

Block**2****IDENTITY AND HYBRIDITY: *KSHETRA* AND *DESHA***

UNIT 5**Folk Language as a Repository of Culture** **5**

UNIT 6**Folklore as an Expression of Existence** **14**

UNIT 7**Folk Paintings: Visual Narratives** **24**

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BLOCK 2 IDENTITY AND HYBRIDITY: *KSHETRA AND DESHA*

Folklore is an expression of our existence, with folk paintings, narratives, language, culture and literature. Until about 4000 BC, all literatures were basically folk literatures due to their orality. Writing developed in the years between 4000 and 3000 BC, in both Egypt and the Mesopotamian civilizations at Sumer. Thereafter, the written literature spread rapidly from Asia, North Africa and the Mediterranean lands to rest of the world. Nevertheless, during all these centuries when the world was learning how to write, there still existed a large and important activity carried on by the unlettered practitioners of oral literatures. Each one of those groups has handled folk literature in its own way, so neither its origin nor its evolution can be explicitly spoken of. Its transmission from person to person and its exposure to various influences affecting it consciously or unconsciously has brought about its constant change. In the process, some of those items may find improvement and develop into a new literary form or may die out from the oral repertory due to overwhelming alien influences. The skilled practitioners of the tradition, storytellers or epic singers have preserved their literary expression in the memory of folk who have poetically and explicitly talked about 'Kshetra' and 'Desha' in their narratives. In due course of time, at various places, special poetic forms have been perfected and passed on from bard to bard. This block deals with the issues of identity and hybridity of folk forms vis-à-vis the concepts of 'Kshetra', a cultural construct, and 'Desha', a political construct.

UNIT 5 FOLK LANGUAGE AS A REPOSITORY OF CULTURE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Folk Language as a Repository of Culture
 - 5.2.1 Communication and Oral Literature
 - 5.2.2 Folk Productions
 - 5.2.3 Folk Speech
 - 5.2.4 Social Dimensions of Folklore
- 5.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.4 Reference and Further Readings
- 5.5 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- understand the differences and specificities of the idea of the “folk”;
- comprehend the various dimensions of folk productions; and
- enumerate the differences between the oral and the written.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The notion of language has been understood down times and across spaces in multifarious ways. The understandings have been almost as diverse as the processes of language itself. As a mode of communication in the domain of culture and creative expressions, language has occupied an intermedial matrix comprising the oral, verbal, non-verbal, visual, aural, performative, literary and so on. In defining “speech genres”, Bakhtin writes:

All the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language. Quite understandably, the nature and forms of this use are just as diverse as are the areas of human activity... Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in various areas of human activity... Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable* types of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres* (www.jstor.org).

Language is that flowing entity in contradistinction to the apparently fixed theoretical construction of the folk. But both are connected in a certain “social” linkage. Language is as much individual as it is social and so is the folk. It is important to distinguish at this point the territory of discourse and that of actual lived reality. Although the two continuously inform each other, naming something is very much different from the lived reality of the same. The seeming discursive fixity of the term folk is connected to a sense of location of the people associated with it. Seen to be located either in a far off time or a fixed place, a certain purity is accorded to them. That way of seeing entails a certain attitude of separating groups of people on

the basis of some essential difference they carry. Language, belonging to this sanctified domain, becomes the repository of a particular kind of culture.

This gesture of ‘uplifting’ is complemented by the act of ‘marginalization’, both acts relying on the act of separation. As one engages with the folk, it becomes inevitable to engage with these two opposing trends. The basic neglect and mistrust of folk materials is connected to the traditional materials/products of the folk. On the one hand, the folk has been hailed as national treasure in keeping with the temper of nationalism; on the other hand, they have been wrongly identified with the illiterate and the uneducated in a so called literate and educated society. As a concept the folk has often been identified with the uneducated, its products as undocumented, fleeting, restricted and protected by a select few people, separated from the general flow, with whom contacts need be established from the outside. By saying these one surely should not assume that there is nothing specific to the folk. In fact much of our task here is to understand the linguistic and cultural specificities of it. The point here is precisely to understand the inherent dynamism and power that is a part of the folk. Many a time by according an essential sanctity to it we lose track of its diversity. Born in a communitarian matrix, folk language changes continuously through newer renditions. Although specific to particular times and spaces, it is ever flowing and colourful. Folk language in that sense ceases to remain the custody of a select few. The realities of it are specific to a particular setting and a given particular time or generation, but the diverseness and the possibilities of newer incorporations in these practices open up a wider ambit of reception.

It is not a coincidence that contemporary scholarship has taken such cognizance of these hitherto neglected and often marginalised forms. The folk is neither separated from contemporary times, nor is it separated from contemporary people. However, certain specific (and not essential) characteristics can be accorded to it. We ought to critique any homogenous, universalist assumption vis-à-vis cultures. It is important to understand and celebrate differences and specificities. It is in that light that we can begin our engagement with the particularities of folk language as a repository of culture.

5.2 FOLK LANGUAGE AS A REPOSITORY OF CULTURE

5.2.1 Communication and Oral Literature

Any act of linguistic communication entails the presence of an emitter and a receiver. A book needs a reader just like a performance requires a viewer/listener. The chain of communication remains incomplete without this preliminary connection. The relation could be passive or active. We will get back to this question later. Central to this communication chain is the presence of the medium of words. We could take it as an example to engage with here. It is here that we come to the crucial disjuncture between the oral (mostly the domain of the folk) and the written world. Although open to newer receptions, the world of the written is governed by a sense of permanence. Once written, words acquire a somewhat fixed and framed position. They can only be read and re-read time and again by readers. The readers make meanings and that way the afterlife of a written text acquires new dimensions. On the contrary, the world of the oral is ever changing in terms of production of materials. Given that we are dealing with folk culture, we will mostly concern ourselves with the “oral” here. Each oral rendition can be distinct and different from the other by virtue of the fact that it is composed in a never ending process. Words, sounds, and

visuals, spoken, enacted sung or performed in general, in that way acquire a certain power. The words are not only spoken but can be deployed for particular reasons in particular ways. Words begin to act and perform. Emanating from people, they might acquire their own identities in the process of oral communication. Language is not an abstract concept. In its most concrete existence it is also concerned with what people do with words. People can do many things with them – perform them, play with them, organize them, utter them, reflect on them, interpret them, even inscribe them in written forms.

In the study of oral literature, considerable importance was once given to the “oral-formulaic theory”. This was a theory developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord. The concern of this theory mostly relied on a search for the reason behind the existence of lengthy oral poems (and subsequently other unwritten literary forms) despite the absence of the use of writing. In answer to this phenomenon, the scholars of the oral-formulaic theory sought to demonstrate from live examples how oral literature was composed (and not written). They concluded that it was created during the performances by composers/performers who drew upon a repository of formulae, of traditional structures and expressions which enabled them to present their long oral poems/songs in a flow without interruption. That way they did not require memorizing word-for-word or writing them down. The popularity of this theory had much to do with the fact that through it one could pin down a certain set of unique and identifiable characteristics to the oral and by extension, the folk. How far that is a viable concept has been and is open to debates.

Following this theory, there is then an absence of a single correct version of oral literature. Although coming from a storehouse of traditional elements of expression, each new rendition/performance is a new linguistic moment. There is also the uniqueness of each occasion of performance, each delivery/presentation of the composer/performer. One can instantly compare this with the sameness of gramophonic, cassette or compact disc recordings – in short the culture of recording. Once recorded, much like the written word in a book, there remains no question of change. Side by side with the uniqueness of these active oral performances, one also has to keep in mind the active presences of the receivers. As mentioned before, a relation of reception can be both passive and active. The latter means that the receiver is also contributing something to a performance in terms of her/his presence. In the folk context this becomes crucial as both the performer and the receiver require to be imprecated in a traditional repertoire to complete the process of meaning production and meaning making.

Coming to folklore as a branch of study, one is baffled by its sheer variety – myths, folktales, legends, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, games, dances and so on. There have been arguments that there are major lexical and stylistic differences between oral and written tradition. Sounding out is a necessary and essential pre-requisite in case of folklore. A word or phrase may appear one way in written form but may be realized considerably differently when orally performed/spoken and vice versa.

Folklore assumes and provides socially sanctioned forms of behaviour in which a performer produces materials on the basis of shared assumptions and lived practices. This is not really different from the reality of the written world. Even the written world has its shared codes and conventions, but in that case it is much more diverse and spread across times and spaces. Whereas in the former case the receiver and emitter are located in the same moment of time and space, in the latter it acquires a longer duration and the possibility of textual circulation across spaces. This opens up a broader readership. This range is possible in the oral scenario only when the

materials enter a chain of circulation – be it in terms of printing, dissemination of audio recordings and so on.

It is important to mention here that despite the differences governing the world of the oral and written, it is an over simplification to treat them as essential, mutually exclusive, and water tight compartments. With time there has been much interplay between them. To remain limited to times and particular cultures where scripts did not exist and to ignore any possibility of overlaps between the oral and written would be a fallacy.

5.2.2 Folk Productions

Folk productions, like other forms, are certainly connected to ideas and worldviews. The ideas could be traditional notions that a certain group of people in a particular time and space have about the nature of human values, of the world, of life in general. It is not that these ideas constitute a single generic variety of folklore or are reflected consistently in fixed forms. They could be expressed in a variety of different genres in different ways. The ideas are the unstated points of departures and premises underlying the thought and action of a given group of people. There could be other ways of naming this world of ideas – premises, postulates, axioms and so on. Whatever the term, the point to ponder is whether or not, in dealing with folk language, one is able to identify basic and underlying assumptions and shared practices of members of certain cultures. These ideas/premises/axioms/postulates are at the heart of the folk worldviews. It is crucial to mention here that there can be no universal and generalised assumption regarding them. There could be commonalities but it is likely that each folk-world would be governed by its own worldviews which could change across times and generations.

If one accepts the American anthropological definition, one defines folklore as “art and literature orally transmitted”. In 1953 William Bascom wrote:

Folklore, to the anthropologist, is a part of culture but not the whole of culture. It includes myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, the texts of ballads and other songs, and other forms of lesser importance, but not folk art, folk dance, folk music, folk costume, folk medicine, folk custom, or folk belief. All of these are unquestionably worthy of study, whether in literate or nonliterate societies.... All folklore is orally transmitted, but not all that is orally transmitted is folklore.

Any act of defining is necessary yet runs the danger of oversimplification and exclusion. Despite the auto-ethnographic attitude, the above definition excludes as much as it includes. It rightly points out that all orally transmitted materials are not folklore or that folklore is but a part of culture. In doing so, it escapes an essentializing and universalizing tendency which could either lead to separating the folk artifacts/productions/materials from culture at large or glorifying them. In highlighting the specificities, the definition accords to folklore a certain non-essential uniqueness; yet, it leaves out a whole range of phenomena inseparably connected to folk life. It seems to prioritize only those materials which are amenable to transformation into written forms. The domain of the performative and related lived practices is left out completely. No wonder there is a difference made between literate and non literate societies assuming that there is only one available register of education and knowledge, that being a certain form of literacy.

It is difficult if not impossible to “define” either “folk” or “tradition”. According to Redfield the “folk” is “a group which has folk lore and folk songs”. This scheme is connected to a vision of an ideal type, the folk society which should be seen as the

polar opposite of urban society. This folk society is conventionally seen to be small, isolated, non literate and homogeneous, with a strong sense of solidarity among its group members. Kinship and familial ties are the units of life and action. The sacred prevails rather than the secular and the market economy has still left this domain untouched since it is governed by social and family statuses. It is that coherent and conventionalized domain of a systemic culture. There is not much scope for changes and experiments as lifestyles and behaviours are traditional, spontaneous and often uncritical and non-intellectual. These highly biased attitudes are aimed at finding a reified culture which has characteristics unlike our own. The 'modern' urban society is poles apart from this ideal type, its specific and definitive qualities being logically opposite to the folk.

It is very important that the contemporary student of folk language moves out of this binary opposition to an understanding of the folk-urban continuum. That would provide a more holistic framework integrating diverse theoretical concerns and possibilities. Equipped with a dynamic approach it will have a greater possibility of engaging with culture and cultural change. New elements and variables would be introduced in the scholarship problematizing any static notion of the folk. It is also perhaps a more politically correct option to study the processes and procedures which takes account of folk literature and folk art instead of battling with definitional paradigms alone.

Given the range of contemporary materials available (in opposition to more exclusionary and conservative understandings), one can note the following readings of folk literature. Folklore (a) is orally transmitted (mostly), (b) can be found anywhere, (c) is found among so called 'primitive' or 'civilized' cultures (it is better to do away with this widely accepted very problematic binary) (d) is found in 'urban' or 'rural' societies. If there is one thing underlying all these assumptions, it is the oral process.

A folklorist certainly uses literary versions. But in doing that s/he should be aware that more often than not, it is the study of the relationship of oral and written literature and not oral literature itself which is the crux of folk literature. The study of oral literature or orature is a widely accepted and valid field of study; studies of its connection with the written forms fall in an inter-disciplinary terrain - no less an important form of theoretical engagement in the present times.

5.2.3 Folk Speech

Folk speech comprises words or phrases used by members of a group sharing an understanding of each other's meanings. According to Dundes, folk speech could include chants, charms, oaths, teases, toasts, tongue-twisters, retorts, folk similes, folk metaphors, nicknames, autograph-book verse, epitaphs, latrinalia (writings on public bathroom walls), limericks, and so on. Since when referring to folk groups, folklorists generally denote relatively small groups of people, folk speech by extension refers to speech that is used/spoken/performed, shared and understood by small groups. Being culturally based, folk speech may reflect communicative expressions of many different groups of people. Many such expressions may be categorized as regional. There could be terms initiated and improvised by individuals, but in the long run they would be incorporated within the knowledge system of a given group. The language may be phrased in such a way that the words express the values and world view of a specific generation and time in history. Here we come to another specificity of folk language transmission. It is transferred from one generation to another. Occasionally, the same word or phrase may be used to communicate different meanings to different folk groups but at a given time and place it is intricately connected to the setting of that particular group.

5.2.4 Social Dimensions of Folklore

Folklore performs a socializing function. It creates a sense of group identity. In the Indian context it has a close and problematic connection with a multilingual and multicultural national identity. Values of life are expressed and expressions are offered for the shared understanding of life and the world. There is also the space for artistic talents in ever new renditions/performances. There is certainly a preservation of the past. In a world which relies on orality as the only mode of documentation it serves to keep historical records linking history to the present times. This could be a completely different history from the officially documented ones as found in text books. Folklore is not the archaic remains of the past despite the fact that it is linked to and preserves the past. As discussed earlier it changes and updates itself in new generations and renditions.

Coming to the example of a folk epic, one could remain stuck to the primacy of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in Indian cultures. Even then one has to embark on a journey of the myriad representations of the Sanskrit forms in regional folk compositions. This effervescence is so much so that it becomes impossible to talk of one *Ramayana* and one *Mahabharata*. The folk epics are more compilations rather than single narratives. Generically, they find different names in different languages. One cannot remain hinged to the composition but has to tread the domain of performances. In each performance (mostly of episodes from the larger narratives) many a time the space of performances (the context) changes to a sacred domain. The otherwise mundane everyday life is uplifted to a different order of being when throngs of people gather to watch/perform a *Ramakatha* episode for example. There could be specialist performers or anyone could become a performer as well. They could be linked to preceding sacred practices like fasting, worship, ritual baths and so on. The caste system could become an important part of these ritual performances.

In case of folk performances there are often juxtapositions of the verbal and non-verbal forms like music, instruments, mimes, gestures, dances and so on. The presence of a participatory audience is crucial. The narrative text underlying the performance may not be easily identifiable. The performance as a whole could become the text itself. A single text can be highly altered in multiple performances. Portions could be omitted, added, contracted or expanded. There could be ritual-oriented performances or entertainment based ones. In the folk context the former seems to prevail. The more the connection to ritual, the more the possibility of fixity and sacredness; in entertainment there is greater scope for innovation and improvisation. There is often a mixture of media. There are combinations of verse, prose, dialogue, song and non-verbal communication.

5.3 LET US SUM UP

Although separated in time and space and talking of a different culture, we can conclude here by citing the Bakhtinian scheme as an example. His theorization can be taken to contain some key markers of understanding folk language as a repository of culture. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin poses the problem presented by the culture of folk humour in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Laughter, as he rightly mentions, has been the least scrutinized form of people's creation. According to him, the constricted notion of popular character and folklore was developed in the pre-Romantic period. This concept did not give space to the culture of the marketplace and of folk laughter. In all the studies of myths, folk epics and folk lyrics, laughter got the least attention. In place of that there were middle class

bourgeois constructions of humour. The manifestations of this folk culture (of humour) were divided by Bakhtin into three forms:

- 1) Ritual spectacles (carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace)
- 2) Comic verbal compositions (parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular)
- 3) Various genres of billingsgate (curses, oaths, popular blazons).

Festivity and celebration is at the heart of all comic rituals and spectacles in the Middle Ages. The seriousness that was a part of official medieval culture was countered by this carnivalesque folk humour. The folk merriment involved lower and middle class people. The force of this laughter could carry away everyone. It was connected to universalism, freedom and to people's unofficial truth. Laughter won over fear. These carnivals celebrated in a layered way the continuity of human life, of people in their becoming and growth. There was a great focus on the bodily, the genital element. In all, the so called indecencies and curses in the carnivals affirmed the people's immortal and indestructible character, hinting in no unclear terms that the birth of new forms is as inevitable as the death of the old ones. In our contemporary understanding of folk language we need to be aware and open to this idea of change and renewal. From a comparative perspective we ought to be able to situate folk in a wider context with room for diffusion as well as new inclusions.

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www.jstor-org (Carnival and Dialogue in Bakhtin's Poetics of Folklore)

5.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Note: Your answers should be in about 200 words.

1) What discursive fixity is usually attributed to the term “folk”?

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2) What are the reasons that the “folk” are both glorified and denigrated?

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3) What do you understand by the term “communication”?

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4) Enumerate the differences between the “oral” and the “written”.

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5) What is the oral-formulaic theory?

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6) What does William Bascom say about folklore?

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7) What are generally understood to be the characteristics of a folk society?

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8) According to Dundes, what are the various things that folk speech can include?

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9) What, according to Bakhtin, are the three forms of the folk culture of humour?

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10) What is the carnival?

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UNIT 6 FOLKLORE AS AN EXPRESSION OF EXISTENCE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Characteristics of Indian Folklore
- 6.3 Pan-Indian Folklore
- 6.4 Saint Movements and Folklore in Maharashtra
- 6.5 Folklore as an Expression of Life
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 References and Further Readings
- 6.8 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to

- know about the pan-Indian folklore traditions;
- comprehend expressions of existence in folklore;
- understand varied characteristics of folklore;
- locate multiplicity and collectiveness as the soul of folklore; and
- comprehend the mantra of coexistence succinctly.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

What is folklore?

Merriam Webster dictionary defines folklore as “the body of customs, beliefs, stories, and sayings associated with people, thing, or place.” Folk literature, though a relatively nascent field, is an integral part of cultural studies, humanities, history, psychology, languages, theology and other disciplines of knowledge. Indian nationalist thought and studies of folk literature are inseparably coupled. The century principal academic approaches in the twentieth century – such as religious, cultural, psychological, socio-psychological, historical – popularized the field of folk literature. It is largely considered as a democratic tradition of the people, by the people and for the people, in which the folk create, continue, conserve and transmit the wholesome traditions to future generations.

For effecting an equilibrium in the fastest growing human life ever in human history and in social developments, the human sciences have to keep pace and accommodate the changes happening unavoidably. Human sciences and methodology, claim to study human lives more closely on point blank distance. But it faces the highest challenge to uncover the most complicated diverse Indian cultural traditions which no other established field of knowledge does other than folk literature: an unexplored exclusive asset.

Folklore offers an interdisciplinary lens to gaze at myriad inherent socio-cultural traditions. This folklorist approach or method is based on popular myths which

illuminate the social mind and psychological perceptions of the then contemporary social reflections. The mystical nature of myths has been appealing to human minds for ages and establishes stronghold in collective consciousness. The male-female dichotomy, differences and the forces binding human minds in the name of myths are the overt examples. Folklorist tradition and its study delve into places, origins of names, traditions of folksongs, folk drama, cultural systems, mythologies, and disciplines like sociology, aesthetics, archeology, psychology and others. The study of folklore was an expansion in the 20th century. Folklore touches upon all aspects of social life and has exceptional sensory power to bring to light all the minutest and salient features of human life. Hence the study of folklore is in the ambit of all social sciences and is being studied widely. All the established theories and theoreticians of social sciences in contemporary time cannot acquire an insight and complete research work without taking folklore traditions in consideration.

Sources of Folklore

The prime source of folk literature is in the literature of oral traditions. It refers to archives, buildings, monuments archeological sites to read the past in present. It is commonly observed that main stream art and literary forms never projected past reality of life objectively realistically or inclusively. Hence the scholars always rely on understanding myriad social undercurrents through folk literature which, understandably, establishes closest nexus with all social sciences.

The emergence of folk literature is based on the ideas and common belief that there is phenomenal power in the elements ubiquitous in nature and they bear homogenous sensitivity to that of any other human beings. It is believed that some of these beliefs institutionalized powers that are amicable, whereas there are other set of antagonistic powers. Hence traditions of offering prayers to both power of god and evil are institutionalized out of fright. For the prayers of these powers songs, prayers, folk tales, stories, stories of gods, goddesses, and consternation stories were popularly formed. *Puranas*, *Rigveda*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Upanishadas* are the store houses of Indian civilization. Narayan Pandit's *Hitopadesha*, *Brihatkatha* by Gunadhya, *Kathasaritasagara* of Somdeva, *Vetalpanchvimshti* of Shivada, and *Sukhsaptati* and *Jataka Tales* are the finest examples of folk Indian literature. These scriptures and books are largely in Sanskrit language but serious attempts were made to gaze through the roots and process of development of folk literary traditions in them.

Folklore Scholarship

Explorations by Christian missionaries, scholars with nationalistic intentions, and academic researchers were the three distinct stream of efforts made in folklore studies. Due to the ignorance and exoticness of Indian folklore the missionaries missed the precise comprehension of Indian ethos and culture yet it offers the first hand collection of stories and knowledge of Indian life with highest exactitude. Aurel Steins *Tales*, J. Hinton Knowle's *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverb and Sayings: Explained and Illustrated from the 'Rich and Interesting Folklore of the Valley'* (1885) and *Folktales of Kashmir* (1893), *Folklore in Southern India* (1884) by Mahalinga Shashtri and E.M. Gordon's *Collection of Indian Folktales* are the foremost resources of Indian folklore. Folklore and nationalist movement also went hand in hand and served as the source of information for the masses. Ramnaresh Tripathi's *Hamara Gram Sahitya* and Narayan Rao and N. Krishna in Telugu, K. B. Das in Odia, H.M. Nayak in Kannada, Shankar Sengupta in Bengali, H. S. Gill in Punjabi, Durga Bhagwat and others in Marathi have contributed to unearth the untraced and waiting to be discovered treasure of folk literature.

But what makes folk literature different from the other literatures is its divergent oral tradition which is theorized and formulated by Jacob Grimm and William Grim in 1785. The discipline of comparative studies established new horizon of communication between Europe and the USA, Africa, and other continents. The German translator of *Panchatantra* Theodore Benfey, needs special mention for his remarkable contribution in comparative studies of folklore. He also propounded the Indianist theory that India is the birthplace of folk literatures. Durga Bhagwat, the veteran scholar in Indian folk literature, in the preface to her book *Folktales of Kashmir* writes that Reverend Hinton Knowles, the British scholar in his *Folk-Tales of Kashmir* (1888) mentions about the translation of Kashmiri stories into French, German, Russian, Persian, Arabic and Siriack languages and that they bear extreme correspondence with Kashmiri original folktales. He also reiterates that folk literature is the prime dimension of cultural studies. All Indian states have been nurturing the rich legacy of folktales and the conscious efforts in formulating critical studies of folk literatures. The Indian states like Maharashtra, Gujrat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kashmir, Assam, Himachal Pradesh and many other states have been cultivating the age old finely woven folk stories delineating the world of ignored, and deprived: the people who in real sense propagated the folk literature Hence folk literature is an apt title.

The past and contemporary Indian folk literature scholars who designed the very process of collecting folktales and applying theories and methods of analysis have been DevendraSatyarthi, Komal Kothari, Sarojini Babar, Krishna Dev Upadhayaya, R. C. Dhere, Jhabberchand Meghani, Jawaharlal Handoo, Prafulla Dutta Goswami, Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Kunja Bihari Dash, Mahendra Mishra, Somnath Dhar, Ramgarib Choube, Jagadish Chandra Trigunayan, B. Reddy, Sadhana Naithani, P. Subachary, Molly Kaushal, and Raghavan Payanad, M. D. Muthukumaraswamy, Malatibai Dandekar, Durga Bhagwat, Dr. U. M. Pathan, Sudhir Rasal, V. A. Vivek Rai, N. C. Fadake, Birendranath Dutta, Dr. Madhukar Vakode and others. They have developed the corpus of critical thought and writings on folk literature which offers an independent gaze to critically look at it. The Indian folk stories potentially offer the unfathomable storehouse of indigenous Indian culture. The songs, stories, marriage ceremonies in various Indian states, the seasons and food habits which are the integral part of Indian culture are part of all the lines composed in the canon of people's literature i.e. folk literature.

6.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN FOLKLORE

Faithful depiction of Indian life in a realistic way is the distinct feature of Indian folklore. In all literary genres such as poetry, short story and drama, the portrayal of people is done in finest way. The authors of oral tradition continue the legacy of previous generations and focus on the human habits, rituals, the stereotypes practised for ages. The rural setting involving nature in all stories and inculcating the cultural traditions of praying to nature and reiterating the man-nature relations is evident in folklore. The teaching and celebration of man-nature association is apparently observed in folklore. Myth, magic, black magic, fairy tales, supernatural elements, strong moral message are generally found in folklore. The characters in general and protagonists in particular are flat, simple and straightforward characters far away from any complexities. To instruct and exhibit human kindness are also the principal aims of Indian folklore.

Pan Indian Folklore and Multiplicity

Multiplicity, unquestionably, is the dominant characteristic of Pan Indian Folklore. All the Indian regional folklores are distinct in their style, linguistic elegances and

thematic concerns but the rare poetic taste, the exhibition of highest order diligence, graphic details, stories of ghosts, witches, supernatural elements, most faithful representation of folk life are their unifying characteristics. Myriad stories depict different patterns of interest in sports; nevertheless they have been integral in the lives of common people. Folklore oral literature also preserves and nurtures the ancient nostalgia. All Indian folklore stories project the popular belief and superstitious practices of the people. We also learn from them the indivisible nature of dance forms and spirituality in our context. The nature of these stories is such that the researchers can gather cultural data of Indian multiplicity which can work as native informants. Invariably in folklore we find the religious belief in general and diverse religious ceremonials in particular. Wide-ranging types of *pooja*'s (prayers) floral decoration, shrines, coconut breaking as auspicious beginning, *agarbatti* (scented sticks), chanting of mantras are very common to see yet it is very easy to recognize the differences among them. In brief folklore: social codes promote multiplicity, analysis and storing of historical data in trustworthy manner.

Collectiveness as an overriding theme in Folklore

Collectiveness as a group or community is so overriding a factor in folk literature that its writers have rarely claimed the authorship of the piece of writing as it was believed to be the property of a group and it was far away from the modern day intellectual property rights. The characters, story tellers, audience, villagers, strangers and relatives reflected in the folklore cherish the principle of comradeship and the stories narrate common concern. Individual or a family grief is always treated as the grief of the whole village on the death of any villager no one goes to farm to work or even relishes food. Hence collectiveness is the principle feature of Indian folklore.

Unique judicial system and folklore

Folklore is an expression of existence inculcating the universal value of brotherhood, togetherness and collective consciousness. The pan Indian folktales are the repository of one of the finest, unique and impartial judicial system and they also uncover the way India honed the judicial talent of the kings in general and parents and panchayat members in particular. The absence of protagonist and presence of collective consciousness is one of the most prominent aspects of Indian folk literary traditions creating ideal ambience for coexistence, universal humanity and harmony between men-women and nature.

Folklore and coexistence

Coexistence is the soul of folklore literature. One of the exceptional wisdoms folklore offers to the world is its simplicity and the idea of coexistence as inherent principle of life. Positive glorification of human relation with nature, multiple ways to lead peaceful life in accordance with nature and potent ways of minimizing evil in life and living life in accordance with all lives existing on earth. In short the slogan: coexistence is at the center of folklore. The principles like forgiveness are inculcated in Indian psyche than the theory of tit for tat. Ordinarily all the folklore stories bear the obvious moral of forgiveness. The individual enjoys the least attention in folklore and only the collective identity, grief, culture, celebrations, beliefs dominate in this matchless literature. The most almighty king who accepts his guilt, announces his penance, renounces the kingdom and prepares to sacrifice his life for the subject is also reciprocated by his subject who forgives him and shows utmost belief in his leadership. This repeatedly elucidated in the stories of Kashmir, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and other state which are evaluated in this chapter are the palpable evidences of the claim that folklore and coexistence are inseparable.

Unique Language system

Whatever folklore literature is available that is mostly in Sanskrit language resultantly beyond the reach of folks to read and comprehend which probably is also the reason why folk literature was ignored for ages to which renowned scholar Ganesh Devi calls it 'deliberate obliviousness'. But this folk literature belonged to history became prevalent and available, though not abundantly, after voluminous translations were brought in to the market. Moral story books like *Panchatantra*, *AkbarBirbal* books, *Alibaba and Forty Thieves* are some of the popular series of folk story books available in almost all Indian languages. *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagvad Gita Hitopadesha Tales*, *Panchatantra*, *Jataka Tales* are written in Sanskrit and follow the pattern of prose and verse. *Jataka Tales*, mainly Buddhist tales, are written in Pali language and intended to instruct human values such as self-sacrifice, morality, honesty and other virtues.

Generally the language of the Indian folk literature is identical to that of William Wordsworth's rustic language. The idea here in folklore is not to impress upon the elite highly qualified readers but to reach out to the masses in the language of masses. Hence the simplified day to day used language of the peasants with high value of life skills, morals, mythological, religious stories narrated in the common language is the noticeable feature of folk literature. Togetherness, collective aspirations and consciousness are the much celebrated features of folk literature. Popular Saint Movement writings by Chokhamela, Kabir, Saint Tukaram, Bahinabai Chaudhari, Dnyaneshwara and others as well follow the language of peasants than the established standard dialect of Marathi or Hindi language so as to link them directly to the masses.

6.3 PAN-INDIAN FOLKLORE

"Asia is the store house of stories and India is the leading country in it", says W. R. S. Rawlston, elucidating the comparative picture of Indian and European folk stories. The folk stories in Hindi too have analogous gorgeous legacy. In Northern Indian states like Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Utttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh use of Hindi is like the first language. Though many dialects of Hindi like Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Khariboli of Hindi language are spoken in northern belt, primarily Hindi is the widely spoken language in this region of India. These dialects of Hindi language actually use the long cherished rich traditions of folk literature. Paheli (Puzzles), kathavaten, proverbs, songs, lokgita, songs, lokgatha (ballads) are the types of folk literature in Hindi. Navaratra festival Kartiksnan, Dussera, Radha Krishna songs, Jagran songs, Bhagi songs are integral parts of Hindi literature. "The Man in Quest of Fate", "Religious King", "Wise Wife", "Prince and Demon" are the famous Hindi folk stories throwing light on the general way of life upholding values to the highest pedal.

Northeast India's seven states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura have a large number of tribal groups like Adi, Apatani, Angami, Rengma, Nyishi, Garo, Khasi, Synteng, Mizo, Kuki, Bodo, Missing, Dimasa, Nepalese, Riang, Trippera and Tripuri residing in these states. They, needless to mention, have indigenous and different cultures than the other groups but it seems these diverse cultures and languages have not been documented. But the folklorist tradition can be looked at as an extremely reliable source to examine, critically comprehend and store the rich heritage of cultural value, knowledge, and identity of these groups. *Assamese* folk literary tradition is as old as any other in the country. The thematic concerns in these stories and Bihu songs

are marriage, religion, and rituals pertaining to various ceremonies; stories and songs related to goddess Sita, Lakshmi, Aai are part of Assamese folk literature. These facts can also be seen in the 1910 publication of S.K. Bhuyan's 'Barphukanar Git'.

Lalbihari Dey's '*Folktales of Bengal*' is a fine collection of Bengali folklore. It consists of stories, poems, songs, proverbs and folk sayings. Myths, legends and *rupkathas* are important features of Bengali folk literature. D.M. Mujumdar's 'ThakurmarJhuli' (The Grandmother's Bag) *Madhumala*, *Malanehamala* are the prime texts of Bengali folk literature.

Acharya Hemchandra is his 'Siddha Hema-Shabdanushasana' focuses on the diverse characteristics of Gujarati folk literature from 11th century. It throws light on the vivid traditions of oral literature. Gujarati festivals 'Ghoga Bapaji', marriage songs, traditional Hindu society, gods, goddesses and its ceremonies, songs of season, upper caste/lower caste based society, women's oppression are the prominent themes of Gujarati folktales. Saurashtra and South Gujarat's stories illuminate the family system and mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relations, feudal system, rural rigidity and other aspects of day to day life which are well expounded in ballads, dohas and folk dramas such as *Dhadhilika*, *raslila*, *bhavai* and *ramlila*. *The Unmarried Princess*, *Three Proverbs*, *Sun-Moon*, *Queen Devaki* are Gujarati collections of short stories encompassing myriad themes like male-female dichotomy, female dominance in family structure, the changing loyalty for money, gender discrimination, business and traveling, men and women in disguise religion, god and morality, which are the prevalent themes in Gujarati folk literature.

As universality is the general feature of world folk literature so is true to pan Indian folk literature. Kannada folk literature also bears the similarity to world folk art and literature. There is also a popular misconception that the Kannada folk literature is the literature of uncivilized and unlettered people in the form of oral traditions. Yellama (Goddess) songs, Zunjappa Krishna stories elucidate the religious influence on Kannada folk literature. Simplicity of words, language and expressions reflected in the stories and poetry is the uniqueness of Kannada literature.

Kashmiri folk literature is also one of the richest legacies of Kashmir. It is written in Kashur or Mandala language and is popular and largely available in oral tradition. The stories of Kashmiri folk literature are pre-dominantly based on mythology, anecdotes, fairy tales, religion, metafolklores, Persian folklores like Firdousi's '*Shahnama*' Indo European cultures and Islamic Arabic sources. The festivities and celebrations of rituals, common to pan Indian folk literature, is also profusely seen in Kashmiri songs of seasons, herath (Shivratri), and Dashera (Vijayadashmi) songs. The folk epics of Kashmir rejoice at the beauty of nature in Kashmiri, romance, and sing of joy, floods, affinity to cultures, Kashmiri clothes, fruits, floating houses. Banda pathar is an old form of dance in Kashmir. "Pir of Fatehpur", "Fox King", and "When Thieves were Looted", "Liar Goldsmith", "Cunning Vajir", *Action or Religion* are some of the eminent Kashmiri folk stories.

Malayalam folklore with its ancient touch is a remarkably ancient tradition with the finest woven multiculturalism of the land. Hindu, Muslim, Christians, Jews are represented in the Malayalam folklore i.e. secularism is the salient feature of Malayalam folklore. The dance forms: Tira and Kolamtullal, Vadakkan and Tekkanpattukal, Yakshi songs, Ganpati songs, Bhairavi songs, the stories of Markandeya and Shiva are equally popular in Kerala. Nature, black magic, superstitions, labour life and sufferings, love and longing, Onam festival, Kathakali dance form are the essential constituents of Malayalam folklore.

Indian Folklore is a pan Indian phenomenon yet bearing myriad inherent multiplicity in it. *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* defines Tamil folk literature as ‘Nattupurailakkiyam’ or ‘paramerilakkiyam’, a generic name to describe the oral traditions of Tamilnadu. Kummi and Oppari are also the alternative names for this literature. It mainly consists of life and love songs of peasants, encompassing the journey of a couple before and after the marriage. Grief and mirth in the lives of common people are the prominent themes of this literature. Lament about the past and present is the constant theme of the Oppari songs. Caste system, cruelty of mother-in-law, the exploitative pyramid of caste structure and sati also found prominent place in the Tamil folk stories. The remarkable Tamil folk stories like “Foolish Mother-In-Law”, “Pride Comes Before Fall”, “Prince in Exile” illustrate the rustic life based on values and morality.

6.4 SAINT MOVEMENTS AND FOLKLORE IN MAHARASHTRA

The integral members of the Saints Movement, Saint Chokhamela, Saint Namdev and Saint Tukaram have always relied on innumerable songs like *Abhang*, *Bharud*, *Gavalan* to effectively reach to the common masses in the language understandable to them. These visionary saints of Maharashtra consciously avoided the standard dialects of Marathi and Sanskrit which was beyond the reach of peasants and attempted rustic language the language of masses thereby carving the special space for rich folk tradition in Maharashtra, predominantly focusing on social awakening, ethics and morality in life and persuading people towards sanctified way of life. The Maharashtraian folk tradition, unlike others, blends spirituality and virtuous way of life charmingly.

Similar trends are marked in *Lawani*, *Gavalan*, *Bharuda*, and marriage songs, bride’s departure songs, funeral songs, songs of season, and songs of Vasudev which have been very central to Maharashtraian life. Dhangar community’s ‘Ovya’ (lyric songs) is also a very popular folk song which begins with a couplet and a rhymed song is sung by four singers surrounding the drum beater in the center who revolves and round. These narrative songs expound the evolution of the Dhangar community, their chief deity- Viroba (warrior), other gods like Birdeo, Biroba and their grandeur and warrior skills. They also have songs based on the traditional work, rituals, prayers, politics, sports songs, comic songs touching upon all traits of life.

Wrestling, public announcements in villages, public processions, religious programs are always accompanied with drum beatings, songs, music and Mang community in Maharashtra cherish and preserve it for generations together. Mang, (also known as Matang), community is believed to be highly proficient not only in making musical instruments but also in composing songs like *Lavani* (famous Maharashtraian Song-dance form), patriotic songs, and Powada (ballad). Anna Bhau Sathe – the famous Marathi writer and a man of letters without any formal education composed ‘Majhimainagavavarrhili, majhyajivachihotiyakahili (My beloved is at native place and I feel miserable without her), a song of love/lorn symbolising , opposing the political plan of separation of Mumbai from Maharashtra and connecting it to Gujarat province which was painful to all Maharashtraians. The song became the central slogan for the entire Sanyukta (United) Maharashtra movement. The Mang community also nurtures many oral traditions till today but there is no state or national level repository of this oral literature tradition. Composition of patriotic songs, love songs, sad songs, lavani and also choreographic dance are special abilities of Mang community in Maharashtra.

One of the perspicuous facets of folklores is their oral traditions equipped with the rarest traditional talent and the inherent system of transmitting it to the next generation by the resilient word of mouth network popularly known as oral tradition. Folklores, globally, commonly is sans script which is the reasons why the immense store house of traditional knowledge is dying with the passing generations and with time. ‘Unity in diversity’, the honored slogan for Indians, expounds the diversity of India. These three words ably and accurately describe Indian culture to its fullest. Hypothetically, it wouldn’t be wrong to say all the Indian states have their own indigenous cultures, history, languages, literatures, songs, rituals, ethos and most importantly distinct ways of life. Indian folklores in the states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and many other states have their distinct folklorist traditions yet they are homogeneous on many counts thereby proving Indian folklore as an expression of existence.

6.5 FOLKLORE AS AN EXPRESSION OF LIFE

Indian society, since time immemorial, has been an agrarian society. The fact that agriculture has solely been the constant source of livelihood for the Indian peasant is largely true even today. Consequently the general habitat, villages, towns, padas, hamlets and the popular cultural practices and the rituals in India have always been revolving around forest, fields, land, seasons, nature, god and myths.

Given that India rejoices the multifarious historical past, it is obvious to have those diversified things in contemporary Indian lifestyle and cultures. It prevails in all literary genres and has also been integral to the lives of people in India, their oral literature, food preferences, habits, sense of dressing and value system. But the interesting observation is this multiplicity, even in the least, could never upset the national and cultural unity. To top it this invigorated the Indianness as is manifested in Indian folklore. Indian Folklore or literary oral tradition abundantly carries the first hand data of minutiae of the life of Indian communities. As renowned critic William Henry Hudson believes, “personal experience is the basis of all literature”. The Indian folklorists have been conglomerating individual experiences in oral form. In that sense folklore and expression of life are dynamically and intimately connected with each other centering society in its entirety rather than the individual. The folklorist traditions delve deep into the essential question of human existence but there is no philosophical center of enquiry. Instead one-dimensional simplified expression of life is in profusion. From this point of view folklore becomes a classic exploration of expression of human life embedded in folklore and beliefs. As Galit Hasan-Rokem observed:

“Folklore is created through mutual movement involving the talents and cognizance of singers and audience alike, of story tellers and listeners- in a manner that blurs the distinction between them.”

All the folklorist traditions have nature as an integral constituent of folklore. The age old bond of humans and nature is well expounded in it. In common they celebrate, nurture and propagate culture. Along with culture, religion is uniquely entwined element in the Indian folk literature. The Gujarati stories like “The Unmarried Princess”, “Three Proverbs”, “An Abandoned Wife”, and “Amazing Tree” make a cursory comment on religion though religious analysis doesn’t seem to be the chief aim of the writer but to teach morals and equipping oneself with the wisdom to live life is the objective of these stories. Some of the stories, published in the famous journal Indian Antiquary in March 1885, like “Saint and Five Rupees”, “Princes Malikka Jarika”, “Dormant Fate”, “Sun-Moon”, “Devaki Rani” have the glimpses

of Allah's stories and seem to be the governing force in the lives of the protagonists. These stories and many more not mentioned in this chapter ascertain folklore is a great traditional vehicle of expression of existence.

6.6 LET US SUM UP

To return to the beginning and sum up this Unit in the light of the 'Objectives' as we had set as the preamble you should be now be able to:

- Trace the emergence and development of folklore.
- Understand the pan Indian folklore scholarship.
- To comprehend the vivid characteristics of age old Pan Indian folklore and the continuance of the legacy.
- Understanding collectiveness as the most integral element of folklore.
- And finally, to understand the extensive folklorist tradition as an expression of life with its marvellous ability of using the myth, nature, songs, art in simplistic way.

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6.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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

1) What is folklore? Illustrate the salient characteristics of folklore.

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2) What are the sources of folklore studies? Discuss it based on the points elaborated in the beginning of the chapter.

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3) Comment on the rich legacy of folklore in pan India. Your answer should contain a brief general review on the basis of elaborate review given in this chapter.

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4) Comment on 'Folklore as an expression of life' in detail.

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5) Nature is an inevitable element of folklore. Elucidate.

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UNIT 7 FOLK PAINTINGS: VISUAL NARRATIVES

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction: Folk Paintings
- 7.2 Prehistoric Cave Painting or Rock Art in India
 - 7.2.1 Bhimbetka
 - 7.2.2 Gond Painting: the Living Tradition
 - 7.2.3 Bhil Painting: Traditional
- 7.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.4 References and Further Readings
- 7.5 Check Your Progress : Possible Questions

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- undertake a journey from the prehistoric rock art or cave painting to the living tradition of folk painting;
- get a glimpse of the visual narratives and appreciate the factor of continuity;
- get an exposure to the vital expressive, evocative, narrative, and magical dimension of art;
- understand the anthropomorphic imagination of art;
- understand and appreciate the vitality of folk painting; and
- understand art as a parallel reality.

7.1 INTRODUCTION: FOLK PAINTINGS

In this unit, we are to focus on the genre folk paintings, as they subsisted in the past and as they continue to exist in the contemporary times. Cave paintings, which bear testimony to the astounding creative energy, had been a part of the cultural traditions all over the globe. There is certain timelessness as far as the painted images are concerned. As J. S. Swaminathan said, “In art, the past lives with us as other presences, it vanquishes time”. He called it “...the state of the continuous present”.

Let us now focus on what we mean by ‘folk’. There are as many definitions of ‘folk’ as there are folklorists. But perhaps we have come a long way from the time when the peasants were alone attributed the status of folk. Another attribute, that of oral tradition associated with ‘folk’ can also not be held with rigidity, considering the factor of spread of literacy. The expansion in the understanding of who the folk are ensues when we consider the folk to be bound by common elements and as the repository of common folklore. Each of us in this sense constitutes a ‘folk’, if we interpret folk to be bound by common elements. When we think of the theme of ‘folk paintings’ and visual narratives, we realize that the common element that binds the folk across time and space is the desire, the passion to make images. As John Berger, the novelist and art critique said, “What the past, the present, and the

future share is a substratum, a ground of timelessness”. The images could be on the rock, on the walls of the houses, on canvases and on paper.

We would begin the unit with the rock art or cave paintings in Bhimbetka, in Madhya Pradesh, that were drawn over thousands of years by men and women across time and space.

We will then look at the living tradition of wall painting and subsequently paintings on canvases and sheets using modern mediums, found among the Adivasi communities of the Gonds and the Bhils in Madhya Pradesh.

Once we have clarity about the folk we are concerned here with, we would need to understand the aspect of painting, their bearing in the cultural tradition, as well as their function in granting us an exposure to that realm of art which questions the dominance of the naturalistic representational tradition that had developed in the west.

The Adivasi or tribal painting, the other form which is infused with what Sir Herbert Read defines as “an element of expressionistic vitality” was not granted any significance for a long time. It was Pablo Picasso, the Spanish painter, poet and writer who had made people aware of the importance of cave paintings when he said, “I realized what painting was all about”. As Kapila Vatsyayan says:

In the context of arts that essence of life is the realization of beauty in perfect form, where a perfect concord exists between viewer and the viewed. The artist shares this vision and it is this which gives him a whole view totally different from what is understood as the ‘descriptively representational’. The artist must in some way realize a complete self-identification with the psychical internalization of sense perceptions. Reality assumes a different meaning and the ‘perfect’ form is the model of his inner vision to which he then seeks to give expression through visual or aural forms.

Let us now have a look at the prehistoric cave paintings from all over the world and then focus on the ‘natural art gallery’ in Bhimbetka in today’s Madhya Pradesh and then the living traditions of folk painting in Madhya Pradesh itself: Gond painting and Bhil painting.

Prehistoric Rock painting

Prehistoric rock painting of the world covers a span of 35,000 years, and traces the art of the people from the Stone Age to that of prehistoric time. Prehistoric cave paintings are found in Africa, Australia, Europe, North and South America, South East Asia and East Asia. Previously it was believed that the earliest prehistoric cave paintings were from Europe, but the discovery of the Pettakere caves in Indonesia proved otherwise. The image of the pig deer on the wall of Pettakere cave in the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia is 35,400 years old and as of now is the oldest one. But may be in future, more cave paintings will be discovered and take the date further back in time.

Till Pettakere Caves were discovered, Altamira caves were considered the earliest ones since Marcelino Sanz De Sautuola discovered it in the late 19th century. He was a Spanish jurist and an amateur archaeologist and owned the land where Altamira caves were situated. Unfortunately, he was accused of forgery since there was wide spread disbelief about the astounding creative energy of the prehistoric human. In 1902, the paintings were acknowledged as genuine. The Altamira caves became

widely known when the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was said to have exclaimed, “After Altamira, all is decadence.” (www.guggenheln.org)

It is to prehistoric rock art that we owe our understanding of the humans who lived thousands of years before us. If there were no art on the rocks, in the caves, how would we have known about the people of that time and space? The rock art narrates to us about the people who walked on the earth thousands of years ago, the animals that existed, the weapons and the tools that the people were making for survival, and for gaining control over their surroundings. The rock art also tells us that the people who walked the earth thousands of years ago were also engaged in expressing themselves creatively through painting images. The paintings also tell us about the way they made colors that stood the vagaries of time. For thousands of years, the rocks were painted by different folks, bound by the common element of creative urges, and now, the rock art is a part of our painting ethos. And in the living tradition of painting today, we get a glimpse of it.

7.2 PREHISTORIC CAVE PAINTING OR ROCK ART IN INDIA

Prior to the discovery of Altamira caves in Spain, the rock paintings at Sohagihat, in Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh in India were discovered. It was Archibald Carlleyle, an English archaeologist, who had discovered it in 1867. Though he did not publish about it, he left his notes with Reverend Regionald Gatty and it was subsequently published by V. A. Smith, an Indologist and art historian, in his book *Early India*, which paints a vivid picture of the era.

Subsequently, many rock paintings were discovered in Kerala, Karnataka, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. We find that more than a thousand rock shelters in nearly 150 sites were discovered. But till now, the richest zone of prehistoric art is Central India. The largest number of prehistoric rock art sites is in Satpura, Vindhya and Kaimur hills. The sandstones that go into forming the hills wither away rapidly leading to the formation of rock shelters and caves.

The two excellent prehistoric painting sites in India are the Bhimbetka caves and Jogimara caves in Madhya Pradesh. Let us know about the prehistoric cave paintings in Bhimbetka.

7.2.1 Bhimebetka

In this unit, we are going to focus on the rock art that was discovered in Bhimbetka as recently as 1957. Prior to that, the ancient Vindhychal ranges with its dense forests had sheltered the caves in its northern periphery. Perhaps, people who lived close by had often strayed into the caves, but not aware of their relevance, had not spoken about it. It was in 1957 that an archaeologist from Ujjain, Dr. Vishnu Wakankar, who happened to venture into the dense forest, located the caves and was astounded to see the paintings on the walls of the caves. The seven hills in Bhimbetka in the western Vindhychal are dotted with 600 prehistoric rock shelters.

The rock paintings have several layers. Each layer is from a different era, from the upper Paleolithic to Mesolithic to prehistoric to the medieval age. Many a times, new paintings were painted on top of an older painting. The fact that the same ‘canvas’ was used by different people at different times has been authenticated by the superimposition of paintings. There are variations in the thematic and stylistic aspects in the art which also tell us about the chronology of the paintings.

Painted mostly in red and white, with the sporadic use of yellow and green, on matters taken from the everyday events of thousands of years ago, the paintings by and large portray hunting, chasing of animals by humans, animal fights, dancing, elephant and horse riders, humans collecting honey, decoration of bodies, disguises, masks and different type of animals such as bison, tiger, rhinoceros, wild boar, elephants, monkeys, antelopes and peacocks. It also portrays social life. In the upper Paleolithic age, that is 40,000 to 10,000 years ago, we find the paintings of huge animals such as bison, tiger, elephant, rhino, and wild boar in linear representation in dark red and green, along with human figures that are stick like. Geometric patterns fill many of them. Interestingly, the hunters are in red and dances have been portrayed in green. The images on the rock have a narrative streak and we get to know the animals that inhabited during that time, the constant fights for survival, the developing of technology to fight the animals, the community life.

The rock arts that are from the Paleolithic to the Mesolithic times show the significance of hunting in the lives of the people and interestingly, the form of animals projected on the rock grew smaller as the humans acquired a grasp over the technology to make tools to fight them. This is evident in other prehistoric cave painting too. In the Lascaux cave painting in Southern France, which are 17,000 years old, one of the bulls in the great hall of the bulls that are shown along with deers and horses, is 17 feet long. Subsequently, the sizes of the animals decreased with the invention of weapons.

In the Paleolithic time, that is the Old Stone Age, when humans were in the hunting-gathering stage, the stones used for hunting were clipped ones. In the Mesolithic period, the hunting scenes grant us a clear picture of the weapons used during those times: barbed spears, bows and arrows, pointed sticks. Moreover, in this period, communal dances are portrayed and also birds, mother and child, pregnant women, men carrying dead animals, drinking etc, are seen in this rock shelter range. It is so very significant to note that by using simple lines and colors, they had created visionary images and had not gone for mere imitation of nature:

When speaking of learning and imitation of nature, it does not mean photographic imitation of nature; rather it is a nature that artist experiences and offers it in the form of art. (Coomaraswamy, 1994)

In Bhimbetka, one gets connected with the transition from the nomadic ways of the prehistoric human to a settled agricultural life. During Chalcolithic times, the paintings exhibit the association of the cave humans with the agricultural communities of the plains. And during the early historic and medieval era, we find many Brahmanical gods like Ganesh and Nataraja in the rock shelters. But by and large, Bhimbetka is known for the images painted by the prehistoric humans.

The way they made colour is a fascinating narrative. Paints were made by grinding various colored stones. Red and white seem to be their favorite colours. The colour red was obtained from 'geru', that is from 'hematite', white from limestone, and green from a green coloured rock called 'chalcedony'. They would also prepare colours by combining manganese, hematite, red stone, and wooden charcoal. And some sticky matter like animal fat or gum or resin from trees may have been used while mixing rock powder with water. All over the world, different substances were used to prepare paint. In Magura cave in Bulgaria, the paintings were made by 'bat guano' that is bat excrement. They had to spend time in making these paints and the brushes that were made from plant fibres. And then they would create the astounding images on the cave walls.

We are simply amazed at their execution which stemmed from a creative urge and which some believe is propelled by a basic social need. In fact there are different theories and interpretations about why the prehistoric humans made images on the rocks. Some of them believe that it could be the practice of 'hunting magic' which even today prevails among the hunter gatherers and which is meant to increase the number of hunted animals. David Lewis Williams, a South African archaeologist said that it was the Paleolithic Shaman who perhaps would paint the animals in a state of trance so that a great number of animals could be fetched, and that those motifs were used to instill courage and hope in the hunters, a kind of auto suggestion. There are others who do not subscribe to this view and believe that it is creative passions which led them to leave creative imprints in the walls of the caves. It could be either or both that led them leave behind such images which they perhaps never even thought would be viewed by people thousands of years later. Today's paintings on canvases would not last the vagaries of time but the paintings on the rock still last. And each painting, a visual narrative of that time frame, would continue telling us of their adventures and social life, fears and joys, sorrows and sufferings. We can relate to the emotions depicted in the painted images since in art, time ceases to matter

Thus Bhimbetka, the 'natural art gallery' narrates the story of the humans and other life forms, the way the humans were learning to survive, the way they gave expressions to their creative impulse.

7.2.2 Gond Painting: The Living Tradition

We will now focus on the painting traditions of the communities like the Gonds and the Bhils who live in the same state of Madhya Pradesh and whose images reflect the connection with the images on the rocks.

The Gonds are the largest Adivasi community in India and they are of Dravidian origin. They lived in the deep forests of Vindhya, Satpura and Mandala by the Narmada region of the Amarkantak region for eons. They are known for their rich cultural legacy which finds expression in their narratives, dance forms, music and art.

The word 'Adivasi' implies that they are the original inhabitants of the land and the history of Adivasis dates back to the pre-Aryan era. It was during the colonial period that the Adivasis were given the designation of 'Tribal' and then in post-independence India, they were classified as scheduled tribes. The problem arises when the 'tribe' is not considered a 'type of society', and is relegated to a 'stage of evolution'. This implies that the cultural practices of the community are in danger of extinction. This is precisely what could have happened to the Gond and Bhil communities but for the intervention of people like Verrier Elwin and J. Swaminathan. It is due to them that the folklore and painting tradition of these communities in Madhya Pradesh got a new lease of life. It is due to the spread of art of painting that the Gond cultural tradition is in a thriving state. Let us get a glimpse of how it had happened. Verrier Elwin, expressing his concern, had written in *Tribal Art of Middle India*:

Tribal India is to be filled with thousands of small schools...there is danger that they will be led to reject the old life and that they will be given in its place little idea of how to have rhythm and vitality, exuberance and delight.

That was 1951. In 1987, J. Swaminathan writes in his book, *Perceiving Fingers*:

The situation has not changed for the better. The jungle no more belongs to them, they can no more practice their traditional mode of cultivation in the name of

conservation of forests (which are any way being systematically destroyed for catering to ‘urban and development ‘needs), they cannot seek and hunt game anymore and the inroads of the money economy are seemingly irreversible.

Verrier Elwin had collected thousands and thousands of tales from different communities. And that ensured the documentation and presentation of tradition.

It was in 1984 that J. Swaminathan, the artist who was the director of Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal then, was passionately in search of Adivasi artists in Madhya Pradesh. He was building Roopanker where he wanted to display the works of urban artists and Adivasi artists on the same platform. He had sent his students to different villages in Dindori district where they located many young men and women with great creative talents. One of them was Jangarh Singh Shyam who was an exceptionally brilliant artist, the image on the walls of his house bearing testimony to his creative genius. He was equally enthusiastic about coming to Bhopal to try out the new medium of painting. And once he came to Bhopal and created a space not for only himself but also for many Gond artists, Gond folklore and painting took a firm root in the minds of the next generation, and that ensured the continuity of their folklore and a sound economic base. This is how the journey of the Gond painting began from walls to canvas and now, it is a simultaneous process. Traditional and contemporary paintings coexist.

Before we discuss contemporary Gond paintings, let us first understand the living tradition of Gond painting. It is found on the outer and inner walls and floors of their houses.

Today’s genre of Gond painting has its roots in *Nohadora*, *Digna*, and *Bhittichitra*.

Nohadora is painted on the outer walls of the Gond house and it is during the *Chedta* festival that they bind the house with it. They first dip their three fingers into cow dung and then put dots on the walls, in the shape of a tiger’s front paw imprint. *Chedta* festival is associated with harvesting and children collecting food grains from each household sit in the open and cook it and eat it together in great joy. It is believed that tigers generally enter the village during this time at night. Therefore the practice was to paint *nohadora* around the house so that tigers would not come near. It is believed that *nohadora* protected them from tigers.

Digna is painted on the inner walls and floors during weddings and other festive occasions. It is a geometric pattern, a chowk that is painted on the wall or floor, after plastering them with cow dung. The *digna* pattern has evolved from *nohadora* and gradually more complex motifs emerged.

J. Swaminathan writes in *Perceiving Fingers*:

The commonly found motif in Gond wall painting of the triangle used in inverted juxtaposition in panels as border around the wall symbolizes the male and female principles of creation and the abstract geometric design in yellow, red, and black or indigo lends an auspicious air to the frugality of the Gond hut.

Bhittichitra is the image of animal, plant, or tree that is painted on the walls of the Gond house. During any festive occasion like marriage, Deepavali or Dussera, the walls of Gond houses are plastered with yellow or white clay and cow dung mixture. The Gond women then paint the inner and outer walls of their houses with *digna* and *bhittichitra*. Vegetable and mineral dyes are used for colors – flowers, leaves, clay stones, rice, and turmeric. Brushes are handmade, made from a **neem** or twig and a rag.

The Gond children grow up observing the process of putting *nohadora* on the walls and making *digna* and images on the walls and imbibe respect towards it as well as the penchant to do it with perfection. The dots need to be put with certain aptness. Though it is held by many that the traditional Adivasi art is a collective creation, it has been found out that some of them are considered gifted by the whole community. As J. Swaminathan said, “Among the various Adivasi communities with whom we established contact, we found that certain individuals in the community were generally recognized as gifted in this direction”. (*Perceiving* 89)

Gond painting: Contemporary

In the year 1984, it was the initiative of J. Swaminathan that made possible the discovery of Gond artists of extreme talent and ‘inborn genius’.

The contemporary Gond painting has its deep association with Jangarh Singh Shyam and some people call the genre of painting ‘Jangarh kalam’. But many of the Gond artists do not approve of this since they all have their individual style and signature.

Jangarh was an exceptionally gifted artist and as J. Swaminathan says in *Perceiving Fingers*, “Jangarh is no ordinary artist, painting in any traditional manner or style. He is not just an icon maker. Inventive and innovative, he opens up vistas which perhaps have no parallel in Gond art”. J. Swaminathan is wonderstruck by this gifted artist who “taking a leap from the chowk, displays an extraordinary versatility” in giving form to his ideas. Many people would question the very essence of the art and would hesitate to call it an expression of Gond art. But as J. Swaminathan pointed out, that they are indeed expressions of Gond art “precisely because they are drawn from the deep recess of Adivasi memory and it is the individual artist who gives visual, tactile expression to commonly held beliefs”.

When Jangarh began to paint with modern brushes using synthetic colors, he was thrilled to see the effect of the colours on paper and canvas and to be able to bring out the nuances, the subtleties of the themes with the fine bristle of the readymade brushes. Jangarh used colours like greens and red, pink and yellow, and he thus ‘fortifies the vibrating tensions of the lines’. As J. Swaminathan puts it so beautifully, “The lines not only fulfill the function of outlining the figure, they create the form. It is in their flow, their conjunction, their staccato rhythm that the form coheres and acquires life and meaning” (*Perceiving* 66).

Jangarh, who also made wall reliefs and clay models, belonged to the Pardhan community among the Gonds. The Pardhans are the traditional bards of the Gond community and are the repository of folklore. The way Swaminathan had discovered him, Jangarh discovered many more artists mostly among the Gond Pardhans. Among them Narmada Tekam, Anand Singh Shyam, Kala Bai, Durga Bai, Venkat Singh Shyam, Bhajju Shyam, Ram Singh Urveti, Gariba Tekam, Rajendra Singh Shyam, Nan Kusia Shyam, Ramesh Tekam, Suresh Dhruve, Indu Bai, Subhash Vyam and many others have created their own space in the world of painting. Among the second generation of painters, Mayankh Shyam and Japani Shyam are both children of Jangarh Shyam, Nikky Urveti and many others have their own space by dint of their sheer talent. Each of them is extraordinarily talented and they have painted on varied themes, and on different Gond cultural motifs. Each of them is full of Gond folklore and song and apart from flora and fauna, animals and birds, they have also portrayed their deities and granted them forms. The myths and tales have been captured so very vividly and with such abandon that even a child from the Gond community can identify it with great joy, thereby granting them permanence in their unconscious. In the Gond paintings, the cosmos interacts with the natural and

social world of human beings at numerous levels and the deities are very much accessible.

7.2.3 Bhil painting: Traditional

The Bhil community is an ancient people, older than the Dravidians. They were referred to as 'Nishada' which did not indicate a particular tribe, rather to all the non-Aryan tribes who were not under Aryan control. We find many references to the Bhils in *Puranas*. It is believed that the word Bhil has come from a Dravidian word 'villa' which means 'bow' and that was the characteristic weapon of the Bhils. It is believed that Valmiki was a Bhil named 'Valiya'.

The Bhils were basically a hunting and cattle-rearing community, and the horse has a vital role in Bhil life. Like many Adivasi communities, they also engaged in rudimentary forms of agriculture. Some of them would refuse to use the plough since they did not want to inflict wounds on the body of mother earth.

During festive occasions, the Bhil women create images on the walls of their houses and they called them *Bhittichitra*. They would plaster the walls with cow dung and then would make images with natural colours. They also use cow dung to make wall reliefs around their huts, which enhance the aesthetic appeal.

The ritual wall painting of the Bhils is very crucial in understanding the ethos of the community and their painting tradition. It needs to be elaborated upon. Though some of the scholars think that the Pithora painting is purely a ritual painting, that there is no aesthetic contemplation, but as J. Swaminathan rightly said, "...it should not be forgotten that the myth is being depicted in a pictorial language and therefore the aesthetic aspect cannot be ignored....It has to be borne in mind that whole areas of Adivasi art are tied up with myths, rituals, magical and religious practices." (*Perceiving* 53)

The Bhils in Madhya Pradesh paint the 'Pithora' which is a ritual wall painting. This ritual painting is done to invoke Pithoro, the deity of fertility and prosperity. It is the most intriguing ritual wall painting which contains in itself the whole cosmos, all life forms, many deities, and mythical characters. Pithora, the painted myth of creation, is a very expensive ritual and therefore, every member of the community cannot afford it. But the whole village gathers during the ritual. It is held for the fulfillment of a wish: for good harvests, fertility, and prosperity. It is painted by *Lekhindra*, the special pithora painters. As he begins to paint, there is an elaborate ritual. The priest, the *Badwa* (the witch doctor), the *Ghardani* (the person in whose house *Pithora* is being painted), they all have prescribed roles and the people of the community are all engaged in drumming, dancing, feasting, a part of the ritual.

Let us first know who Pithora was and why this ritual wall painting is so crucial for the Bhil consciousness. The gist of the story narrated by Pema Fatya, who is a *Lekhindra* (Pithora painter) of exceptional artistic talents, goes thus: Pithoro was the son of Indiraja (some of the scholars think he is Vedic God Indra while others do not subscribe to this view). Once it so happened that Pithoro committed an impropriety. When betels were being offered to the guests, Pithoro took the offering though none of his brothers committed this indecency. And so Pithoro was punished for this. He was asked to go to the Himalaya mountains riding his horse and bring Himalaya Behn from there. He was very worried to go to the far off land and felt he may not come back. But Indiraja's daughter told him not to be afraid since Himalaya Behn was also Indiraja's daughter. When Pithoro reached the abode of the Himalayas, he was recognized by Himalaya Behn by his ring and he was treated like royally. As

there was only one bed to be shared by them, Pithoro placed his sword between them, saying if they turned to each other, they will die. And he brought Himalaya Behn back to Indiraja who called him a blessed person to have come back alive. And since then, it was decided by Indiraja and Desi Bhabar (village deity) that Pithoro would have a permanent place on the wall of the house and will be the one who will be given the new grain first. And others would stay in the jungle and would eat only after feasting him. The story tells the people about the whole cosmos, different life forms, and mythical characters while they are being painted on the wall. There are many layers in the narrative and it goes on for hours together as the *Lekhindra* paints the creation myth on the wall.

Pithora painting: The *Lekhindra* paints a rectangular area with an opening in the center of the bottom of the border. And then he fills up the area with characters. Baba Gane is the first figure, who is painted in black and sits at the left hand bottom corner, smoking a hukka. In the upper left hand corner, the *Kathiya ghoda* is painted in black. *Kathiya ghoda* is a horse with a rider, who is called *kathiya kunwar*, and they are the ones who are engaged in inviting all the deities and the people for the *pithora* ceremony. At the bottom right near the gate opening are painted the *chandababa*, *surajbaba* and *tare* (moon, sun and stars). And then with some irregular lines, *sarag*, that is the sky, is painted near the sun and the moon. Near the moon and the sun is also painted a rectangle divided into scores representing the earth, *Jami mata*. The Desi Bhabar, the village deity is represented by two horses held by a groom. And just above the Desi Bhabar, Pithora Bapji I is represented by two facing horses held by a groom. Then all other characters are also represented by horses or mares. For instance, Rani Kajal, the sister of Indi Raja is symbolized by a mare with a foal. Meghani Ghodi is the two headed mare symbolizing the lord of the rain cloud. A black horse stands for Hagarja Kunwar that is the lord of the jungle. Everything connected with Bhil life is painted: tigers, elephants, goats, camels, monkey, parrots, banyan tree, toddy tree, shrubs, insects, snakes, scorpions, chameleons, beehives, deities and mythological figures, wells, women water carriers, farmer ploughing the land, women churning butter, hunters carrying the games. The horse as a symbol of fertility and power has great significance in Bhil life.

Bhil Painting: Contemporary

J. Swaminathan points out that “There is a great austerity and economy of expression in the Pithora of the Bhils of Jhabua. They have the primeval strength of prehistorical rock shelter drawings. In the Bhil Pithora, the horse is rendered by the simple device of two triangles horizontally joined at the apex and the human figures conceived in the same manner vertically” (*Perceiving* 39). In 1984, Bhuri Bai, a construction labourer, was asked by J. Swaminathan to paint on paper, using a brush and acrylic colour. Bhuri Bai had painted the Pithora horse, ‘rendered by the simple device of two triangles horizontally joined at the apex.’

This is how Bhuri Bai’s journey in the contemporary world of painting had begun. She was five years old when she had started to paint *bhittichitra* on the walls of their houses during a festive occasion and was soon recognized by the community as a gifted child. While other children would do the paintings for a short while, Bhuri would do it for hours together. She loved the whole process of making colours and then making images on the walls. Gradually her neighbour and others began to invite her to make *bhittichitra* on their walls during weddings or other occasions.

Bhuri Bai and Jangarh Singh Shyam had begun to paint on paper and then on canvas at the same time. They both were thrilled to see the effect of acrylic colours and brush with fine bristles. In 1984, none of them knew how revolutionary the step

would prove to be, that within a decade or two, they would be considered as the *avante-garde* among the contemporary Adivasi artists.

Bhuri Bai loves to paint the forest as she says, “I feel I am a part of the forest. Since I no longer live in the forest, I feel an urge to create forest on my canvas.” (Quoted by T.B. Naik)

Bhuri Bai has painted every life form that she came across while collecting dry leaves or animal bones in the deep forest as a child. One of her favorite life forms is ‘khobla’, the reddish brown insect that subsists on clay. *Satkood* is another favorite snake which is lethargic by nature and survives on the chance rat or other life forms which come close by. She has painted on every cultural practice of her community, and deities they offer prayers to. And Bhuri Bai never tires of painting mythologies and folktales. The Pithoro is an integral part of her unconscious.

Gradually other artists also emerged from the Bhil community. Another artist, Gangu Bai – also known as ‘badi Bhuri Bai’ – and many others have also established themselves as contemporary Bhil artists and some of their children have also become artists. To understand Adivasi art, it is significant to understand what J. Swaminathan says:

It is important to understand the difference between sight and vision. The human eye of course projects an image but at the receiving end there is not a blank screen but the human mind. The human mind is not only served by senses other than that of the eye but also genetic perceptions or perhaps what Jung calls the ‘collective unconscious’. The capacity of sight becoming vision lies not in the lenses but in the mind....Art does not mirror nature. It is on the other hand a parallel reality.

The mythology, the folklore and this function of imagination create this ‘parallel reality’ which turns the ‘sight’ into ‘vision’, and that is how we move forward, from being one dimensional to multidimensional beings.

7.3 LET US SUM UP

The painting journey had begun thousands of years ago and it continues depicting the narratives to people who are from a different era and space. This journey will continue and since the distant future is not known to us, we do not know how it would be then. Whatever it may be, humans would continue narrating their tales through paintings, and the images would grant us a vista to explore further into human mindscape and understand it in its multiple contexts and levels.

7.4 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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7.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Note: Your answers should be in about 300 words.

1) What do you understand by the term 'folk'?

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2) Why are cave paintings important? What is their relevance?

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3) Which are the oldest cave paintings in the world?

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4) What are the ways in which colours are prepared for cave paintings?

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5) What narratives are being told by the images in the cave in Bhimbetka?

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6) How would you portray the humans of that time and space, based on the cave paintings?

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7) What role did the mythic character of Pithoro play in the collective consciousness of the Bhil community?

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8) Who was Jangarh Singh Shyam?

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9) What role did Verrier Elwin perform in ensuring the continuity of Gond folklore?

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10) What role did J. Swaminathan play in the area of contemporary Gond painting?

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