

Talking about Tradition

a one-day conference about tradition and change, Estonian Literary Museum, May 31st 2010

**supported by the Estonian Literary Museum and by the European Union through the
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9:30

Introduction: Jonathan Roper

9:45

Value of tradition: the case of the Latvian beer market

Toms Kencis

10:15

'Rationalizing' the traditional explanations of folk belief

Kristel Kivari

10:45

Tradition and Revivalism: A Folkloric study among the Bodos of Assam, India

Faguna Barmahalia

11:15 – 11:45 **Coffee Pause**

11:45

Keeping the vernacular orthodox tradition: women as religious examples and experts in a Komi village

Piret Koosa

12:15

Becoming: Karew Tradition and the Weretiger

Margaret Lyngdoh

12:45

Putting folklore on stage

Kati Taal

13:15 - 14:30 **Lunch**

14:30

Crossing Traditions: Transition of the Lord's Prayer to Vernacular Religion

Carolina Pihelgas

15:00

Changes in the usage of traditional Kihnu dialect over time

Toomas Pajula

15:30

Kiikumisest Kiikingusse: A development in the Estonian swing tradition

Daniel Allen

A b s t r a c t s:

Toms Kencis

Value of tradition: Latvian beer market case

As a value (to distinguish it from process) traditions are negotiated and contested within various discourses, both in positive and negative ways. At the same time, traditionality has a purely economic value, one that can be measured. There are three important mutually interrelated sectors of economics that exploit the discourse of traditionality – cultural heritage, tourism and foodways.

Traditionality is one of the most important key-words also in the Latvian beer market. Tradition, positioned as a value, turns to a value of market share. According to data, beer is the most consumed alcoholic beverage in Latvia. As the market is very dense, claiming to be traditional is kind of a threshold statement for local producers. My presentation will explore the ways in which brewers use concepts of tradition and traditionality, how these claims pay-off in competition between domestic and foreign products, and what it tells us about the tradition as an ongoing process of symbolic construction rooted in social reality.

Faguna Barmahalia

Tradition and Revivalism: A Folkloric study among the Bodos of Assam, India

Tradition is the most essential trait of folklore, which will lose its identity if it is segregated from tradition. It has played a significant role in the history and civilization of India since time immemorial. Once upon a time, the Bodos were assimilated with the Assamese society and they identified themselves as Assamese, and as an integral part of Assamese society. When Assamese society used to look down upon them, the movement for self-assertion among the Bodos began. In this movement, right from the beginning, a conspicuous importance was attached to folklore as a mode of constructing and glorifying a distinct Bodos history and tradition.

The newly emerging class of litterateurs among the Bodos in the first quarter of the 20th century made an attempt to infuse self-confidence among the common Bodo population in order to establish themselves as a homogenous group deserving attention. This was necessary as the Bodos living in different parts of Assam in the first half of this century were not conscious of their common ethnic and historical background. In order to achieve their objectives, the incipient Bodo middle class

litterateurs had recourse to their traditional oral narratives like myths, legends, folk songs and so forth which were in circulation among the common Bodo people. In my presentation, I want to explore how the Bodos are engaged in the project of construction of their own distinct identity by having recourse to tradition. Further I attempt to throw light on the traditions as source of revivalism.

Kristel Kivari

'Rationalizing' the traditional explanations of folk belief

My presentation discusses the changes of the concepts of folk belief in general. The term 'rational' involves, inherently, the opinion that something else is 'irrational', or less relevant. The credibility of the opinions is raised through using scientific rhetorics. These implications are often held by those who tend to revive and implement the certain explanations or just have taken the stance of professional knowledge of spirituality. My presentation concentrates on two professional healers of present-day Estonia, who use the positioning on the environment as their method of healing. I analyse how they use the different motifs of beliefs that are working in the purpose of recovering and how it reflects upon the formation of the self and image of well-being.

Piret Koosa

Keeping the vernacular orthodox tradition: women as the religious examples and experts in a Komi village

In spite of the fact that most of the people I have met during fieldwork in the villages of Komi Republic were born and grew up during the Soviet period of militant atheism, they are all more or less encultured into the vernacular orthodoxy. This is so common among the villagers because of the women, who were the main keepers and carriers of the orthodox tradition in families and in the community, while the official structures of the Orthodox Church and its clergy were destroyed. Some of the elderly women are still widely acknowledged among the community as religious experts. However, the now-reappeared priests often find it hard to accept that they are not always recognised as having more authority in religious matters, and strongly disapprove of the "paganist" traits in the local religious tradition.

In my presentation, I shall present some reasons why it has been important for the women to keep their religious traditions and also briefly look into the problematics of competing religious discourses of the local priest and folk experts.

Margaret Lyngdoh

Becoming: *Karew* Tradition and the Weretiger

The Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya is home to the Bhois, or the Karew, as they prefer to call themselves. Its headquarters is at Nongpoh, about sixty kilometers from Shillong the capital, of Meghalaya. The social setup of the Khasis, and also their religio-cultural institutions finds expression in their matrilineal and kinship system. The rites of passage of birth, marriage and death, including central folk customs of egg divination and kyntang jait (clan initiation) constitute the pivotal points of these traditions. The Karew (inhabitant of Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya) are a sub-group of the Khasis who inhabit the northern section of the Khasi Hills. The indigenous faith, as well its derivatives of social and cultural practices, informs the traditional, agrarian way of life here.

Intrinsic to belief here is the existence of the Sansaram¹ or Were-tiger: men and women shift into the form of the tiger. Reality becomes alternate as they metamorphose from human to animal in order to fulfill certain social roles that they are assigned. In this state of transformation, they go into the ramia² where they exist in a liminal space. The dreaming exists parallel to constructed reality which accommodates the sansaram experience. The were-tigers are accepted into the social space, where they engender and as well as generate, legends and tales which are associated with place. As such, geographic landscapes assume significance in their relationship with tigerlore. Moreover, the “becoming” as well as the area of habitation of these people and such places may be contextualized within the tradition of the community and their presence is also connected with other prevailing belief systems.³

This paper will attempt to locate the were-tiger within the Karew tradition as a pragmatic, social phenomenon, which is now fast eroding. Dynamics of the changing social mores has led to the wilderness depleting, and there is now public appropriation of sites associated with tigerlore;⁴ economic and market factors have influenced occupation, the modification of land tenure system under duress from state government interventions has resulted in a “developmental discourse” which undermines traditions such as this. The nature of this belief, the practical uses it is put to, local

perception and threats to its existence will be some of the key questions that will be addressed in my presentation.

1 Literally, *five-clawed*. Weretigers are also called, *khla phuli* and *khruk*.

2 The term is roughly analogous with dream and vision in the Khasi worldview.

3 The *Knia Lyngdoh* is one such example.

4 Kharmawphlang, D.L. 2001. "When the stone crumbles", Indian Folklore Research Journal, Vol 1, No. 1, pp.53-56.

Kati Taal

Putting folklore on stage

My presentation analyses the International Folklore festival BALTICA and describes problems and aspects of putting folklore on stage. The BALTICA festival is hosted in turns by the three Baltic states:

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This year the XXIII festival will be held in Estonia on July 08-13. BALTICA is described as "a great event of folk culture", which "will be held according to the rules of CIOFF (International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts)". Its aim is "to preserve, revive and develop national and local cultural traditions, to promote cultural contacts with other nations". The Baltica festival promotes "the *authentic forms of folklore* through dance, music, games, rituals and customs."

My first contact with the Baltica festival was in 2007, when it was again held in Estonia. I had been working as a specialist of folk culture in Põlva County exactly one year and because of my background as a folklorist I was assigned the role of curator of folk culture events in Põlva County. As the festival preparations had begun long before I started work at my new post, my job was mainly to watch and learn so that next time I could organize the preparations by myself. So therefore my job of organizing the festival started in 2009, when I was preparing Baltica 2010. As of now, the festival programme is ready and performers and groups have all been through some more or less rough inspection and they have got their feedback about their work in putting together an authentic folklore performance.

In my presentation I will describe methods and criteria of the Baltica artistic council for evaluating a folk group's authenticity and suitability on stage. I will analyze the expectations and views to main concerts (in the concert hall of the National Theatre Estonia) from the standpoint of the festival organizers and from the folklore groups. I will also look at the principles by which the main concert's

programme is put together (by well-known folklorists in Estonia). As I had the opportunity this year to take a close look at the preparations of the festival programmes, I will give a short review of problems and questions that folk group instructors came across when looking for materials and putting together their programme. And finally I will concentrate on the role of the Baltica festival in the Estonian folklore movement in general.

Caroliina Pihelgas

Crossing Traditions: Transition of the Lord's Prayer to Vernacular Religion

This paper observes the textual changes in the Lord's Prayer when it is transposed from sacral context of the Christian church into vernacular context and thus becomes a charm. In Christian context the prayer is directed towards abstract "Our Father" or God, the Creator, but in vernacular context it has pragmatics of a charm and is directed towards concrete supernatural powers, which would help to avoid unwanted changes. In this paper I observe the magical use of the Lord's Prayer in preventive magic, in influencing the future and future-telling. This paper also looks into the intertextual techniques of the charms.

I make a distinction between two aspects of speech in my paper, according to French structural linguist Émile Benveniste: utterance (*énoncé*) and enunciation (*énonciation*). Utterance is a statement which is independent of the context, whereas enunciation is tied to the context culturally, psychologically, etc. Two main forms of intertextuality in the manuscripts from the Estonian Folklore Archives which I have looked into and from which there are examples in my paper, are simplex utterance and complex utterance. Simplex utterance is repetition and/or reversal of the Lord's Prayer and this form is dominative in preventive magic. Complex utterance, on the other hand is most notable in descriptions of healing diseases where the Lord's Prayer has been added in the beginning or end of other charms as a quote.

Toomas Pajula

Changes in the usage of the Kihnu dialect over time

Since the middle of the last century, Kihnu dialect has started to undergo great changes and mainly towards simplification. This can be seen as becoming closer and closer to written Estonian. Has this

change been brought about by the better level of education, modern communication appliances and more activities outside the island? This presentation tries to point out the effects of the modern school education on the disappearance of the sound of the traditional dialect as well as the more frequent use of simplified sentence constructions in everyday speech.

Presentation analyzes the speech of 5 different generations of the islanders on the basis of representing the same traditional and well-known stories. Still 50 years ago, Kihnu people used the phrase “sie põlõmte õige” (literally, *this ain't not right*), but nowadays the young ones use “sie põlõ õige” (literally, *this ain't right*). Representation of the texts by younger islanders shows a clear tendency towards simplification of the language tradition and the loss of the tinge of colour characteristic solely of Kihnu dialect.

Daniel Allen

Kiikumisest Kiikingusse: A development in the Estonian swing tradition

This presentation will take the form of observations on an example of innovation within tradition. Specifically it will look at the Estonian village swing tradition and outline a recent development in this centuries-old practice. The presentation will be split into two halves. The aim of the first half will be to establish that *kiikumine* (swinging) is in fact an Estonian tradition. This assertion will be supported with reference to various sources dating back to the 18th century showing the breadth of social recognition for the *kiik* (swing), including folk songs (from written collections), a print from 1780 and one from about 1840, contemporary records made by folklore collectors, etc. The second half of the presentation will look more closely at a commercial venture that began in 1996, and was given the name '*Kiiking*' by its inventor. Interview material along with images will show the direct link between *Kiiking* and the swing tradition, and investigate how and why this development came about.