In 1869 appeared *Old Deccan Days*, the first collection of Indian folktales made by a British resident of colonial India, Mary Frere, daughter of the Bombay presidency governor. It was published in London and attracted considerable attention. The second collection, *Indian Fairy Tales*, followed, by the very young Maive Stokes, daughter of another senior civil servant in Calcutta. Simultaneously came the collection *Legends of Punjab* (1884–85) by Captain R. C. Temple, and the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the publication of many collections of Indian folklore by British missionaries, civil and military officers, and their family members in India. While none were professional folklorists, they had often studied anthropology at prestigious British universities and with the publication of these collections became recognized as scholars of *Things Indian*, to cite William Crooke’s title from 1906. While the history of British orientalist writing in India was already more than a century old, the folklore collections started and were popularized mainly from 1869, a decade after India had received a new Queen, Victoria. Thus, while the orientalists had introduced versions of the classical and religious texts and pasts of India to European readers, the folklore collectors claimed to be presenting another India, “the real India” (Gordon 1909, v).

The collections of Indian folklore compiled by British officers, missionaries, and others almost always featured a long preface to the volume, written either by the collector or by another colleague-friend who was considered to be more knowledgeable—though not necessarily about Indian folklore. These prefaces, some of which are the subject of the present analysis, sought to introduce to the intended European readers not only the tales in the collection but also India, her folk, folklore, culture, and history. Although the tales in these collections were essentially regional in nature, having most often been made within the limits of a district or within the area under the collector’s administrative control, a small dot on the geographically and culturally varied subcontinent, the folklore collector, while writing the preface, applied his observations and conclusions to a much wider area and generally to India. The folklore itself was seen as the “mind of the people,” and the collector’s prefaces attempted to place this mind in its social, cultural, and historical milieu for a readership that, for the most part, had not seen India. The folklore collector thus defined the comprehension of the folklore texts.
What distinguished these prefaces from earlier British orientalist writing was the claim that their subject of study was “the real India—the India of the villages” (Gordon 1909, v). It was the discovery and understanding of the “interior,” the “hinterland”—culturally, geographically, and socially—which was emphasized. This expansion of knowledge boundaries corresponded with the expansion of British political, administrative, and military influence in the physical interior of the subcontinent. The relation between these two phenomena needs to be studied, but the collectors’ consciousness towards the social (read colonial) importance of their work shows that this correspondence is not merely coincidental.

These images of India were not based on pure imagination or fantasy, as the collectors were temporarily or permanently living in India, nor were they the first to write on Indian culture. The writings of the British in India and their reception in England formed an orbit in which the imaginings of India traversed the continents. This orbit also shaped the fantasies, perceptions, and writings of the average male folklore collector: he grew up in the United Kingdom, in his youth prepared himself for a lucrative career in the colony and in the process (Morrison 1984, 148–49) imagined India on the basis of the images generated by the early orientalists and travelers and also by traders and governments. On reaching India as an officer or missionary, his relationship to Indian reality was channeled ideologically through the media of British colleagues and superiors and through the overwhelming numbers of the Indian staff—from personal cooks and barbers to clerks and secretaries. When he thought of collecting folklore of the region of his residence, he was conscious, as is evident from the “prefaces,” that his writing would produce images which could affect the deliberations of the government and the people back in Britain, especially those preparing to leave for India. In this orbital generation and communication of images, the real India with her real people did not directly figure in the scheme of this discourse. Unlike the imagining of other states (such as Turkey in German folklore; see Cheesman’s paper in this volume) this discourse was generated in India with her own resources but was not meant for her. Thus the British folklore collector was free of the real India, since the representation had to communicate not with the represented but with those ignorant of the real. The real could be (and needed to be) fantasized, both for the pleasure of the intended readers and because of the limitations of the collectors’ own knowledge.

Examples of the prefaces to collections of Indian folktales made by British missionaries, administrators, and military officers in the second half of the nineteenth century have been randomly chosen but two types of closely associated material have been specifically excluded:

1. Despite essential similarities between their perceptions and those of the English men, the prefaces to folktale collections made by the wives and
daughters\(^1\) of the officials remain a distinct category and merit separate treatment, taking the women collectors’ gender status and thereby the generated structures of relationship with the colonial enterprise into account. Reference to their works will be made in the analysis because quite often the prefaces or introductions to their collections were written by the father, husband, or male folklorist friend.

2. Prefaces to ethnological works and reports written as part of official government duty and policy, such as surveys, censuses, and compilations of details of tribes have not been included, although these may contain information on folk customs and beliefs.

The conditions of employment determined a British official’s or missionary’s place of residence and therefore also the place of his folklore collecting. The differences in their social and political status and in the nature of their official work determined not only the course of their interaction with but also their experience of the narrators. Yet the similarity among them is striking, not only in their perception of the people and their culture but even in their linguistic expression of them. Even regional differences of their subject matter become blurred by a set of phrases and idiomatic expressions which by their omnipresence seem to be prescribed.

Collectors’ narratives are constituted of three abstractions: India, the folklore collector, and the folktales. The first constituent, India, mainly comprised the geographical identification of the locale of the folktale collection, highlights of its history (whenever possible),\(^2\) and the description of the state of mind of the people. The second, the folklore collector, took the form of an in-depth account of the collector’s efforts and an expression of his aims in the work. The folktales were identified according to the ethnicity of their carriers, and almost every collector attempted a theoretical position on the issue of their antiquity. Similarities are the norm in the treatment of these three subjects by different folklore collectors in the second half of the nineteenth century in colonial India, while differences are limited to descriptions of the geographic locales. Taken together their narration generated a discourse from whose deconstruction emerges the following three “tales” of this article:

**Tale One**  
**A Folk Tale Called India**

“Wonderfully beautiful” (Swynerton 1892, xii) and plentiful, but extremely difficult to reach is the countryside where these tales are narrated. Its wealth attracted European greats like Alexander, Columbus, and many others, but none of them could ever possess it. In this fertile land live people who are poor, “rude and
unlearned” (Swynerton 1892, xii), “superstitious” (Swynerton 1892, xi), and “ignorant” (Beams 1869, viii) of their ancient cultural heritage. They are otherwise self-involved and practice artistically unique folklore traditions and tell tales which are “of course (of the) highest possible antiquity . . . being . . . older than history itself” (Swynerton 1892, xi). Thus, in folklore too, their land is “not surpassed in fertility by any other country in the world” (Knowles 1888, v). From these tales much about their history can be learnt, but they themselves do not know this. They are also “unfortunately not safe guides in questions relating to their own past history . . . (owing to the) extravagantly legendary character of much that is recorded” (Beams 1869, vi–vii). This is extremely puzzling and most disquieting. So there is a “veil” “lying heavily over India’s past” which has to be “lifted”3 by the collection and publication of her folklore. These tales, songs, and legends have been “faithfully handed down by people rude and unlearned who have preserved them through all the vicissitudes of devastating wars, [and] changes of faith” (Swynerton 1892, xi). These tales have to be collected in order to “save them from the clutches of oblivion to which they would otherwise have been consigned” (Knowles 1888, v). The people are thus asked to narrate their tales, which they do, in the most picturesque of surroundings—“round the leaping log fire” (Swynerton 1892, xii) in the cold nights of the Himalayan foothills, “by the bonfire” (Gordon 1909, vii) in the jungles of central India, “by the sunset” (Steel and Temple 1884, 2–3) under the trees in the limitless Indo-Gangetic plains, and “under the dewless sky” (Swynerton 1892, xii) in the summers of south India. “All and every one” of these people are “entirely free from European influence” (Knowles 1888, ix), although their beautiful land and fertile fields are being ruled by a European—British—power and although “(in the ryot’s [tenant farmer’s] mind) his superstitions, his tools and his rent are all mixed up” (Beams 1869, x).

A tale in conflicting dualities? The land is marvelous, but the inhabitants are not; the history of this land is old and in ancient times it has seen many philosopher-kings, but at present it is enveloped in darkness; the folklore is abundant, ancient, and well-preserved, but its carriers and creators are stupid and ignorant; the claim that the real Indian folk are the source of the collection enhances its trustworthiness, but the folk themselves are untrustworthy and become understandable only through the mediation of the folklore collector; they are uncorrupted by European influence but easily communicate with the British folklore collector; their folklore has been preserved since the dawn of history, but it is at present in danger of being lost to the world; their superstitions and revenue are mixed up in their mind, but they do not see that the revenue collector and the folklore collector are the same person; and so on.

These not-so-obvious dualities of positive and negative attributes reflect the essential logic of orbital communication in the context of the colonial empire.
These dualities of the tale called “India” lead the multitudes of arguments to a single conclusion, that is, to an argument in favor of the individual, religious, and national colonial enterprise: the country is beautiful and thus a lure to all those who may want to come; the people are stupid and thus not only ruleable but also in need of being ruled; the field of folklore is rich and fertile in collectable material and thus a lure even to those seeking knowledge; since people don’t know their own past and history, all of the folklore collector’s judgments are correct and establish him as a scholar; their lore is being lost, and thus the collector is performing a historical task, that of preserver!

Each and every one of the intended readers has a role to play in this India: for the adventure seeker, there is a geographically varied country; for the militarily-oriented, a conquerable people; for the scholarly-inclined, the possibility of experiencing, researching, and representing an ancient culture and publishing the first ever volumes on its various aspects; for the trader, a wealth of natural resources, agricultural produce, antique handicrafts, and art objects; and for the (British) nationalist, pride, for no other European power could ever rule this ancient civilization. There is something also for the glory of collective (English) martyrdom—all this which is available in plenty is not very easily haveable: traveling through this beautiful land is very difficult; the climate is tortuous; the rivers unnavigable and unpredictable; the languages too numerous; the people secretive, misleading, and confused; and their history itself a problem for it does not exist in digestible records. For the ultimate moral justification of colonization, there is a lot to be done in this India, such as bringing “civilization,” which may wipe out the existing folklore. Folklore therefore ought to be collected ahead of the march of (European) civilization and published in English translations in London.

No one has anything to lose, only everything to gain—materially, intellectually, and morally. The real space of India is thus imaginatively prefaced for the advancement of colonial intervention in various spheres of her social, cultural, and political life. The two obvious sides of this imagining of India are that it is being imagined by the British residents of colonial India and it is being imagined for the general populace, scholars, and government institutions in England. The orbit in which the imaginings travel, however, revolves not around the imaginary but around that real India which is under British colonial rule and with the resources with which the British society and economy are variously involved. It is this involvement which has to be both projected and hidden. This is thus a tale in conflicting dualities: a folktale about India, which, while luring the readers to her, safeguards against an overenthusiastic appreciation of her society and culture.

The folktale called India is not yet complete because the moving force, the dynamic character in this stagnant India, has not been portrayed, and that is the
folklore collector, whose primary role is the representation of British colonial interests, whether as missionary, district administrator, revenue collector, military officer, or a combination of these roles. The similarities in their perception and explication of India find parallels in their depiction of themselves, their work, and their life in the colony. This depiction is a tale about the collection of folklore in India and is again meant for the general public, government ministries, and other specialists in England.

**Tale Two**

**A Colonizer Called the Folklorist**

After endless travails of a lonely journey, a British officer or missionary reaches this socially stagnant, geographically beautiful, and (in remote history) great land. He has been trained to understand the aims of the government or the institution he is representing and to rule the people under him, but he does not understand this people, their culture, nor in most cases their language. So he gets “busy” doing the former and attempting to master the latter. Infused with the spirit of connecting this far-off land with global trade, he collects handsome revenues from the fertile land for the government in the center of his world—London—and simultaneously reaps a “rich harvest” (Temple 1884, vii) of gems by digging into the “mine of folklore.” Or else, he is zealously spreading “the religion of Christ” (Gordon 1909, vii) amongst people who practice many different faiths and simultaneously gathers stories of their faith about nature, life, and gods. His task is a very difficult one, mainly because the collection of folklore is to be done alongside official work. So it is generally done in the evening “by lamp-light” (Knowles 1909, vii), when no other form of entertainment is otherwise available. He personally records the tales, and sometimes, while on an official tour of the countryside, he has the villagers called to his camp 6 to narrate their traditional tales and local stories about neighborhood shrines and monuments. At other times he visits the villages and sees and hears people in various kinds of gatherings listening to traditional tales. He takes notes: some are stories for the collection while others are information for direct administrative purposes. The power of the folklore collector over these people is complete and they are his obedient servants, but he still has reason to mistrust them. Moreover, they confuse him with all their idiosyncrasies like telling different versions (Swynerton 1903) of a tale or discrediting each others’ versions; demanding special treatment before beginning narration (like a heavy dose of opium, or a letter of reference for some official favor) (Temple 1884, x), and even expecting him to have complete faith in their stories.8 There are many other difficulties besides these in the path of this folklore collector whose “lot is cast in India,”9 such as being far away from the libraries of London. But he carries on his task, realizing
that he is digging into a gold mine and with a threefold objective: informing those of his countrymen who have not seen India about the colony and his own role therein, guiding those who come to spread the “religion of Christ,” and helping in the expansion of his Queen’s empire. He also hopes to contribute to the enrichment of science (i.e., anthropology) back at his alma mater and to establishing the science of folklore. In this heroic task he is helped by British colleagues. Soon he is able to collect an impressive quantity of tales from “the officiating governor, the poor farmer, the learned Pandit, the ignorant Musulman, the physician, the barber, the daily labourer, the old man gray-headed, and the dirty little boy” (Knowles 1888, ix). “A careful classification” is then “prefixed” and “an index added” (Swnerton 1892, ix) to the tales by the folklore collector. Thereafter he “sends forth” (Gordon 1909, vii) his collection for publication, of course, after having written a long preface to it in which, while narrating the saga of his adventures in India, he narrates a tale about India and a tale about the tales of India.

It is a tale of victory against odds: the journey was difficult and lonely but he reached his destination; the language and dialects were unknown to him but he learned them well enough even to collect the folklore; people were confused but he made sense out of their ramblings; there were no libraries but he still made scientific collections and indices; and above all, despite being a “busy Indian official,” he managed to learn much about the culture of India. The victories and odds are again in fine balance: the victory is rewarding and the odds are not insurmountable for the British official or missionary in India. They encounter difficulties along their way, but not impossible situations; the colony is uncomfortable, not hostile; the narrators are confusing, not resistant; the problems of understanding this culture are due to its being enveloped in darkness and not due to the ignorance of the collector.

These dualities too formed a harmonious whole: the folklore collector was greater than the folk and the folklore he studied. The folklore collection was itself a statement about his being more than a mere official and representative of the state and its institutions, and it assigned to him an identity as a scholar of Indian culture. Such “scholarly” works from officials not only added to the knowledge about the colonized people, leading to their division in census categories, but also lent a humane image to the colonial state itself, that of being interested in the culture of the colonized land and not just in its economic exploitation. The folklore collector could not have been very wrong in his aspirations because most such Indian folklore collectors on going back to England were recognized as such scholars: were given honorary appointments in cultural institutions, asked to edit various books on India, became respected members of the Folk-Lore Society, and were even given titles such as, “Chief of
Fairy Tale Men.” They had qualified in the European test of “knowledge about India.”

In this tale about himself the folklore collector never revealed that such voluminous works were not the result of an individual’s labor but of the active assistance of a large Indian staff. In the case of missionaries, the number of these may have been smaller, but help was generally provided by the British officer of the area. The missionaries often lived in the houses of the British officers. These Indian assistants were those knowing a modicum of English and, obviously, the local language and dialect and could therefore act as scribes, interpreters, and translators. More often than not, they were themselves the source of various stories. When the folklore collector mentions the list of his informants, from the barber to the grey-headed old man, he does not say that they were in his regular service and not discovered on the streets. He also never mentions any social or political disturbance in the country of his residence, nor even any sign of resistance to British authority. Nor is any criticism of the colonial government ever reflected in these writings, not even when they say that the coming of civilization—implying European civilization through British rule—would wipe out the rich and “colorful” folk traditions they are studying.

If India is a mirror of any part of the Indian subcontinent, then likewise the folklore collector is symbolic of the colonial state as a whole. And while this parallel is never consciously drawn, the story of so many folklore collectors leads one to imagine administrators, spiritual leaders, and rulers who, in an alien land, are trying to achieve difficult targets, learn the languages of the people, make them known to the world, contribute to the growth of the sciences, and record oral narratives which may soon vanish. The essence of the folklore collector’s depiction of himself seems to be the colonial state’s rhetoric of “bringing civilization” to the colonies, the nature of the task being the “white man’s burden.”

In prefaces to the collections of folktales, the British missionary and officer as folklore collector also threw “a few gleams of light” on the tales in their collections, without which their image as folklore scholars would have remained unformed. As mentioned earlier, the collections generally carried tales of a particular region and sometimes only of a particular community, but the similarity in their categorization and their claims to authenticity are strikingly similar.

Tale Three
A Tale of Tales

These “quaint legends and stories” are “essentially the tales of the people.” “As folktales they claim of course the highest possible antiquity” and have remained “unchanged for thousands of years” (Swynerton 1892, xi). They are stories about nature, animals, gods, saints, and legendary heroes and thus
reveal the “mind of the people.” They have not only not changed for centuries but have also remained “almost ungleaned” (Knowles 1888, v). Thus their “field” is “ripe for the harvest” (Swynerton 1892, xv). The collector has “availed (himself) of the opportunities afforded (him) through a . . . residence” (Knowles 1888, vii) in the land. These tales delight young and old alike, who listen to them in groups under trees, beside blazing logs of fire, in the village guest house, and almost anywhere else. “The subject of scientific value” (Knowles 1888, ix–x) of these tales should be left to the experts, as also the question whether these tales originated in the East or in the West. The latter is however not an important issue. The similarities in tales found in India and in Europe should be attributed to the similarity of human mind and needs. Of course, crosscultural influences are present in every country. The idea that India is the homeland of folktales is an “absurd conclusion.”15 These age-old tales of India will contribute to that increasing stock of folklore which is doing so much to clear away the clouds that envelop much of the practices, ideas, and beliefs which make up the daily life of the natives of our great (British) dependencies, control their feelings, and underlie many of their actions (Beams 1869, vii).

To this tale of tales, some British folklore collectors of colonial India prefixed a classification and added an index whereby the focus was on the discussion of themes and characters. The regional identity of tales was most often explicit in the title of the book itself, but simply identifying them as “Indian” was also not uncommon. Their religious basis, too, was generally specified. Besides this, the comprehension of the tales and narrative traditions is similar in the writings of these collectors. Once again, the logic of conflicting dualities presents itself anew: the tales being old, even older than history itself, and not having changed for thousands of years, is a positive attribute of the collection, but since they reveal the mind of the people, the people are unchanged and quaint and thus need to be colonized.

The question of the age of the Indian tales is an interesting one as it seems to concern each and every collector. How old these tales are in comparison with European folktales is a question whose answer is not sought, but commented upon. Thus, while claiming at the beginning of their discussion no expertise on the subject and also no wish to enter into the scientific aspects of folktales, all the collectors make direct or indirect reference to Theodore Benfey’s theory, popular at the time, that India is the Ur-Heimat of folktales. Whereas all other conclusions about Indian society and history are confidently drawn, Benfey’s proposition is subjected only to doubts, leading to its negation. Here is another conflicting duality: the tales of India are old, older than history itself, but not older than the European folktales.
This duality is at its most complex in W. R. S. Ralston’s introduction to Maive Stokes’s *Indian Fairy Tales* (1880). Selecting many examples of tales common to India and Europe, he argued that they were of Indian origin because they could not be explained through the religious and mythological beliefs of the European people, not even of the pre-Christian populace, but definitely could be through those of the East, “especially India.” The conclusion of this long introduction ponders the issue of the origin of tales in a manner typical of the colonial folklore collectors and theorists. In the following quotation each statement is refuted by the next, and the final position is an understanding of history arising from the nineteenth century power equation between the East and the West:

> It does not, of course, follow that, because a story is found both in Europe and Asia, therefore the western version has been borrowed from the east. . . . but it is not unreasonable to come to the conclusion that such stories [which cannot be explained “by the mythologies of the heathen ancestors of the European peasants”] have been borrowed by the West from the East. . . . Far more difficult is it to believe in . . . a triumph of independent development, than to place reliance upon a statement to the effect that *the wave of story-telling, as well as of empire, has wended its way westward* (Stokes 1880, xxi–xxx; emphasis added)

While emphasizing the antiquity of the tales, British folklore collectors are reluctant to date them in real time and space. Having control over an ancient and well-preserved folklore is a matter of pride, but accepting it as the progenitor of one’s own is uncomfortable in the collectors’ overall sociopolitical context. They are only old enough to make themselves attractive entertainment and provide knowledge about the age-old ideas of the colonized subject.

The tale of tales does not tell us much about the tales. The folklore collector having taken enough space in the prefaces in telling the tale about himself, about India, dedicates the book to relatives or to inspiring British colleagues, for whose expansion of knowledge and entertainment the collection was meant anyway.

**Conclusion**

The prefaces to the collections of Indian folklore by British missionaries and officers in the second half of the nineteenth century were prefaces to the geographical and political space called India—the British colony. In this game of hide and reveal, a narrative is created which is universal in its application and particular in its implication. “A Folktale Called India,” “A Colonizer Called the Folklorist,” and “A Tale of Tales” are three aspects of one narrative created by a large number of “folklorists,” even though they may not have known each other. The depiction
of India, the Folklorist, and the Tales is couched in terms of universal beauty, zeal, and antiquity, and were this place not called India, it could be anywhere in the world. It is nevertheless identified as “India,” which has real associative meanings in the context of communication and, thereby, implications relating to political and intellectual dominance. Unless the implications of this identification (of which the writers themselves were conscious) are taken into consideration, the need for this imagining of India by British colonial officials and missionaries for the European public and scholars may be ignored as reflective of the state of (under)development of European folkloristics. One would further argue that for this reason even the scholars of the time were unable to pose the following questions: Why should people be poor in a resourceful land? Why should their folklore, which they have preserved for thousands of years, be threatened with oblivion now? Why does it not sadden the folklore collector that European civilization is threatening the existence of those traditions he is so zealously collecting? How can a “scholar” of folklore himself be the agent of that change which is causing its disintegration?

Contemporary European scholars could not have seen the conflicting dualities in the writings of these folklore collectors and could not have asked these questions. They could not have asked these questions, not because of limitations of knowledge and information, but because they saw the development of their field of study as a boon of colonization. Folklore collections by British “overseas folklorists” were not only made possible by colonization but were its inherent need. These were the motivating factors not only for the British folklore collectors in India but also at various other levels of debate. E. Sidney Hartland, president of the Folk-Lore Society and a man who had himself collected materials amongst African tribes, crystallized these possibilities and needs in the colonial context in his presidential address of 1901:

the Anthropological Institute and the Folk-Lore Society have joined to urge upon the Government the importance of seizing those opportunities [for the advancement of the anthropological sciences] in the countries we have lately added to the Empire. . . . and we believe that by no means as effectual as the methodical study of the people and their customs and beliefs can their proper government be secured. No ruler who does not understand his subjects can govern them for the best advantage, either theirs or his. . . . But we have ventured to urge another consideration—the interests of anthropological science—interests only to be subordinated to those of actual government. For when in all directions the speculative science of to-day becomes the practical and applied science of to-morrow, who shall venture to deny such a possibility to anthropology? . . . The government of India, under the
guidance of Mr. H. H. Risley, and thanks to the statesmanlike grasp and energy of Lord Curzon, is taking measures for an Ethnographical Survey of that teeming Empire. . . . The mother country in her turn will surely show a just appreciation of the duties of a civilized nation. We are helping to macadamize the world for the benefit of modern commerce. . . . It will certainly destroy much that can never be replaced, much that is picturesque, much that is capable, rightly construed . . . . To have missed an opportunity like the present of accumulating a large body of evidence within and beyond . . . our new possessions, will then be seen to have incurred a responsibility and a reproach which we are seeking to spare our country and our government.” (Hartland 1901, 97; emphasis added)

The transition of orality into writing has often led to fixed definitions, but in the colonial context this transition was political as well. In other words, the political authority could also claim intellectual authority over the ruled. In the process of shaping this knowledge, new structures of power emerged: the folklore collector could henceforth be considered more knowledgeable about the colonized folk than they were about themselves. Moreover, his conclusions were to become not only a means of defining but also of effectively governing them. While the folklore collectors’ political and administrative authority ended with their service, their intellectual authority continued long after.

In the postcolonial world, reflecting continuance of the ideological structures of power and scholarship in neocolonial forms, the British folklore collectors of colonial India have retained their credibility amongst folklorists for having done monumental work in a foreign land, often recording traditions now extinct. Their evaluation is based on the history of European folkloristics, while the history of Indian folkloristics remains, in a comprehensive and exhaustive manner, untraced, unanalyzed, and unappreciated. Thus, in an extremely Eurocentric evaluation of the British “overseas folklorists,” R. M. Dorson (1968) is highly appreciative of the work of every such folklorist and defines the Indian context in the colonial terms of the nineteenth century:

Unlike Australia and Africa, the homes of savages, India offered the special charm of an ancient high culture lurking behind the nineteenth century realities of Hindu village castes and aboriginal hill tribes. . . . Here was the ideal ground to examine both survivals and diffusion. (Dorson 1968, 333–34)

Besides the fact that this is a rather meaningless statement about India, it is surprising that it comes not from 1901 but 1968. Dorson’s perspective is epitomized in his particular praise of R. C. Temple, whom he judges to be an “excellent folklorist.” After detailing what the British overseas folklorists contributed
to the development of European folklore studies and libraries, he concludes that “The cause of Indian folklore was now well established, and the decade of the 1890s proved equally fruitful” (Dorson 1968, 338). The first half of the statement needs the question how? and the second, for whom? In her short, crisp and intense article “India on the Map of ‘Hard Science’ Folkloristics,” Heda Jason says, “The first to pay attention to the lore of the simple folk in India were the well-educated British ladies and gentlemen of the colonial administration in the last quarter of the 19th century” (1983, 105).

All these evaluations have been made without considering the fact that these gentlemen not only recorded the folklore of various parts and peoples of India for the benefit of the colonial state but also, directly or indirectly, contributed to the processes of social and political impoverishment and disintegration of its bearers and sponsors. However, the collectors’ image continues to be based on their self-portraits and claims of “their untiring efforts and earnest purpose” (Dorson 1968, 348) and is appreciated long after “India” refused to be obliged by the goodness of colonial rule. The intellectual authority of the colonizer folklorists continued beyond his lifetime, even beyond the lifetime of the colonial system, in scholars’ search for the positive sides of colonialism.

The British folklore collectors of colonial India not only continued to fuel the imaginings of India but also defined the pattern of research into Indian folklore: folklore material was collected in India on European theoretical models, and scholarship on these was generated and advanced in Europe. Heda Jason comments, “While, however, the tide of 19th century nationalism brought with it the development of the main social and academic tools and institutions (associations, archives, museums, publishing enterprizes and university chairs) for folklore research in Europe, India did not join in” (Jason 1983, 105). This is a statement of fact made without consideration of the politics of academic institutions. India did not “not join in”; the colony could not. It would be more correct to say that India, as a British colony, “joined in” as a raw material supplier to the industry of academic institutions, particularly that of folklore scholarship in Europe, but did not experience a reciprocal establishment of these institutions within her borders (Naithani 1997, 1–14). The British folklore collectors of India left without having established any significant institution of folklore studies in India. No wonder then that “Indian intellectuals joined the stream much later and in smaller numbers” (Jason 1983, 105). While the “wealth and colourfulness” (Jason 1983, 105) of Indian oral traditions is emphasized again and again, even in contemporary writings on Indian folklore traditions, and while more and more field work is done in India, Indian folkloristics is in its infancy.

The analysis of the writings of the British folklore collectors of colonial India is rendered necessary not, at least not primarily, due to their having collected material now extinct but mainly because the way they made their contemporaries
Imagine India is a way reflected also in contemporary writings on India (Naithani 1997). Neither contemporary nineteenth century scholarship nor a large part of our own dissociates itself from the logic of conflicting dualities to see that through their writings on Indian folklore the British colonial officers and missionaries created in the second half of the nineteenth century a tale about India suited to the interests of the colonial state.

Notes

1. This is the subject of a paper I have under preparation.
2. The writers/folklore collectors make sweeping and poetic references to Indian history. John Beams: “It may be assumed that the Aryan nation entered India from the North West many centuries ago. . .” (1869, vii). Swynerton: “As we sit in the warm winter sun among the river-boulders at Ghazi, where several gold washers are busy rocking the sand in their rude cradles . . . we remember that all this land was once in the hands of a dynasty of Greeks, of helmed Menander, or lightening-wielding, Anti-Alkides. . . . Or again, listening to the murmuring of the river . . . we think of the great Buddhist convert Azoek [sic]. . .”(1892, xii–xiii).
3. Beams 1869, ix. Most other writers also use these terms with minor variations.
4. Many folklore collectors directly and indirectly invite students and scholars to India. Temple advises future scholars on how to recognize bards and collect legends in Punjab in his prefaces to “Legends of Punjab (1884)” (see Naithani 1997). Beams cautions against the superstitions of the natives. An almost official invitation comes from H. H. Risley, in charge of the ethnographical survey of India: “Now that anthropological and ethnographic research in India has been placed on a footing which promises to lead to regular and uniform progress, we may hope that the unvealed facilities which that country offers to inquirers will appeal to European students and induce them to visit India in quest of classical parallels . . . . A student engaged in such research may count on the most hospitable reception from all Indian officials; and he would find the administration ready to place ample facilities at his disposal for studying the institutions of the country under the most favourable conditions” (Risley, “The Progress of Anthropology in India”).
5. Every collector emphasizes that he is the first to collect these tales, which may be correct in the modern sense of collection of folklore.
6. “Most of the tales have been collected during winter tours in the districts. . . . A carpet for the operator is spread under a tree in the vicinity of the spot which the Magistrate has chosen . . . near enough to let the village idlers approach it . . .” (Steel and Temple 1884, ii).
7. Temple (1884) claims to have attended fairs and festivals. The manuscripts in this collection, now in the India Office Library (IOL), London, do not establish this as the source of any legend (Temple Collection, IOL, MSS Eur F 98). During his travels through the villages, Swynerton, (1903) sees tales being narrated and people listening in rapt attention; so much so that they do not seem to have noticed the arrival of the foreigner!
8. Gordon (1909) narrates being awakened at night to listen to the roaring of a tiger whom the villagers believed to be the soul of a dead and deadly Rajput.

9. An expression common to many writers, including those not discussed in this paper.

10. These aims are common to most collectors, although the emphasis varies; e.g., the officers do not normally include the spread of Christianity as their goal but sometimes acknowledge help given by a particular missionary in the collection of tales. However, matters of administration do seem to be the concern of the missionaries.

11. Two examples are those of R. C. Temple (1850–1931) and William Crooke (1850–1924). Temple, on his retirement in 1904, went back to England and “entered upon the most fruitful period of his literary activity” (Enthoven, *Dictionary of National Biography*). In the same year he gave the prestigious inaugural lecture of the Board of Anthropological Studies, Cambridge University, titled “On the Practical Value of Anthropology,” and drew heavily on his experiences in India. He edited several books on Indian subjects and was elected fellow of the British Academy in 1925 and in 1928—president of the Jubilee Congress of the Folk-Lore Society, London. “Chief of Fairy Tale Men” was the title of Temple’s interview on the occasion of the Jubilee Congress in the *Daily Express*, 25 Sept. 1928, London (IOL, MSS Eur F 98). William Crooke was president of the Folk-Lore Society from 1910 to 1911; edited the Society’s journal *Folk Lore* from 1915 to 1924; was elected fellow of the British Academy in 1923, and edited and wrote several books on India. Similar or more glamorous career records may be found in the personalities of Ibbetson, Grierson, and Risley.

12. Indian staff ranged from personal attendants to office clerks and thus surrounded any British officer all through the day. Many of them are on record for having contributed in the collection as well as translation of tales. They themselves contributed tales (see following note 13). Often what they told the officer in day-to-day communication about their beliefs and practices also became material for folklore collections. In a way, the Indian employees who guided the research in different roles simultaneously were anthropological objects subject to observation.

13. Crooke credits many of his attendants and assistants for various stories in many of his works. R. C. Temple’s munshi not only collected and translated tales for “Legends of Punjab” (Temple Collection, IOL, MSS Eur F 98) but also contributed to Temple’s journal *Punjab Notes and Queries* (1883–90) and continued doing so even after Temple left Punjab in 1885 and *Punjab Notes and Queries* became *North Indian Notes and Queries* under the editorship of William Crooke.

14. Instances of resistance are reflected in people’s refusal to narrate under religious and ritualistic pretexts. A. C. Burnell, wanting to document “The Devil Worship of the Tuluvas” in southern India, had to depend on the observation of his office clerks as he was not allowed to observe the ritual. Finally, a Christian convert amongst the community of Tuluvas organized the performance of the ritual at his home, which Burnell “believed” to be the same as the regular ones (Temple Collection, IOL, MSS Eur F 98).

15. Temple was one of the collectors who emphasized the “scientificity” and analysed the tales in his collection “on the plans of the Folk-Lore Society, London.” (See prefaces to vols. I & II of *Legends of Punjab*, 1884–85. See also Steel and Temple, 1884).

16. Temple, in his lecture “On the Practical Value of Anthropology” on the occasion of the inauguration of the Board of Anthropological Studies at Cambridge
University in 1904, detailed the advantages of anthropological knowledge for every section of the British population in the British colonies based on his Indian experience: “It is a common commercial saying that trade accommodates itself to any circumstances. So it does, but he who profits first and best is he who knows the most of mankind and its ways. . . . To the administrator and the magistrate and to judge especially, there is an apparently small accomplishment which can be turned into a mighty lever for gaining a hold on the people: the apt quotation of proverbs, maxims . . . they (proverbs) are a powerful force working for influence” (Sir R. C. Temple: Miscellaneous Papers. British Museum Library, London).

WORKS CITED


