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## UNIT 3 INDIAN FOLKLORE: FORMS, PATTERNS AND VARIATIONS

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to

- different forms and patterns of Indian folklore;
- different forms and variations of folk drama and theatre; and
- different forms and variations of folksongs and dances.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Folklore, in modern usage, is an academic discipline, the subject matter of which comprises the sum total of traditionally derived and orally or imitatively transmitted literature, material culture, and customs of subcultures within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies; comparative study among wholly or mainly non-literate societies belongs to the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology. In popular usage, the term folklore is sometimes restricted to the oral literature tradition.

Folklore studies began in the early 19th century. The first folklorists concentrated exclusively upon rural peasants, preferably uneducated, and a few other groups relatively untouched by modern ways of life (*e.g.* gypsies). Their aim was to trace preserved archaic customs and beliefs to their remote origins in order to trace the mental history of mankind. In Germany, Jacob Grimm used folklore to illuminate Germanic religion of the Dark Ages. In Britain, Sir Edward Taylor, Andrew Lang, and others combined data from anthropology and folklore to “reconstruct” the beliefs and rituals of prehistoric man. The best-known work of this type is Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890).

Large collections of material were amassed in the course of these efforts. Inspired by the Grimm Brothers, whose first collection of fairy tales appeared in 1812, scholars all over Europe began recording and publishing oral literature of many genres: fairy tales and other types of folktales, ballads and other songs, oral epics, folk plays, riddles, proverbs, etc. Similar work was undertaken for music, dance, and traditional arts and crafts; many archives and museums were founded (Doniger 354). Often the underlying impulse was nationalistic; since the folklore of a group reinforced its sense of ethnic identity, it figured prominently in many struggles for political independence and national unity.

As the scholarship of folklore developed, an important advance was the classification of material for comparative analysis. Standards of identification were devised, notably for ballads (by F. J. Child) and for the plots and component motifs of folktales and myths (by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson). Using these, Finnish scholars, led by Kaarle Krohn, developed the “historical-geographical” method of research, in which every known variant of a particular tale, ballad, riddle, or other item was classified as to place and date of collection in order to study distribution patterns and reconstruct “original” forms (Doniger 355). This method, more statistical and less speculative than that of the anthropological folklorists, dominated the field throughout the first half of the 20th century.

After World War II new trends emerged, particularly in the United States. Interest was no longer confined to rural communities, since it was recognized that cities too contained definable groups whose characteristic arts, customs, and values marked their identity. Although some Marxist scholars continued to regard folklore as belonging solely to the working classes, in other circles the concept lost its restrictions of class and even of educational level; any group that expressed its inner cohesion by maintaining shared traditions qualified as “folk,” whether the linking factor be occupation, language, place of residence, age, religion, or ethnic origin. Emphasis also shifted from the past to the present, from the search for origins to the investigation of present meaning and function. Change and adaptation within tradition were no longer necessarily regarded as corruptive.

In the view of “contextual” and “performance” analysis in the late 20th century, a particular story, song, drama, or custom constitutes more than a mere instance to be recorded and compared with others of the same category (Doniger 355). Rather, each phenomenon is regarded as an event arising from the interaction between an individual and his social group, which fulfils some function and satisfies some need for both performer and audience. In this functionalist, sociological view, such an event can be understood only within its total context. The performer’s biography and personality, his role in the community, his repertoire and artistry, the role of the audience, and the occasion on which the performance occurs – all contribute to its folkloric meaning.

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## 3.2 INDIAN FOLKLORE FORMS

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India is a country where the elements of folklore exist in abundance in the form of folk performing art and non performing art, folk practices, folk literature etc. Going into the literary meaning of folklore, we identify folk and lore as two distinct aspects. The *folk* identifies with the specific community whether it is tribal or non-tribal and *lore* specifies the collective knowledge or wisdom on a particular subject. Lore is also often associated with myth. Myth is an important mode of human communication, teaching, knowledge and learning. There is clear intimacy between folklore and culture. Since folklore is intimately associated with the culture we have to first look at the culture. It has been stipulated by scholars that folklore depends mainly on oral traditions and there are little margins for their recreation or change in developing society. However, when we look at the developing societies of today, we observe that, although the basic genesis of folklore may not change but its manifestation and interpretations may see perceptible or imperceptible changes.

In this chapter we are discussing folklore as a concept, its definition, forms, patterns and variations. William Thomas in 1846 coined the term folklore in English to replace popular antiquities and popular literature. The manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs and so on were part of folklore as viewed by Thomas.

There are 21 definitions given by different scholars of the term “folklore”, the number serving to explain the vastness of the debate and discussion on the word itself (M. Islam 2).

A. Taylor, an eminent American folklorist, has defined folklore as follows:

... the material that is handed on by tradition either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folktales riddles, proverbs or other materials preserved in words. It may be traditional tools and physical objects like fences or knots, hot cross buns or Easter eggs, traditional ornamentation like the Walls of Troy or traditional symbols like the Swastika. It may be traditional procedure like throwing salt over one's shoulders or knocking on wood. It may be traditional belief like the notion that elder one is good for the ailments of eye. All of these are folklores. (12)

M. Islam says that folklore is the outcome of the human mind imbued with creative feelings. Since ancient time two faculties of human mind have been responsible for the creation, preservation and transmission of folklore. These are creative ideas and urges of aesthetic and artistic impulse. The lore or traditional learning was inspired by these two to help creation of folklore (M. Islam 13). The Oxford Dictionary looks at culture as the intellectual side of civilization. If culture is product of the intellectual faculty of man, folklore is the result of his creativity and impulsive love for beauty and knowledge. In one he finds his intellect and sense of refinement released; in the other, creative ideas are expressed and shaped and his aesthetic impulse takes a form.

These forms may be in words, a part of language (the language may be either oral or written), action through gestures or movements as in the performing arts, lines and forms as in non performing arts and crafts. Knowledge is basically the exploration. Application of that exploration in a procedural manner becomes technical knowledge and folk science. Man nourishes culture through folklore. Folklore is therefore a product of culture, a component part of culture. Since folklore finds its expression through culture, therefore, the study of folklore cannot be fruitful and perfect without the study of its culture (M. Islam 14).

There are different thoughts and identities of folklore in Indian, European and American psyche. Indian folklore identity is different from American and European folklore. Therefore, the American or European paradigm may not fit into the Indian thought and concept. India as part of East earlier used European or American conceptual frameworks. These frameworks not only diminish the conceptual construction of Indic thought, they also directed thinkers and scholars to work with the given mode of thought. India is a vast country and part of the great eastern culture, where folklore does not need a decided form, instead it should have a conceptual framework that incorporates its indigenous diversities and specificities. Though, after careful examination, it is observed that the scientific approach to define folklore by American scholars fit well into studying the vast Indian folklore, but there is still a vast magnitude of emerging trends of folklore in the Indian subcontinent, their merging and blending into the urban metropolises and maintaining a distinct identity of functional perpetuation.

Folklore constitutes a major part of culture, specifically of a folk culture. Culture cannot be divided on the basis of specified or unspecified. Scholars who have signified folklore as folk literature have termed it as verbal art (Bascom 283-90). Expression of verbal art is reflected in songs or literature but folk painting, craft or

dance are not verbal in that sense of accuracy. Yet they are very much elements of folklore. Marginally judging upon folk medicine, folk science and folk games or folk technology, we may say that they are folklore in spite of not being part of verbal or visual art. Folklore does not therefore remain in the domain of the village dwellers and has moved to the cities as well. Traditional folk science and knowledge-based technology is the first aspect of folklore. The other aspects are folk literature, folk practices and folk arts (M. Islam 7-11).

Folk science and technology is a prominent domain of folklore. There are many myths and practices that are knowledge based. Practices associated with such myths prevent diseases, illnesses, and natural calamities. These knowledge based myths also give clear indications of the management of nature, including water management, nurturing of nature etc. Folk science also contains knowledge for cures through use of herbal plants and minerals, as well as for using body parts in different postures and adopting breathing regulations and variations to cure organ ailments. For example, yogic science and acupressure are important folk sciences which have sustained themselves for centuries. Technologies devised for use of natural materials for producing dyes, fertilizers, insecticides bridge building and furniture accessories, etc. are the part of folk technology.

There is a closely integrated relationship between the oral and the written literature. When we look at Indian folk literature, we find that serious efforts are now being made to pen down oral literature. We can also observe that with the passage of time, elements of written literature, particularly the *puranic* literature, were transmitted into the oral literature. The point of discussion here is that classical literature like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were traditionally written in the classical language Sanskrit. However, to make them understandable, local languages and dialects were used as the spoken elements to explain this classical literature to the larger population. Enactment of folk dances based on themes of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and other *puranic* stories is a case in point.

Folk literature may or may not be realistic literature, sometimes it may be an amalgamation of reality and myth. Local knowledge systems and beliefs get merged into mainstream literature to evolve into a folkloric version, which is depicted through oral narration in conjunction with folk art and folk practices.

Folk art or Artistic Folklore is the broad category of the artistic depiction of a myth or folklore. There are two sub categories of this type: the performing folk art and the non-performing folk art. When a myth is translated into a pictorial and is associated with a written/oral narrative, it establishes a wider link with performing and non-performing reality. Structurally this artistic depiction may be through performance or through creation of forms.

Performing arts are broadly those art forms where the human body is used to enact a written or oral literature. Folk performing arts include music, dance, drama, rhyming, theatre etc. Volumes may be written on each of these styles of arts forms. Since we are documenting these styles and art forms, we go further with our classification. There is a very close-knit relationship between folk performing arts and non-performing arts. The visual aspect of performing arts lies in the body movements of the performer or the singing talent of the folk singer. In such performances, in order to depict a character more authentically or loudly several other aids are incorporated. These include modification in physical ambience of the performance area; the costume and the body makeup of the performer, several accompanying musical instruments for the singer or the performer. In *Chau* dance

of Odisha, the performance is augmented by the use of masks and costumes, and the theme of performance centers around mythological narrations such as *Mahishasurmardan* (killing of a demon by the goddess Durga). The body movements of the performer are in conjunction with lyrics and the beat of drums. Another folk performance is the *Gotipua* dance from Odisha, where young boys dressed as girls perform stylized dance movements based on *Gitagovinda*. There are specific art and craft activities associated with these performances, which are used to alter the human body into the body of the character in the folk narration. Puppetry, another form of folk performance, has the total replacement of the human body with handcrafted forms termed as puppets, generally made of wood. Sometimes leather is also used as a material for making these puppets. These puppets are artistically painted.

The narrator/singer and the listener are interested only in the action and nothing more. The environment in which a folk artist lives and works is not reproduced in narrative art. For the folk singer or performer his house, his barnyard with its stable and cattle shed, his field, his garden, his meadow, as well as the people around him including his family, do not exist as the object of art. True, small features, details that reflect the real life of the artist are interspersed here and there, but the narrator does not attempt to represent this reality. (Propp 21)

The anthropomorphic presentation of Indian deities has brought an interesting character to the Indian performer; he imitates the character depicted in the myth in the performance. For example, the character of Ravana is depicted with ten heads. On stage, the artist is generally seen wearing a mask with ten heads. Animal masks are also important aids to performers. *Baul* singers of West Bengal do not personify a specific character but have their own characteristic attire which identifies them.

Folk non-performing arts include folk painting, sculptures, making of a variety of arts and crafts for several materials, and body ornamentation through painting or tailoring. The costumes devised by communities for their specific identities have a large constituent of the folk element. Arts and crafts have always been the activities linked to the material culture of the communities, whether tribal or folk or traditional communities living in the cities and towns. In the domain of folk art there is marginal or minimal difference between the folk art and folk craft forms. Generally the two dimensional depiction of a myth is termed as the folk art form, whereas three-dimensional depiction is categorized as folk craft. Manifestation of a myth may be both through a painting or any material such as clay, metal, grass etc. to give a three-dimensional form. Sometimes the ritualistic practices associated with a particular myth may also be simultaneously depicted in the painted form and a three dimensional form. Briefly we may say that folk art is generally associated with the painted forms, which may be on the floor, wall, or any other surface that may be flat and is used as a canvas. Sometimes the paintings are also done on the three dimensional surfaces such as a terracotta pitcher. The painted pot shards are available from the prehistoric period. The practice of the painted pitcher continues even today. Folk craft is the wider depiction of folk art in utility, decorative or ritualistic items.

Folk generally means ordinary and non-literate people like villagers, labourers, tribal people from backward communities etc. Some time ago folk was related to the primitive. Today when we discuss folklore with reference to development and dynamism of society, folklore needs to be re-designated. It is true that folklore emerges within a group of people living together or belonging to a particular caste related occupation or else having a common cultural/regional identity irrespective



of the fact whether they live in a city, town or a village. The social identity of each group by way of life, language tradition, and livelihood is patterned in a clearly identified manner. Thus in the wake of large migrations from remote villages, whether tribal or non-tribal, to the urban metropolises like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru etc., small cultural pockets are created in these metropolises. These metropolises are then the constituents of people who have migrated from one particular geographical area, who share the same language, culture, mechanism of livelihood and living conditions. Their way of life and traditional heritage are bound by a common identity. Even in urban metropolises, these groups express their folklore traditions through manifested verbal art, rituals, materials etc. They exhibit their folk culture and language in a slightly more sophisticated style, bringing in changes, wherever necessary in the given situation.

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### 3.3 FOLK DRAMA AND THEATRE

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During the age of the Buddha and Mahavira, drama was a means of communicating the principles of their respective religions. Short skits and long plays were enacted to preach and educate the masses. Music and dance also played a vital role in increasing the appeal of drama.

Drama developed in two types — the classic drama, which had intricacies of theme and subtle nuances of dramatic traits, and folk theatre, which was of spontaneous and extempore nature. Local dialect was used in folk theatre and hence many types of folk theatres developed in different provinces. Acting with accompaniment of music and dance was the popular practice. Different names were given to the forms of folk theatre in different provinces:

- i) Bengal: *Jatra, Kirtania Natak*
- ii) Bihar: *Bidesia*
- iii) Rajasthan: *Raas, Jhumar, Dhola Maru*
- iv) Uttar Pradesh: *Raas, Nautanki, Svaang, Bhaand*
- v) Gujarat: *Bhawaii*
- vi) Maharashtra: *Larite, Tamasha*
- vii) Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka: *Kathakali, Yakshagana* (Satpathy 283).

Instruments like *dhol, kartal, manjira, khanjira* were some of the props used in folk theatre. The medieval period was rich in music and dance but theatre did not get much prominence. Wajid Ali Shah, a great patron of art was also an important patron of drama. He encouraged artists to participate in theatre and supported them. In the southern region, folk theatre which used local dialects was more popular.

The advent of the British in the country changed the character of society. In the eighteenth century a theatre was established in Calcutta by an Englishman. A Russian named Horasim Lebedev founded a Bengali theatre which marked the beginning of modern Indian theatre in India. English drama, especially by Shakespeare, influenced Indian drama. The stages evolved by educated Indians were different from traditional open air theatre. The stages now had rolling curtains and change of scenes. A Parsi company founded in Bombay showed that theatre could be used for commercial purposes. Dramas began to depict tragedies, comedies and the complexities of urban life. Dramas were now written in different regional languages. Side by side, folk theatre like *jatra, nautanki, khyal* (Rajasthani folk), and *naach* also flourished. Another aspect which influenced performing arts was the adaptation of folk forms

to classical forms. Connoisseurs in different fields made their respective arts a medium for serving the cause of the masses. So they adapted the popular folk arts to reach out to people. A similar situation appeared in the case of writing of drama. *Vidyasundar*, a popular drama of the medieval period, was influenced by *jatra*. *Geetagoavinda*, an exemplary work by the great poet Jayadev, weaved stories of Krishna in *kirtania natak* and *jatra* style.

### Practice of Traditional Folk Theatre

The significant role of folk theatre in educating and entertaining its audience is a widely acknowledged fact today. It has been a vital means of communication during ancient times owing to its interpersonal and interactive appeal. Issues like adult education, environment, child labour, population control, the abuse of women and the problem of dowry have been skilfully dealt with through folk theatre. It represents traditional themes enacted in the form of dramatic representation of myths, legends, beliefs and tradition of a particular community. Various forms of this distinct theatrical medium exist in the world representing various cultures and nationalities and their rich heritage. India has a 5000 year long and rich tradition in theatre. The emergence of Indian folk theatre is traced back to Bharata's *Natya Shastra* (2000 BC to 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD), one of the earliest and most elaborate treatises on dramaturgy in the world (Sharma n.p.).

Indian theatre can be divided into three kinds: classical or Sanskrit theatre, traditional or folk theatre, and modern theatre. The Sanskrit language splintered into vernaculars and took root in the form of regional languages after the tenth century. Sanskrit drama too was replaced by the growing folk theatre which emerged forcefully in different regions, using the language of the region where it emerged, during the fifteenth-sixteenth century. For themes, it looked at the Sanskrit epics and the *Puranas*, historical tales, folk stories of romance, valour and biographical accounts of local heroes.

The various folk theatre forms are *Nautanki*, *Ramlila* and *Raslila* from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab, *Swang* from Haryana, *Jatra* from West Bengal and Odisha,

*Therukuttu* from Tamilnadu, *Bayalata* from Karnataka, *Kalapam* from Andhra Pradesh, *Teyyam* and *Kakkariissi Natakam* from Kerala, *Tamasha* from Maharashtra, *Bhavai* from Gujarat and Rajasthan, *Nupipaalaa* from Manipur, and *Chhau* from Sikkim, besides *Siamsa Tire* from Ireland and *Cheo* from Vietnam, all of which feature a wide range of make-up, song, dance, mime, improvised repartee, slapstick or stylized acting and even acrobatics (IBP USA 103)

The *Bayalata* of Karnataka is based on mythological plays. The themes are religious and the plays begin with an invocation of the divine. The five types of *Bayalata* are – *Dasarata*, *Sannatas*, *Doddates*, *Parijata* and *Yakshagana*. The *Dasarata* is performed by a group of 'dasas' (mela) men and women. Every 'mela' has at least one leading lady who is a highly talented singer and dancer. She interprets the emotions with vivid gestures providing the audience immense entertainment, information and humour by enacting the themes of Radha and Krishna.

*Sannata* or the small play has a full length story that lasts for about six hours. The troupes perform in villages – on weddings, birth of a male child, religious festivals and even to appease the rain gods in times of drought. The *Sannata* is divided into three kinds – the *Vaishnava* (in which Radha and Krishna are invoked); the *Shaiva* (Shiva and Parvati are invoked); and the social plays that begin with the 'Kathabija' (the core of the story) being outlined, and the story is then woven around it (IBP USA 103).

In contrast to the other types of plays like *Yakshagana*, *Doddata Puppet plays* and *Sannata* bring the folk theatre to the social plane. It reflects the native intelligence, wit and sharp response of the villagers. Like the *Sannata*, the *Parijata* is also an opera where the actor summarizes and explains the song. The essential character in the *Parijata* is the Bhagavata who plays the dual role of narrator and clown. But before the characters appear on stage there is an invocation by the Bhagavata – an invocation of Ganesha. This is followed by the prelude – the story of Radha and Krishna. The main story is based on the myth of the romance of Krishna and Rukmani-Satyabhama.

Like the *Parijata*, the *Doddata* begins with an invocation to Ganesha. The Sarathi offers prayers to the deity before the story begins. The composition of the play is a mixture of verse and prose. The performances are on an elaborate scale with rich costumes, wide stage, a number of characters and a lot of sound and fury with all the male characters shouting “shabaash!” The *Doddata* does not have the facility for display of delicate emotion.

In *Parijata* and *Yakashagana* a single narrator (Sutradhar) controls the story whereas the other has a chorus of four or five narrators aided by a ‘Vidhushaka’ or a clown who adds the local colour.

Folk theatres have existed since centuries and their relevance has not dimmed in any way in the present age. This continuing attraction and effectiveness is proven by the fact that many of the contemporary dramatists make use of the style and techniques of folk theatre in their plays. Karnad is the first Indian dramatist to reflect really typical Indian characteristic in his plays, as he has consciously resisted the influence of the Western theatre, which fails to take cognizance of the Indian milieu in its entirety (Dhanavel 98).

Traditional Indian theatre is very popular among village folk. Generally, the subject of these traditional folk theatre are mythology-based, sourced mostly from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and from the *Puranas* (Awasthi 53). These traditional folk dramas are written in a very simple manner which is convenient to perform on stage. There is flexibility in the usage of music, song, rhythm, dance, and even in costume. They use these as per their availability. Sometimes, if actors happen to forget a verse or a dialogue, they skip those verses and continue their performance. On the request of the audience, the artists may also repeat certain verses, dialogues or songs during the performance. Only traditional folk theatre is capable of being so accommodative. Modern Indian proscenium theatre is devoid of such spontaneity (Awasthi 54).

The integral elements of all these different folk forms are identical even though the areas differ. The music of traditional theatre is dynamic. In some of the traditional theatres, the music is very systematic. The practice of these traditional folk theatre of different areas is the same. However, only a few forms are practised today. People have started forgetting the traditional folk forms. Folk forms in certain areas of India such as *Tamasha* in Maharashtra, *Jatra* in Bengal, *Rasleela* and a few other forms are still in vogue but many forms are gradually vanishing from the scene for want of patronage and infrastructural facilities and because of the poor conditions of the artists.

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### 3.4 COMMUNITY SONGS AND DANCES

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India had a band of religious teachers and gurus, leading people to the path of pious living and high thinking. Their teachings were made palatable through artistic



renderings such as community singing, dancing and devotional songs. These artistic activities and ways of living were a very healthy counterbalance to destructive and immoral ways of living.

Community singing such as *kirtans*, *bhajans* and *hari kathas* were effective factors in bringing people nearer, irrespective of their class, creed and colour. The numerous folk entertainments such as ‘Bahurupi Kala’, ‘snake charming’, ‘Terahtal’, ‘Dummy horse dancing’, ‘Nat acrobatics’, etc. were so popular that no Indian home, either in rural or in urban areas, was left without a performance of these at least once a year. All Indian ceremonies, marriages and festivals were full of dances and songs. All religious and community centres were associated with some sort of artistic expression as a means of spiritual development and understanding of complex human nature. These art forms were practiced in relationship with life and for the achievement of *Artha*, *Dharma*, *Kama* and *Moksha* – that is for the growth of a complete human being. They helped us to love each other and live and let others live peacefully and harmoniously. These joyful activities were also useful in developing a relaxed mental attitude for a healthy body and a happy mind.

### **Puppetry (Kathputli)**

Puppetry is perhaps the most outstanding traditional medium which requires patronage and trial. In Indian traditional puppet art, as envisaged in Odissi, puppets were principally meant to highlight the achievements of our ancestors and all those distinguished personalities who had contributed to the growth of the human society. The puppets were carved in most fantastic and interesting figures. Their limitations and deficiencies in the sizes, action, movements and autonomy have a science of their own and are governed by principles based on experience and study on the part of the Indian traditional puppeteer. But “most traditional puppeteers belong to the socially deprived sections, such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a fact that is indicative of the low esteem the society has for them” (Ghosh & Banerjee 163)

The heavy stress on stylization and symbolization in Indian puppetry is to make the emotional appeal of the puppet powerful and lasting. That is why a puppet character, while in action, has more impact on the audience than a human character. Another factor that contributes to the effectiveness of the puppet is its independent personality unlike a human actor. The puppet character is exclusively made and designed for a particular role, but in case of a human actor he has only to be dressed and made up to play that role. A puppet therefore, always has a powerful impact and is used not only for entertainment but also for all educational work in the schools and for the society.

Puppetry, therefore, is a very powerful medium of education as well as entertainment and provides tremendous opportunities to those who wish to use the same as an independent art form. Puppetry is quite different from a human drama. It has its own dramaturgy, its own technique of play production and play writing.

The tradition of *Pats* is now predominantly found in Bengal, but it is believed that it was a much more wide spread tradition in pre-modern India. *Pats* or Bengal scroll paintings is an art form which mainly relies on the narratives of *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Manasa Mangal* (the legend of the snake goddess), stories from *Puranas*, *Krishna-Radha* legends or folklore. The scrolls are performed by the *patuas* by singing and narrating the paintings on the panel. Some of the *patuas* are Hindu, others are Muslim; some of them even carry names which bear imprints of both religions. Thus the tradition of *Pats* in Bengal is not merely a tradition of folk painting and singing, it also celebrates the syncretic faith and practices in the country.

## Folk Dance Forms

Indian folk dances and the dances of small forest and hill communities are simple dances, and are performed as a part of some community celebration or observance. These dances are performed for every possible occasion: to celebrate the arrival of seasons, the birth of a child, weddings and festivals, social activities such as hunting and food gathering.

There is a large body of non-classical dance forms. The only thing common among these dance forms is their rural origins. Most of them are extremely simple with a minimum of steps or movements. But they are very vigorous and energetic — they burst with verve and vitality. Men and women perform some dances separately, while in some performances they dance together. On most occasions, the dancers themselves sing their songs, while they are accompanied by artists on the instruments. Each form of dance has a specific costume. Most costumes are flamboyant with extensive jewellery. While there are numerous ancient folk and tribal dances, many are constantly being improved. The skill and the imagination of the dances influence the performance.

Along with classical dance forms, folk dance also flourished. In most of the regions the local dance form became very popular. Manipuri dance, *Santhal* dance, *chhau*, *ras*, *gidda*, *bhangra*, *garba* are some of the folk dances that have flourished in India. They are equally popular and have extreme acumen and innovation. Practically every region of our country has developed their rich tradition of folk dances. For example, *the Bihu* dance of Assam, Mask dance of Ladakh, *Wangla* of Meghalaya, *Bhutia* or *Lepcha* dance of Sikkim. Similarly we also have some dances which are called martial dances like *Chholia* of Uttranchal, *Kalaripattu* of Kerala, *Thang-taa* of Manipur among the more famous ones.

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## 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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India remains one of the world's richest sources of folktales. Not merely folktales but all forms of oral traditions – proverbs, aphorisms, anecdotes, rumours, songs, impromptu folk street plays – mirror the culture and values of the land in which they occur. They have also helped in binding vastly differing mores and customs of even a single given place. India is one place where the speech of even the most illiterate farmer is filled with lofty thoughts and metaphors.

By preserving and adopting many a tale and numerous songs and plays peppered with the proverbs and aphorisms of the region, Indian literature has played a huge role in binding together vast cultures in an unseen way. The role of Indian Literature in maintaining and fostering cultural unity and identity in the vast land such as India cannot be diminished.

Indian folk literature holds out a strong and loud message for other parts of the world where these art forms have disappeared thick and fast in consonance with rapid industrialization and globalization. Folk literature and folk art forms are not merely carriers of culture or philosophical poems, but rather the expressions of strong self-reflections and deep insights accrued therein. Simple life, self-reflection and treading the path of the righteous contained in traditions. Again, folk traditions are not merely platforms for holding high moral ground having no relevance to the present day reality.

The folklore of India is distinguished from classical Sanskrit literary traditions by its colourful local bias. Stories and oral epics glorify local heroes and places and are expressed in local languages and dialects. Folklore is created and enjoyed by the lower castes and classes who often use it to champion their values and to raise

themselves above their social circumstances. Indian folklore has a religious character and may be associated with sacred rites or festivals. Folklore heroes are frequently deified and worshiped in their communities. Collections of Indian folktales have circulated in written form throughout the Indo-European world for centuries and have inspired numerous translations and derivations. India has a rich tradition of folk painting and the decorative arts which is appreciated and enjoyed all over the world today. Ramanujan rightly pointed out in his celebrated essay that there is dire need to develop a profound understanding about the complex relationship amongst the Great and Little traditions and how they can at times challenge our religious and social dogmas.

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### 3.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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**Note:** Your answers should be in about 200 words.

- 1) Name a few folklorists who pioneered folk studies.  
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- 2) What primarily triggered the requirement to constitute folk studies in Europe?  
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- 3) What do you understand by the term 'folklore' ?  
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- 4) How do you think the study of folklore changed after World War II?  
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- 5) How is *Chhau* different from *Gotipua*?  
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- 6) Write a short note on *Pats*.  
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- 7) Write a short note on *Bayalata*.  
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- 8) Explain how puppetry is different from human drama?  
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- 9) Name few folk forms of theatre practiced across the country.  
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- 10) What are the characteristics of folk dance?  
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