

BREAD CRUMBS OR YEAST: INDO-CANADIAN POPULAR CULTURE AND ITS GROWTH POTENTIAL

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Most people think about popular or folk culture the way they think about bread crumbs. Bread crumbs are tiny, disorganized bits that are hardly worth eating. Songs, stories, costumes and momentos brought to Canada by immigrants are often understood to be remnants in the same way. Folklore, in our contemporary vocabulary, is often a term used when describing traditions that seem "impractical" or unscientific. Folklore also has associations with nostalgia. "Folk" items are things brought out for display on festival days and briefly admired or celebrated, only to again be packed away. A folk festival is a once-a-year event. It is defined as a leisure-time activity, and is usually financed by volunteer labour. Hence the Canadian cultural "frame" placed around folk themes and materials generally defines them as play, something set well apart from the real concerns of daily life.

Are there other ways to think about folklore, ways that imply that folklore can claim a more central and significant role in contemporary life? An immigrant community that begins to use traditional images and expressive styles in ways that comment about its place in a new society is making a statement about having adapted to that altered surround. Its popular culture can be called alive. Folk creations, when they provide an expressive critique, thus play a double role. They both help specific ethnic groups formulate their own identity vis-a-vis newly acquired neighbors, and they also aid the latter to see what contributions to an existing cultural 'frame' a specific ethnic perspective can make.

In contrast to the bread crumb image, I would like to suggest thinking about immigrant innovations in folk tradition as a type of yeast. Yeast is found inside the loaf of bread, helping it to expand and reach its full potential. Yeast also has a concealed energy that becomes activated only in the context of a new environment, that is when it is mixed with a warm, watery surround. Furthermore, yeast must be there from the start of the baking process, it is not something left-over at the end. But how can we compare folklore to yeast? B.A. Bodkin made a start in this direction in 1953 when he wrote that we must outgrow the older 'survival' theory of the 'partial usefulness' of folklore and...(begin to view it)... as the 'germ-plasm' of society."¹ What he meant by this is that folklore embodies basic values and survival strategies which can help provide landmarks, and meanings when facing a difficult future.

Similarly, Albert Friedman has written that our mythologies contain:

"covert systems of assumptions, values, beliefs
personal wishes socialized, and social wishes
internalized, which reveal themselves only in
the images and metaphors in which they get
expressed, in syntactical relationships, in the

articulation of incidents, in the fleshing out
of archetypal personae and situations."2

That stories, songs, folk art and even folk food patterns contain implicit social values and basic human understandings is not difficult to demonstrate. But we are still left with the question of what values actually get expressed in Canadian settings, and whether they ever get related to pan-Canadian frameworks. If there is a new popular culture being created amongst immigrants in Canada, one which contains contemporary views and attitudes and which can relate effectively to changed conditions, where can we find it? Later on in this paper I shall try to provide some leads.

Before searching for immigrant folklore that is contemporary and closely related to Canadian experience, however, one must first establish more clearly the type of material to be sought. To define what I have in mind let me start by quoting Talcott Parsons. He has written that:

"the symbolization of ethnic identification
is primarily focused on style of life dis-
tinctiveness within the larger framework of
...social structure"3

The important idea here is that specific ethnic styles always exist within a larger societal frame. One can never have ethnicity without the presence of some kind of larger cultural backdrop, something to be "ethnic" in relation to. As a sub-unit, the concept of a particular ethnic group is then established and maintained by persons who display a subtly distinct style. Style is a purposefully vague word. It conveniently covers (at a minimum) potential differences in verbal usage, dress, behavioural manner, housing, foods and recipes, particularly stressed colours, sounds, or shapes, and of course, the preferential use of specific images, stories or mythic themes.

Folk traditions help to frame these specific subtleties of style by relating them to wider concepts. Just as a little bit of left-over dough, when carefully nurtured, latter becomes the yeast for a new loaf of bread that can be shaped by a new baking mould, so old folk-themes in new cultural frames should produce creative outcomes. Let me give a simple example. A Vancouver based Indo-Canadian runs a small business in which he imports lithographed prints of various Indian gods (often called Indian calendar art). He then frames these with local Canadian wood, in a Canadian style that emphasizes knots and solidity, coupled with a wavy irregularity of line. The frames are then coloured with a deep stain and coated with shiny laquer. Hence we see Indian gods literally "framed" by Canadian wood in a Canadian folk art style. They are now sold at a profit in local food stores and used to decorate private homes. The adaptation of Indian religious themes to Canadian popular home decor patterns is here clear, even to the untrained eye.

Now, however, let me take a more complex example, a New Year's festival that has recently developed among members of Vancouver's Polish community. Across Canada people of many backgrounds indulge in a peculiar ritual on New Year's Day. At roughly twelve noon on January 1st they gather on the sands of a beach or river bank in their bathing suits. At the sound of a whistle they all run towards the waters to immerse themselves. Judges stand near by and the persons who stay in the longest are later awarded prizes. Pictures of these people appear on the front page of local newspapers the next day. In Vancouver so many people take to the water in small boats to watch this event

that special sea-going police are required to reduce the chance of collisions.

Last year, and this year too, the Vancouver Polish community has begun to celebrate a similar New Year's event, two weeks later on January 15th. However, there are certain interesting shifts of focus in this "echo" festival. Now the bathing costumes used are far more elaborate and many have comic overtones. Indeed, the Poles dress up for this event, not down. Their judges, furthermore, award prizes to persons wearing the best costumes, not to those (if any) who actually get themselves wet. This surprising celebration provides an ethnic folk critique of Canadian values for two reasons. Firstly, the Polish festival is clearly meant to parallel a generalized, non-ethnic event held in the same spot just two weeks earlier. It uses the former as its reference point. That first celebration is called the Polar Bear swim and clearly equates Canadians with polar bears. It highlights the reality of a cold climate and even celebrates this ecological reality. Most importantly, the polar bear swim serves to highlight a general cultural concern Canadians have with fitness. Jumping into the sea on January 1st demonstrates one's physiological stamina. It also relates to Canadian pioneer values, stating pride in a local resident's ability to deal with harsh, physical challenges.

The Polish festival, by contrast, "mocks" this be-tough mentality. The fact that prizes are given for costumes rather than for bathing stamina at their celebration is itself a critique. This shadow event on January 15th asserts that Poles know how to have fun. They know a good joke when they see one. They are not over serious. They do not seek out hardship where it seems unnecessary. Canadian festivals can be fun, but they tend to be over-serious and too fitness oriented for Polish tastes. Hence old Polish cultural themes are here used as "yeast" to create a new tradition. The new event relates Poles to a local setting and takes local traditions as a back-drop to highlight significant Polish differences. A lively folk commentary is the result. The festival, clearly, is a source of local immigrant pride. A detailed study of the costumes worn might uncover further statements about the presence of other distinctive aspects of a Polish-Canadian style in Vancouver.

As the Polish festival illustrates, living folklore is generally concerned to mark specific social identities in relation to some wider cultural frame. Hence folklore must be understood as social commentary, a kind of counter-culture. It always seems to mock and reorganize what can be found in the more socially orthodox traditions which surround it. Yet folklore is rarely revolutionary. Rather than advocating the overthrow of the wider framework or surround, folklore usually takes an ambivalent position towards its surround. Its main purpose is to assert the potential for alternative life styles. Folklore, in this definition, argues for the equality of distinctive worldviews, suggesting that each alternative should be recognized and valued in its own right. It does not advocate the abolition of frame traditions altogether.

If we now attempt to relate this definition of folklore to Canadian issues it quickly becomes clear that the growth of a creative popular culture among immigrants is much to be lauded. Immigrant folklore of this kind thrives on particular immigrant encounters with (and reactions to) a new set of ambient values. It is a folklore that employs ideas, and images brought to Canada from previous social settings and then uses these in creative ways to assert a group's changed identity. This feature is, of course, the reason newly developed folklore can be so captivating. Such material thrives on a

kind of controled, imaginative rebellion against wider social norms. It is this that makes genuine folklore into social "yeast."

Though the typically rebellious style of popular folklore is important, two further characteristic features of this genre also require comment. For one, good folklore is full of humour, a humour that does not limit itself to a critique of the high and mighty. Folk characters are generally humourous in their own right. Often they display exaggerated or undesirable qualities in a strange mix with more laudable ones. Hence folklore finds ways to laugh at the very people whose identity it becomes bound up with. The folk artist never takes himself (herself), the audience, or the wider culture too seriously. Like the double edged dramas acted out by jesters in a medieval king's court, so too, really genuine contemporary materials. Most so-called ethnic folklore today, however, is far too serious to fit this demanding description. To understand the growth of truly significant immigrant folklore, we must look for humour. Furthermore, such humour must extend to the portrayal of ethnic characters themselves, not just to features of the official or orthodox surrounding culture. Indeed, learning to laugh at foolish or unproductive aspects of one's own heritage, as it appears newly framed by other traditions, provides the analyst with a poignant indication of the progress of a particular group's accomodation to a new locale more generally.

The second feature of folklore that deserves special mention relates to matters of content. True folklore will always contain social and geographic references to local terrain. Such markers may involve locally recognized story motifs, local social habits, known political figures, and/or mention of specific geographic clues. Folklore, to serve as a commentary on a local identity, must contain flags pointing to a familiar, home domain. When a story or a folk art motif travels with people from one locale to another, or from the hands of one group into those of another, small adaptations are always made. Otherwise a folk tradition quickly becomes ossified. Those changes are markers of the appropriation and incorporation of that particular material by the new group. It is like the "branding" of foreign material with one's own logo. Hence, Canadian immigrant folklore (if alive, rather than ossified) should display markers indicating its appropriation by new users, in a new context.

It is now time to turn to a specific immigrant group, and ask whether the kind of folklore just described can actually be found amongst Indo-Canadians. If so, what might it consist in, where can we look for it, and how can it be further encouraged? Little has been published in Canada directly related to this issue. However, I would like to say a few words about what the existing literature does contain. Buchignani published a very comprehensive bibliography of works referring to Indo-Canadians in 1977. This listing contains a total of 433 items which are carefully classified into several content categories, sometimes using two or more descriptions per item. Percentaging the frequency of these different content types yields the following table:

LITERATURE ON INDO-CANADIANS: PROPORTIONAL TO CONTENT TYPE

Historical	44%	Marginal References	10%
Sociological	15%	Bibliographical	3%
Folk Historical Commentary	13%	Quantitative	2%
Comparative	12%	Educational	1%

It is clear from the Buchignani survey that the great majority of material written about Indo-Canadians refers to the history of their settlement in Canada. A further 15% is "sociological" in character, and mainly describes patterns of family life. Yet the third largest category is called folk historical commentary. Is this where studies of immigrant folklore can be found? Unfortunately the answer is no. This classification was used by Buchignani to refer to journalistic materials containing anglo-Canadian folk attitudes about Indo-Canadians, not visa versa, and mainly of a pejorative kind. The other categories of writing he lists are even less relevant to our purpose. Buchignani's bibliography is quite comprehensive for the pre-1977 period. Hence this leaves only the possibility that there might be something of interest written after that date.

For the post 1977 period there is no comprehensive bibliography available. The best I can do is to report on publications familiar to me, and on work I know is in progress. A couple of interesting items may be mentioned, however, and are listed below:

Attitudes of Indo-Canadians towards various aspects of family and work life:

- Brenda Beck, 1978 survey of 16 families, some published data, see bibliography
- Carolyn Filteau, article on the concept of love, see bibliography
- Josephine Naidoo, article on female role perceptions and sense of achievement, see bibliography
- Marjorie Wood, Ph.D. thesis on attitudes towards public and private social service institutions in Vancouver, (in progress).

Traditional Indo-Canadian Medical Beliefs:

- Judy Pugh, 1982 survey in Vancouver, unpublished
- Marjorie Wood, data on childbirth attitudes, unpublished

Religious and Ritual Life:

- Van Dusenbury, Ph.D. thesis on Sikh religious life in Vancouver (in progress)
- Parin Dossa, Ph.D. thesis on Ismaili religious life in Vancouver (in progress)
- Kuldip Gill, M.A. thesis on Sikh weddings in Vancouver, see bibliography
- Marjorie Wood, article on Hindu religious adaptations in Canada, see bibliography

Contemporary Poetry, Novels and Drama:

- Suwanda Sigunasiri, book on contemporary range of these materials, for all Indo-Canadian groups (in progress)

Use of Metaphors, Imagery:

- Brenda Beck, articles on imagery used when discussing ethnicity, and parent-child relationships, see bibliography

Although all of the publications and research activities cited above have some general relevance to the issue of contemporary Indo-Canadian values, none really focus on creative developments in Indo-Canadian folklore. The work being done on religious traditions concerns more orthodox materials and does

not generally discuss matters at issue from a folkloric perspective. Dusenbury, Dossa, Gill and Wood all talk about the "framing" of Indian religious traditions. But none of these researchers has yet looked at folk critiques, say, through local religious drama. Nor have they looked for the use of humor in such materials, or for the creation of new stories that place traditional mythic characters (for example, Lord Rama) in a Canadian setting.

Most Hindus probably feel that their corpus of myths is somehow "fixed", and that to introduce a series of stories describing Rama's travels in Canada would be sacrilege. But a bold, creative story teller, familiar with the Canadian setting, could overcome such objections. After all, this is precisely what folk tradition has done to the great heroes of both the Ramayana and Mahabharata throughout Southeast Asia. There is also ample evidence that key figures from both epics were given extra adventures within India itself, experiences that tied them to specific new landscapes throughout that geographic area. By fancifully adding to the great epics in their retelling, new, independent stories have gradually emerged. This is an area where researchers should watch for potential innovations in Canada.

It might be argued that religion is an inherently orthodox dimension of cultural life. The Ismaili community, for example, gives the impression of being very conservative where published (or broadcast media) material is concerned. They have an elaborate formal hierarchy through which anything presented in these communication modes must be vetted. But in the realm of festival performances, considerable experimentation has been encouraged. The difference seems to pertain to an idea about "fixed" materials which get preserved for posterity, and more "flexible" or evolving modes of personal expression. One is official and orthodox, the other informal and popular. Yet that line is not rigidly held. For example, the traditional sacred chants (ginans) sung at the Ismaili Jamat Khana are set to specific tunes. But Vancouver-based devotees have now started experimenting with these, setting old words to new cinema-derived melodies. At first the new tunes (and sometimes the new words, too) were banned by Ismaili authorities. But now these new modes have become so popular that religious officials have been unable to stop the trend. Ceding to local demand, non-traditional hymns have now become available as cassette tapes. Many people play them in their cars, on the way to work.

More radical, in the area of music, is a local Vancouver jazz band made up of Ismaili players which calls itself Afro-fusion. This group plays monthly at one of the local hotels. What blend of traditional Ismaili, African and North American rhythms are used would be interesting to explore. Does the band provide critical commentary in a musical mode? Can one "do" with music, perhaps, certain things that are culturally frowned upon if put into words? Another Ismaili example relates to physical experimentation with movement. At a recent variety show sponsored by the community (I am told) there was a "chicken" dance performed by a group of school-aged children, certainly not traditional Ismaili festival fare. Nor is the chicken thought to be a beautiful animal. Yet the dance was admired, spoken about, and remembered. Could the chicken-like movements have been a non-verbal commentary on a new Canadian trend towards musical exercises? If so, ambivalent Ismaili attitudes about Canadian group fitness themes might here have found folk expression in dance. The area of literature is somewhat less promising when looking for folklore, for two reasons. First of all, fixed words become a subject for cold scrutiny by others, and hence suffer greater social control than do unwritten

materials. Secondly, literature has strong links to education, and to sophisticated tastes in general. Folklore, linked to underbelly of society, requires a style not easily captured with orthodox grammar and vocabulary.

Another area of popular research relates to Indo-Canadian family values. The inquiries here have been of relatively high standard, and deserves careful reading by those interested in folklore. But none of these works deal with the realm of popular culture specifically. Another potentially interesting domain for research is the use of interior home space. Indo-Canadians do not share the European concern with putting children in separate bedrooms, for example. Instead, many prefer multi-use spaces. Some Korean-Canadians have experimented with sliding panels in order to allow in-laws more access to communal life, while some Indo-Canadians reserve one room for their gods. When standard Canadian homes get remodeled or creatively used by immigrant families, then we can speak of the growth of a critical folk commentary on the more standard Canadian uses of domestic space.

Various memorate materials, collected with regard to the early history of particular families in Canada, might also be called folklore. But here the perspective of most collectors has been that of preservation, rather than an interest in learning how a given populace thinks about its folk heroes. My sense is that there is a great Indo-Canadian memorate richness yet to be tapped. In keeping with a Canadian tradition of immigrant hardship and the eventual conquest of a new environment, many second and third generation Indo-Canadians remember their parents' and grandparents' struggles with admiration. Much could be done in this realm, not for the sake of preservation of old memories, but for the sake of contemporary role model formation. The first Canadian Sikh aviator, to take one clear case, might become the basis of a small epic. One could develop dramatic story performances centering on his many adventures, and the surprises he encountered in this new culture. There is a whole folklore of cockpit conversations between pilots that could be used. What did this Sikh think of the new joking style and what might he have said in commentary? There are also plenty of old photographs of mill workers, and farm laborers available in government (as well as family) archives. Stories could easily be spun around their local experiences. Industrial leaders like British Columbia's Mayo Singh have an equal potential for folk development.

Modern Indo-Canadian entrepreneurs can also provide culturally distinctive examples of business success. Story-tellers need to be encouraged to look for such materials. Indo-British labour songs, for example, have already been reported from English factory settings. A similar workers' folklore may lie waiting for discovery in the Canadian saw mills, in canneries, and amongst migrant farm workers. Take, too, an interesting picture found in the federal archives where the sad but famous Komagata Maru boat has been photographed with the Indian passengers laughing. Is there a tale about the immigrant's perspective to be spun here as well?

Indo-Canadian folk medicine also deserves a brief comment. Here the utility of studying present habits is slightly different. Beliefs about common illnesses, about the nature of sickness and the construction of the human body, are important to cross cultural understanding. Often nurses and doctors misunderstand the complaints of immigrant patients, and the patients, in turn, misunderstand a medical practitioner's reasoning or true intent. But folk medical beliefs can also make rich story material. One need only think

of the popular medical issues present in many North American "soaps." Media extravaganzas like E.T. further stretch the imagination with regard to body construction and capabilities. Imagine how much interest an Indo-Muslim or Hindu version of E.T. could hold, as a commentary on a preferred ethnic body images that would critique North American values simultaneously. We ought to look at what is being created in the temple context, too. We need better data on medical ideas, and much more information on family heroes. Both leisure time adventure, and business or professional courage needs documentation. We also should keep an eye out for talented story tellers, cartoon drawers, singers etc. and provide whatever economic and social incentives can be found to encourage their concerted production of fresh material.

One might argue that the age of folklore is rapidly disappearing, and that now we live in the era of mass media creations. These vast productions, like advertising, the argument goes, are not true folklore but instead evidence for a new and subtle political and economic domination by powerful social elites. In my view this kind of material is "fakelore." The development Ronald McDonald by the fast food chain is a good example. True folklore provides a popular and much needed answer to this kind of banality. It lies in the story that circulates about the McDonald's hamburger that fell under the chesterfield at a teenage party, not to be found for three months. When mother finally moved the furniture to vacuum and saw the burger, not a single patch of mold or one ant's nibble had tainted it, so indestructible and inedible was that corporate product! True folklore is not the creation and filming of E.T., then, but rather the folklore that kids build up around this character as millions include him in their games and private stories.

Indo-Canadians are a complex and largely unintegrated category of citizens. They hail from a number of religious backgrounds, speak or identify with a wide range of ancestral languages, come from varied parts of the sub-continent and from widely different social and economic backgrounds. They are also, at times, rivals for recognition, status and respect in this new homeland. They have also settled in widely disparate regions of Canada. A fair number would prefer to shed their ethnic identity all together. Any effort to bridge these subdivisions is likely to encounter some indifference, perhaps even some active resistance. Given these constraints, what, then, are some of the directions of growth that a distinctive Indo-Canadian body of folklore might take? First, let us consider content. A flexible, evolving set of key characters would seem likely. To be ethnic, folklore need only represent special stylistic preferences or perspectives. It is sufficient for an audience to appreciate a folk commentary as cutting or salient.

Separate Sikh, Hindu and Muslim developments are thus easily imagined. A possible religious base for creative folklore themes has already been suggested. Specific mythological figures could easily develop new challenges or adventures in the Canadian context, in the case of Hindu tradition. For Moslems and Sikhs, the potential lies with developing stories about local saints or devout lay figures. Take, for example, an Ismaili guru who travels to the West Coast of Canada every year or so, and has already become a legend for his outstanding celebrity and colourful character.

Aside from imaginary or highly interpreted symbolic material that might originate from various religious communities, there is also plenty of room for journalistic folklore. The Indo-Canadian community is full of persons who have fought for Canadian identity, family security, and local respect in

heroic measure. Some small legends of this kind circulate already, but public knowledge of them is slim. Someone might start a column to run in local newspapers, for example, with a story about an Indo-Canadian immigrant hero/heroine featured each week. A little colour, personality and humour would, of course, be needed, not the style of reading material familiar in government textbooks. Interviews on radio or TV with persons who have found unusual but colourful niches in Canadian society would also lend themselves to folk development. I recall, for example, a Sikh owner of a classy French restaurant I once encountered in Vancouver. His family story would make interesting telling.

Another more general public arena that already exists is the folk evening or folk concert. For example, one such event held in Ottawa in March of 1983 was composed of eight men who sang innovative ballads and sea songs about ethnic topics. In laughing at the Welsh, Irish, English and the Scotts in turn, each take-off pointed to a different group's ineptitudes and difficulties in dealing with Canadian life. The same singers also poked fun at the audience, including gays, the upper class, and a recent Ph.D. We need to air jibes like these that each group takes at others, doing it in controlled, public ways. Indo-Canadians should join in this playfulness, and not just leave it to Canadians of English-speaking origin. For example, a lovely Hindi poem I once heard captured very nicely the Indian distaste for the British topi. If the Indo-Canadian community is going to succeed in shaping the larger cultural images of course, it must be willing to view its own role in semi-humorous and self-critical ways as well. If we try to stamp out such imagery, saying that nobody can refer to anybody else publically in colorful hues, we will simply drive these attitudes underground. There they will do far more harm.

Sports is another promising area for folklore creativity. Just as one branch bank will compete against others, so can groups of Indo-Canadians compete using their ethnic identity as a strength. Sikh, Ismaili and Fijian teams in field hockey, soccer, badminton, table tennis and volley ball already exist. Is there already an interesting folklore developing in this domain? What about cheers that are sung to urge these teams on? What about their mascots, their team names, their uniforms? What about the design of the trophies awarded? The saga of each season of play, furthermore, may well be codified in accounts of team life told by a specially designated fan at group meetings, in songs and dances for local festivals. Let us bring these materials forward and develop their full potential.

Some Indian intellectuals might object to conveying an image of their ethnic identity through competitive sports. Some believe that supporting a local team is a waste of time, and that an educated group ought properly to devote its time to higher human values. But even a moment's reflection will show that the larger Canadian value domain sets up sports as a key arena where social values get symbolized (Beck, unpublished). Why not join in, and talk about Indian values, too, with this new set of metaphors, thereby reaching a large Canadian public? Further examples might come from the individual sports area. Take Gurnam Singh, a Sikh struck by polio who is already a gold medal winner in handicapped cycle racing. He is now making an around the world trip, trying for a place in the Guinness Book Of Records. A fanciful and humorous debate between him and Terry Fox over the merits of their two careers, and differing sport choices could make interesting folk material.

There is, of course, a clear difference between ethnic groups in Canada in terms of preferred domains of imagery (Beck, 1982 and, in press). A recent article by Leo Dreiger (1975) also suggests preferred value domains. Jews, for example, place strong emphasis on ingroup friends and highly value endogamy. Poles seem to enjoy New Year festivals. The French link their ethnic identity very strongly to their language. Ismaili's value their poetic psalms. Folk imagery can develop around volunteer work in local hospitals, be displayed at ethnic garage sales, and even be seen at gasoline pumps. Mascots, mottos, uniforms and related creative activities have potential application in a wide range of social contexts.

Another obvious place to develop would be in the cartoon medium. A creative artist could develop a journal strip, say along the lines Doonsbury has mapped, but with an Indo-Canadian adolescent as the focal character. If well done, such a character might become widely appreciated. From such a starting point it might be possible to build one or more short films, using the same or similar characters, that could play at local theatres. Characters that are seen to cope in a humorous, yet also insightful way, with immigrant dilemmas and experiences would no doubt receive enthusiastic endorsement. Once well-established in an ethnic media world, a good idea might also be "floated" in wider pan-ethnic contexts.

Cartoons, animated film strips, and soap-opera type serials are all possibilities in the modern media domain. But the sequenced, one week at a time, principle is important to bear in mind. And any character must be developed gradually. Reminders must appear. For a true folklore to flourish there must be a gradual penetration of the imagination, and time allowed for shared perceptions to grow. Folklore traditions can mature, like a good patina on old glass. Furthermore, the building of folk traditions is always a participatory process. Though the bard or story teller plays a key role by creating and then repeating formal elements, only the audience can internalize these, and respond with personalized variants. Hence, folklore becomes rooted in the popular imagination only when the non-professional artist begins to recreate and remould context or frame materials for family or friends, in the ordinary intercourse of daily life.

CONCLUSION

This essay attempts to map out a set of directions in which Indo-Canadian culture can fruitfully grow. There is, of course, already plenty of "high" culture in Canada that has clear South Asian roots. Much of this is of a religious character, and is centered in temples, churches and mosques of various sorts. Regional language groups also sponsor films, dances and celebrations relating to Indian history and aesthetic tastes. There are newspapers and periodicals available in several Indian languages, as well as some TV programs with South Asian content. Foods and condiments from the sub-continent are readily available. Many people, especially women, elect South Asian forms of dress, both at home and in public. Family visiting patterns between friends and relatives flourish in the Indo-Canadian milieu.

What is lacking, then, in Indo-Canadian popular culture today? Poets, writers and ordinary individuals have provided a range of interesting commentaries, as persons. But these actions and their related literary creations are not part of the popular or "common" mind. The plays, novels and short stories that do say something largely reflect historical and/or very

personal experiences. Also, they are not widely circulated. What I believe is missing in Indo-Canadian life, then, is a determination to respond to the ways ethnicity is understood in Canadian society at large with a creative imagery that depicts one's own milieu in relation to this wider frame. In a very real sense the Indo-Canadian diaspora has been so pervasive and so fragmented that the task of forming an image of this "ethnic" group for other Canadians has been left mainly to the media. Devoid of any special knowledge or motivation to do otherwise, these unpaid "advertisers" have done little more than pick up derogatory international stereotypes about Indian poverty, female oppression, etc. and then applied them to the Indo-Canadian milieu.⁵ Such negative associations will persist until and unless a much more creative and focused interest in forging a more interesting and accurate Indo-Canadian identity is taken by spokesmen from within.

Contemporary Canadian culture demands that there be a range of intermediate level categories for discourse about ethnic matters. If Indo-Canadians are currently being "lumped" together by others under rather derogatory labels then they must, themselves, begin to suggest alternatives. Academic lectures about the great diversity in Indian culture, or about the past glories of Indian history will never succeed in creating this much needed set of public images. I have outlined some alternative strategies above, which I feel have far more potential.

This paper has not provided many examples of a contemporary Indo-Canadian folklore in situ. It is largely waiting to be created, using local landmarks and experience as guides. The potential field for such an effort is huge. It has hardly been surveyed. At present there are at most a few bits of yeast germ growing here and there. More warm water and careful culturing is needed. Immigrants from South Asia, as from elsewhere, have thus far been preoccupied with more pressing economic issues. Furthermore, there is no ready market for a folk artist, and the way to develop such traditions lies uncharted. I feel confident, however, that the ferment and growth of a genuine Indo-Canadian folklore would do much to strengthen the position this set of immigrants can claim in Canada's wider mosaic. A healthy popular culture lends strength to local communities, and to a country at large. Not only will Indo-Canadians profit individually from the proper nurturance of local folk material, but so will their image with the public at large. Other Canadians will be quick to appreciate new imagery that provides humour, amusement, and local colour, along with critical social perceptions of wider Canadian themes and trends. Such a development, however, will require more (not less) cultural self-confidence and a strong sense of local rootedness. It would be wonderful, indeed, if Indo-Canadians could take the lead in developing this new and needed dimension to this nation's multi-cultural life.

Footnotes

- 1 B.A. Botkin, "Applied Folklore: Creating Understanding Through Folklore," Southern Folklore Quarterly 17/3 (1953), 204.
- 2 Albert B. Friedman, "The Useable Myth: The Legends of Modern Mythmakers," American Folk Legend: A Symposium (Berkeley, 1971), p. 43.
- 3 Talcott Parsons, "Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity", in Nerhan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds., Ethnicity Theory and Experience, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 65.
- 4 Letter from Stephen Inglis, National Centre for Folk Arts and Folk Culture, March 23, 1983.
- 5 Doreen Indra has written extensively on this topic. See the bibliography.

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