, and

cross-references between genres, categories, subjects, and folkloric forms. This holds true regardless of how big or small their query is. For instance, one must conduct a relatively limited and focused search across genre, forms, and categories that have been identified in the cataloguing if they are looking for information about a specific motif used in Keralan folk performances. The archive should arm itself with the assistance of a to meet the needs of a person who makes such a request. With the assistance of a server with a network system and pertinent computer programs that have been painstakingly and carefully developed, the archive should be able to meet the needs of anyone who makes this kind of request.

Manuscripts, audio documents, and visual documents (including videography) are the three main physical formats into which all data in a folklore research archive fall, as shown in Figure 4. These formats differ structurally, but they are frequently related in terms of functionality and content. An archive may contain visual documents in the form of CDs, videocassettes, or photographic images. Similarly, if preservation concerns demand it, manuscripts are frequently kept apart in an archive. Simultaneously, in the folk's life, every piece of field data is connected to and complimentary to every other piece of data, as well as to the researcher without the support of every single data point. All of the field data items in folk life are related to and complementary to one another, and without the support of all the data in various formats, no research or study could be successful. Manuscripts can take many forms, including field notes, field diaries, interviews, and maps. The best formats for recording folk performances are still images and video recordings. Audio recording is a more effective method of recording oral traditions, particularly long recitations. Regardless of the genre, the text of folklore appears to be a singular entity, yet its roots are found in almost every other genre that is accessible to that specific group of people. For practical reasons, all data that has been converted into various formats is stored independently in an archive. In some instances, the actual data is converted into audio recordings of interviews or verbal descriptions.

## **Retrieval**

Providing as much information as possible to folkloristics is the ultimate goal of any folklore research archive. Thus, whatever system an archive develops for cataloguing and organizing field data, it should aid folklorists in retrieving the data stored there. Since the ingredients a folklorist needs to prepare his research are dispersed throughout the archive in a variety of formats, the archive's role is to collect the needed data and make it available to the folklorist. An archive that has been fully programmed can collect even the smallest piece of field data from all over the archive and provide the results. Even the smallest piece of field data can be gathered from the archive's many nooks and crannies by a fully programmed archive, which can then deliver the results to the folklorist seated at his computer terminal. The folklore archive at Calicut University's School of Folklore Studies is expected to operate similarly to the previously described model.

## **Folklore Archive at the School of Folklore Studies**

With a methodical and well-coordinated field research plan, the University of Calicut's School of Folklore Studies began actively collecting and documenting folklore in 2002. They also developed an interest in creating a folklore archive. The Ford Foundation funded a three-year Folklore Project that included this mission. Over the past seven years, the Center has produced field documentation in the form of audio and video cassettes as well as supporting information, such as field notes and files that will be deposited in the archive. As of right now, the Folklore Archive has 236 hours of visual documents, 199 hours of audio documents, 2500 digital images and slides, and a sizable number of manuscripts that provide information to support folklore in other formats.

When conducting fieldwork, a folklore researcher or someone involved in folklore research activities typically has goals in mind and a strategy to achieve them. Therefore, in order to achieve the goals of his research, he collects and analyzes data. The information gathered in this way about

a specific type of folklore only completes the research; it is not comprehensive on its own. Following field research, the data gathered may be stored in a depository archive. A folklore research archive, as opposed to a depository archive, is anticipated to preserve a greater quantity of information about a specific type of folklore and, as a result, provide more comprehensive and well-organized field documentation to be archived.

### **Field Collection**

The Center for Folklore Studies has employed complex methods, including extensive pre-fieldwork planning and a well-thought-out research plan, to gather folklore data for the archive. For instance, it was decided in 2003 to use team fieldwork to document Padayani, a type of folk performance found in South Kerala. The project fieldworkers first gathered secondary sources in the form of books and other publications, as well as conversations, to gain a sense of the locations and characteristics of this type of ritual performance. The project staff then conducted extensive preliminary fieldwork, gathering a wealth of information about the Padayani performance and its locations, the context of the performances, and the various Padayani texts that were available. Additionally, they gathered background information about each of the Bhagavathi shrines where the performance was held. The gathered field research, which is mostly in manuscript format, includes field descriptions, interviews, charts, and maps.

The project videographer then visited each shrine with fieldworkers, gathered information from informants regarding the performance (time and location), and recorded the information they provided on audio and video. Drawings of camera positions at various times and locations according to the type of performance were created by the videographer with the assistance of informants. Every piece of data gathered by these methods was incorporated into the active.

Making audio and video recordings without leaving out any performance sequences was the third

stage of the collection and documentation process. Additionally, information was gathered on the spot through interviews, discussions, and observation; all of this information was regarded as supporting or contextual data. As is frequently the case, field workers were compelled to approach informants at the time and location where they felt comfortable providing data because it was impossible to record in-depth or protracted conversations or interviews during a performance. These interviews were included in the supporting information as well. Correcting and documenting missing data that could not be gathered in the first year was the fourth and last phase of field collection. This happened on the occasion of the performance during the following year.

One of the main tasks the School of Folklore Studies completed to build the archive was the documentation of Padayani, the ritualistic performance of South Kerala. All of the aforementioned protocols were put into practice and adhered to. A total of thirteen distinct Padayani texts from various villages were recorded. Given that some of the ritualistic performances lasted five days and others up to thirteen days, this was an ambitious undertaking. Over the course of these days, every member of the field project remained there, and comprehensive documentation was gathered in various formats.

### **Archiving & Retrieval**

Folklore archives are established to preserve folklore information for future use, as has been covered elsewhere. To ensure that the data can be retrieved without any issues, systematic archiving is required. With the aid of a good software program, fragmented data items can be correlated, allowing any segment of the data to be remembered. The data is prepared to be fed to the server with the aid of computer programming once the fragmented data has been identified and coordinated.

While we wait for a good computer program that can be used to provide easy retrieval, the Center

for Folklore Studies is in the process of archiving. The server is safe for all raw data. Because the same data is accessible on cassette and simultaneously in CD/DVD formats, the data is secure. In the not too distant future, a computer program that works with all genres and formats will be ready for retrieval. In order to facilitate the feeding and retrieval of data from terminal computers, a server has been installed. Classifying the collection of data in a way that is compatible with the computer program and feeding the computer will be a challenging task. . That process is ongoing. When it is finished, anyone can use the archive's resources to meet their own needs. Naturally, in order to serve the data, the archive will then require specific rules and regulations. According to the archive's policies and procedures, the School of Folklore Studies is working toward creating a comprehensive folklore research archive that will have the capacity to receive any data that has been systematically collected and then make that data available to anyone who requests it.

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***The footnotes.***

Dorson, R. M. (Ed.). (1972). *Folklore and folklife*. University of Chicago Press.

→ (Already included in the reference list; no footnote needed in APA.)

<sup>2</sup> Bauman, R. (1972). Differential identity and the social base of folklore. In A. Paredes & R. Bauman (Eds.), *Toward new perspectives in folklore* (pp. 31–41). University of Texas Press.

→ (Handled through in-text citation and reference entry.)

<sup>3</sup> *Explanatory Note:* In this context, the term *folkloristics* refers to any individual who approaches a folklore archive to extract information for academic or non-academic purposes.