
UNIT 1 VERBAL / ORAL AND NON-VERBAL

'Folk' Representations by/
of Dalits and Tribals

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain what folklore is and what are long narratives and short narratives in folklore;
- understand non-verbal forms of folk culture; and
- identify how verbal and non-verbal folk forms can be related to one another.

1.1 VERBAL/ORAL FOLK FORMS OR NARRATIVES

1.1.1 Long narratives: tales and myths

We will now try to learn more about tales and myths. Long oral narratives generally include folktales and myths. The first important question that needs to be addressed in this regard is, what is a folktale or a myth and are they different from each other? There are no agreed upon definitions of a folktale. However, most scholars working in the field agree that folktales are generally oral narratives that circulate in a given community, in the form of stories which are passed on from one generation to another verbally, i.e. they are not written down in texts. In other words, people's memory and not a text is the repository of folktale. Also, it should be noted that, folktale is a generic or common term given to all such kinds of stories or oral narratives that exist across the world.

What is the origin of folktale? It is difficult to identify the origin of folktales. Though, based on the nature of social life that is referred to in a given folktale, scholars have tried to trace historical origins of folktale; such attempts have not always been successful. What makes tracing the historical origin of folktale difficult? It is difficult due to the nature of folktales. In folktales there are always

numerous references to the social life of a community. Since different communities have their own distinct social life, a folktale can generally be traced to a certain community. In other words, it is possible to identify from where a folktale has originated. However, there are very few references in the tale on when such a social life existed in the society. Therefore, though it is possible to identify from where a folktale originated, it becomes difficult to identify when such a folktale originated in that society.

Folktales are similar to myths in one way. Like folktales, myths are also based on oral narratives, i.e. they too are in the form of stories. Narratives are oral or written sequences that can be fictional or non-fictional in nature. With regard to this unit, the important point for us is that the stories have a sequence (a beginning and end) and they are oral in nature. However, myths are different from folktales in other ways. Myths are generally stories that explain the origin of life and the universe. On the explanation of life and universe, there are many myths that deal with gods/goddesses or heroes/heroines. The origin of life and the universe is traced to the thoughts and actions of gods/goddesses or heroes/heroines. Myths of such nature are commonly associated with institutionalized religions, such as Hinduism, Christianity and others. But there are also many myths that explain the origin in terms of thoughts and actions of human beings. This is more common in the case of tribal beliefs and customs.

An important difference between folktales and myths is with regard to 'time'. Unlike folktales, since myths are explanations of origin of life and the universe, most myths generally explain it in terms of a time sequence (giving a sequence of what happened and when it happened). For example, in the Hindu origin myths, the concept of *yugas* or ages is a specific time sequence. One of the most common origin myths in Hindu religion is that of the ten incarnations or *avatara* of the god Vishnu on earth. However, all myths do not use such an abstract concept of time. In many tribal beliefs, origin is often explained in reference to nature such as the sun, or the moon, or the wind, or water or natural phenomenon, i.e. events related to nature. The universe and life forms emerge from nature. The role of an individual or a family or a community is associated with this process of emergence and subsequent spread of human habitation across geographical spaces. These individuals or families or communities are not historical in nature. They are creations of people's faith and their attempts at explaining the origin of life and the universe, i.e. explaining how they themselves came into existence in the world.

It is this latter category of myths that comes close to folktales in character. The distinction between such myths and folktales becomes blurred. Since such myths are not based on concepts of time but rather on nature or natural phenomenon, it becomes difficult to historically trace such myths to a specific period of time. But similar to folktales, they tell us which is the society or the nature of the society in the narrative. Therefore, in such cases, though folktales and myths belong to different genres or classifications, they tend to share more commonalities than differences.

What is folklore and how is it different from folktales or myths? Folklore is the general collection of various verbal or oral narrative forms that exists in a given society. In other words, folktales and myths, besides many other oral narratives, are collectively referred to as folklore. Folktales and myths comprise the long

narrative forms while lullabies, sayings, proverbs, omens, etc. are the short narrative forms that are found in folklore. The short narratives will be taken up for discussion in the subsequent section (1.1.2.).

It is important to discuss here what folktales or myths mean. The meaning of folktales and myths has been discussed in terms of (a) nature of narrative, (b) function of the narrative, and (c) social context of the narrative. In nature of narrative, also called narrative structure, certain elements are identified as peculiar or primary, and based on that classification, folktales or myths are categorized into 'types'. For example, one 'type' of folktale will have the same elements as primary while another 'type' of folktale will have certain other elements as peculiar or primary in their narratives. The primary objective of the method is to highlight the elements that respective categories of folktales or myths emphasize more or exist as central to them. Based on this understanding, what the respective categories of folktale or myth explain about their own society is made evident.

Meaning of folktales or myths has also been understood based on what function they perform in a given society. For example, folktales or myths are classified based on their function in rituals, festivals, customs and ceremonies, giving moral lessons, narratives on origin of the community, etc. In other words, it is the function of the folktale or myth (and folklore in general) in a given situation or event that gives them their meaning.

Meanings have also been seen in terms of the social context of the narrative in question. In such an approach to understand the meaning of folktales or myths, the society in which they exist is taken into consideration. The nature of the society is taken as central to knowing the meaning of the folktales or myths that exist in that society. Therefore, if the society is primarily a tribal society, the folktales and myths would be considered examples of cultural forms of such a society. Similarly, if the society is seen as agricultural in nature (as opposed to shifting cultivation or industrial society), the folktales or myths would be considered examples of cultural forms that exist in such a society.

The classifications of meaning based on the three criteria indicated above are not strict water tight distinctions. In fact, all the three are related to each other. The nature of the narrative, i.e. what is being said and how it is being said, is closely related to what function it performs in a particular kind of a society. Therefore, all the three classifications indicated above are closely related to each other. Also it may be noted that a same folklore can be classified in any of the above given categories. This is because it depends upon the person who is doing the classification, how he or she sees the meaning of the folktales or myths that he or she is dealing with. We need to remember that a folktale itself does not say that it is a folktale and a myth does not indicate that it is a myth. It is the person doing the classification who categorizes a narrative as folktale or as myth. Such attempts at classifications have been in practice since the early periods in most civilizations of the world.

Do folktales and myths remain same do they undergo changes? Most studies have shown us that folktales or myths (and folklore in general) can undergo *certain* changes over a period of time as well as when they move from one society to another (i.e. when they spread geographically). It is pointed out that the same folktales or myths when recorded at different periods of time are not always

necessarily the same. (Of course there are many folktales or myths which studies show have remained the same as well.) In fact, different individuals or groups of people could give alternate versions of a folktale at the same point of time, i.e. when the folktale was/is recorded. Therefore, the question emerges that in those cases in which folktales or myths vary or exist in many versions, is it possible to talk about an *authentic* folktale or myth?

Different studies on this issue have indicated three conclusions in this regard. Firstly, because folktales or myths are oral in nature, therefore, it is possible for them to differ from individual to individual or from one social group to another. But secondly, they also point out that the different versions do have certain common elements or themes. Once these elements or themes are identified, it is possible to see that the changes have been in the ornamentation of the tale or myth, not in its central elements or themes. In other words, the basic properties of the tale or myth have remained same. However thirdly, they note that changes can occur in the basic properties of a folktale or myth both historically and geographically, i.e. changes over a period of time or when it spreads from one society to another. It is pointed out such cases indicate the changes that the given society or societies themselves have undergone during the period or the nature of relation that they have had with other societies in this context.

1.1.2 Oral short narratives

In the previous section, we learnt about oral long narratives, especially folktales and myths. In this section, we will focus on oral short narratives. There are numerous kinds of oral short narratives. Some of the more common ones are lullabies, proverbs and sayings, idioms / phrases and clauses, omens, street narratives and vows and swears. Lullabies are songs to make children fall asleep. Proverbs and sayings are short pithy statements about some general truth. Idioms or phrases are syntactic structures that have more than one word but lack a subject and a predicate. Their difference from clauses is that clauses have subject and predicate. They generally come into existence through popular usage. Omens are portends of something good or evil that could happen to someone or something. Street narratives are kinds of oral narratives that are to be found in circulation in activities that are related to streets. For example, there are certain oral modes in which different categories of hawkers would advertise to sell their wares and these modes of advertising would differ based on hawkers or based on the commodity that is being sold. Vows and swears are promises that are kept for or on someone or something. Swears too are promises like vows. But swears could also be the popular usages of obscene verbal expressions that circulate in a given society to express oneself vis-à-vis other people or phenomenon.

There are two basic differences between oral long and short narratives. Firstly, short narratives, as is evident from the terms itself, are shorter in length than long narratives. Secondly, short narratives are generally not in the form of a story that is being told to listeners. A story usually would have a plot, i.e. a beginning and an ending. Story also has characters such as hero/heroine or villain. In both folktales and myths, plot and characters can be found. However, in short narratives, the plot as well as characters need not be present. Short narratives do not aim to tell a story. They are aimed at indicating or highlighting or referring to an aspect of the social life of the community. In that sense, short narratives are closer to being seen as abstractions of reality or social life than long narratives. It

may be noted in this regard that in lullabies, though there could be characters, whether animate or inanimate, there are rarely any plots in which the characters are organized.

Despite the differences, both long and short narratives share certain commonalities as well. One of the basic commonalities is generally the language. In a given community, both long and short narratives would exist in the same language. As a result, there would be similarity or commonality of syntax and vocabulary between the long and short narratives. Further, both long and short narratives in a given society would share the same social or cultural context. Therefore, short narratives can exist in long narratives as an integral part of the process of story telling and so could long narratives exist as referents for short narratives when the latter tries to indicate an aspect of the social life of the given community. For example, 'David and Goliath' is both a folktale in the Christian and Jewish traditions as well as a clause to indicate a fight and its result between two who are unequal. Thus, it is evident that though long and short narratives are different, they also share many commonalities.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Your answer should be about 100 words each;

2) You may check your answer with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) What are the main differences between long narratives and short narratives?

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2) What are the differences between the folktales and myths?

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1.2 NON-VERBAL FOLK FORMS OR NARRATIVES

1.2.1 Folk dance

In the preceding sections we have focused on verbal forms of narratives. Now, we will learn more about the non-verbal forms of narratives.

Non-verbal folk forms are those which generally do not use the medium of words or sentences to convey their meaning. Dance, music and art and craft are usually considered non-verbal folk forms in different societies across the world. It is

important to remember that media such as dance or music or art and craft can also narrate a particular event or story. In other words, they can also do story telling. However, they do not take the help of speaking in a given language to narrate. They narrate through the use of form and expressions of dance or music or art and craft.

Folk dance is a dance that belongs to an entire community or a social group and in which the entire community or that social group can participate. Folk dance is one of the most important non-verbal folk forms. In a given community, there could be many kinds of folk dances depending upon the event or occasion of its performance. For example, folk dances are performed in rituals, in festivals, mourning, at change of seasons, on events pertaining to customs and rituals, in reference to seasons or to procreation, or in the different periods of an agricultural calendar. At times, there could be an overlap of occasions when a particular folk dance is performed. When the Bihu folk dance is performed in Assam during the spring time, it is for the celebration of a new year (spring is the beginning of the traditional new year) as well as the beginning of an agricultural calendar. The dance, however, is also the celebration of youth and becomes an annual event in which young people meet and can openly declare their love for one another through songs and dance. Similarly, 'Karma' dance is performed in Orissa to celebrate youth, happiness and love. In other words, the dance in both cases functions as a social platform for young people to choose their partners of life. Thus, different dimensions of the social life of a given society can come together in a single event or occasion.

One fundamental distinction between folk and classical dance form that is pointed out is that classical dance forms are based on strict grammar, and that they are imparted through a long process of institutional training by master or to disciple a student. Grammar here means that dances are based on codified form of expressions. Whether it is hand or feet movement, facial expressions or body movements, their different forms or patterns indicate a specific meaning, and it is only possible to acquire the ability to perform them or understand them through the process of training.

It is now being increasingly noted that folk dances are also based on codes and are generally acquired through training. The training is not carried out in an institution, but as a community practice. Further, the various movements (hand, feet or body) or expressions in folk dances are also specific codes that indicate something about nature or about life or about the community. If a community is spread out across space, it has been found that though variations may occur in the performance of a folk dance by members of the community in different places, the basic movements or expressions in terms of what they indicate generally remain constant. Can a folk dance become a classical dance over a period of time? The answer is yes. There are instances when folk dances have come to be considered classical dance over a period of time. One of the recent examples of this phenomenon is the Satriya dance of Assam. Here we can cite the example of another important classical dance from Orissa, Odissi, the source of which is also from the amalgamation of two types of folk dance forms, *Devadasi* dance and *Gotipua* dance.

Odissi dance

The first record of dance in Orissa is found in the manuscripts pertaining to the rituals of Lord Jagannath at his world famous temple at Puri. Dance as a ritual

finds mention in Utkala Khanda of Skanda Purana, Niladri Mahodaya, Madala Panji etc. besides many other texts. There it was extensively practised by Devadasis or temple dancers (only females) as an ongoing ritual for the pleasure of the Lord.

The Devadasi dance at the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri was also known as the Mahari dance. The Devadasis were called Maharis, which literally means, according to some, one who is deeply in love with the Lord. Dancing has remained a very important and indispensable item in the daily rituals (seva) of Lord Jagannath since the time of Ganga rulers of Utkal. Besides the inscriptions of the Ganga rulers, there are also some treatises and literatures which hold the proof for the oldness of this ritual in the temple of Lord Jagannath. We also find dancing as a ritual in the temple of Lord Jagannath mentioned in Agni Purana, Vishnu Purana, Srimad Bhagavatam, Padma Purana and Vamadeva Samhita.

Chodaganga Deva who ruled Utkal in the twelfth century is credited to have first given a legal dimension to the Devadasi dancing at the temple of Lord Jagannath. He established seven localities (sahis) for the servants (sewayats) of the Lord and one of the streets known by the name of Anga Alasa Patana was intended for the Maharis alone. Chodaganga Deva introduced many ceremonies (Jatra) of the Lord in a year. It is interesting to note that dancing and singing were associated with almost all these ceremonies. The Maharis in olden days enjoyed a place of esteem in society. Girls of respectable families took it as an honourable profession. The Maharis were of six categories: Bhitara Gauni, Bahara Gauni, Nachuani, Patuari, Raj Angila, Gahana Mahari and Rudra Ganika.

Almost contemporary was the Gotipua tradition. To Ramachandra goes the distinction of paving the way for bringing into practice an ingenious dance- the Gotipua. This was towards the end of the 16th century. The last in the sequence in the dynasties of Orissa had collapsed, and the Mughals and Afghans were locked in rivalry to be in power. Ramachandra was Raja of Khurda, a small principality in Orissa. He had found Akhadas to give shelter to Mughal soldiers who had been routed by the Afghans on Oriya soil and thus had earned the favour of Emperor Akbar by being designated as Gajapati or the King of Orissa, with allegiance to the Mughal Viceroy. He was also appointed as the superintendent at the Jagannath temple in Puri, a position of some authority, since it was the hub of religious life in Orissa.

The dance style co-existed, each independently, but with palpably common roots. From both the essence has been drawn, kneaded and moulded to shape the Odissi dance of today. The word Goti means 'one', 'single' and Pua, 'boy' or 'lad'. But the Gotipuas always dance in pairs. Not in duet where each is a partner in a composition devised for two.

This is further reinforced by giving the boys an oil massage, every morning, coupled with stretching, bending and twisting the limbs. The dancing, that involves the body, contrasted with dancing which is expressional and demands a certain maturity in the performer- the Gotipuas conveniently score over the Maharis. One of the most demanding aspects of the dance tradition in Orissa- the Bandha, which includes incredible contortions and positions of the body- is the monopoly of the Gotipuas, for the Maharis, as adult women, could not, even if they tried, have met its demands.

A *Gotipua* presentation is supported by a set of three musicians, who play the Pakhawaj, the Gini or cymbals and the Harmonium. The boys do the singing themselves, though at times the party has an additional singer. In decorative items, where there is no song and therefore no play of expression, sometimes the boy stands in a pose and recites the phrase or line of rhythmic syllables like a refrain, while the other dances, generally the Bandha pieces.

The *Gotipuas* have no place in the temple set up, as neither they nor their Gurus are listed as Sevayats, servitors. But in the past, on a major occasion, they had an indispensable role to play. This was during the Chandan Jatra festival, when, apart from the Maharis, the *Gotipuas* were carried in independent boats down the Narendra Sarovara, a sacred tank in Puri, to dance and sing before the sacred images. But the *Gotipuas* had their day when they appeared in a religious festival, where the Maharis were never given any room. This is the Jhoolan Jatra celebrated every August. Though the Jagannath temple also observes this, it is only incidentally. It is the Mathas or religious endowments that celebrated the occasion in a big way. Puri at one time bristled with Mathas, though there are now no more than a dozen that continue to be functional. Most Mathas carry, in the portico, a tall iron framework. In case of the Jagannath temple, the facility is provided in a gallery called the Mukti Mandapa. During Jhoolan Jatra, that begins ten days before full moon, the whole structure is lavishly decorated with models made of pith and adorned with coloured paper, tinsel and the like. Figures of dancing girls, drummers, birds and monkeys are common. A special place is allotted to the Jhoola, or swing, which is of metal and no longer than two hands. Metal images of Madana Mohana representing Jagannath, Sridevi and Bhudevi are placed on the swing. Occasionally a priest sits in front of the swing and gently pulls the chord or chain fixed to the swing to set it in motion. In the open space in front of the makeshift shrine is spread a cotton *durrie*, and it is here that the *Gotipua* dance. Performances take place a number of times during the day, and the early part of the night, and generally more than one party appears before the venue. The festival culminates on full moon night.

Much of Odissi tradition owes to these two traditions of the 'Mahari' dance and the '*Gotipua*' dance. (source: <http://www.narthaki.com/info/articles/article38.html>)

However, such processes also highlight the fact that in certain cases, the distinction between classical and folk dance could also be arbitrary rather than being scientific. Since the criteria that is generally associated with classical dance can also be found in some folk dances (though not all), therefore, the general principle that distinguishes the two become vague. Therefore, what constitutes 'classical' and what constitutes 'folk' dance in such cases becomes a matter of perception or practice rather than a well laid out principle.

1.2.2 Folk music

Now that we have understood all about folk dance, we will move on to the next topic which is folk music.

Along with folk dance, folk music is another significant non-verbal form of folk culture. Similar to folk dance, folk music too pertains to all those forms of music that belong to an entire community or a social group and in which the entire community or that social group can participate. There can be different kinds of

folk music based on events or occasions for which they are performed. In this regard, folk music is similar to folk dance.

Like folk dance, folk music is also based on certain codes, i.e. they too have grammar. Like folk dance, certain forms of folk music too have shared close relation with classical music forms. In the history of music traditions in the Indian subcontinent, there are numerous instances of folk and classical genres borrowing from each other. This relation would be taken up in the subsequent section.

In most parts of South Asia, however, there is one difference between folk music and folk dance. Folk music, unlike folk dance, makes far greater use of language to communicate with the listeners. Since folk dance relies on movements and expressions, there is generally less reliance on language as a means of communication. Folk music, on the other hand, since it primarily relies on the human voice rather than on musical instruments, language becomes an essential component of its performance. Folk music also includes musical instruments. But it is seen that in most societies in South Asia, musical instruments support the human voice, i.e. the singing, rather than taking the leading role. It is to be noted that the same characteristic is also seen in classical music traditions of the subcontinent. This is one of the basic differences between Western and Indian classical music traditions.

Another major difference between folk music and folk dance is that whereas folk dance generally indicates various actions whether of economic production or procreation that members of a given community engages with, folk music also engages with philosophical dimensions of life besides actions of economic production or procreation. Once again, in South Asia, the relation between role of language and human voice, i.e. singing, can be seen as the crucial factor that causes this difference between folk music and folk dance. As a result, it is possible to locate an organized sequence of some kind, i.e. narrative, in what a piece of folk music tries to say vis-à-vis folk dance. Folk dance, because they focus on actions, do not necessarily need narratives. However, folk music, because it engages with philosophical ideas as well, needs a narrative to express itself.

1.2.3 Crafts

In this section, you will understand how crafts too are an equally important part of the non-verbal folk form.

Non-verbal folk forms also include different kinds of crafts such as textiles (clothes), totems and totem poles, masks, or other objects of ritual or customary significance. Textiles in terms of fabric, colour palates and design patterns (figurative or geometric) strongly bear the imprint of a given community. The fabric or the nature of colour and design that are used are indicative of the social organization of a community. For example, the designs in the woolen shawls among the Naga tribes in north east India are specific to the tribe or the hierarchies within a given tribe. The nature of colour or design would vary from one tribe to another. Further, even within a tribe, the shawls of the tribal chief / king would differ from those of the others from the same tribe. Customarily, other people are prohibited from using shawls with designs that are traditionally meant for the chief or king. Thus, the colour or fabric or very importantly the designs are indicative of the social organization of or within a tribe among the Naga people. The same can be said for most of the other communities in the region as well as

across the entire South Asia. It is also important to note that textiles can also be used to narrate stories. Through paintings or designs, myths and legends that circulate in a given community or the various actions pertaining to daily life such as hunting, gathering etc are found to be narrated in a piece of textiles. Such textiles can be for symbolic or ritualistic use or they can be everyday use as well. Therefore, we may say that such textiles are pictorial narratives.

Totems and totem poles, as a living tradition, constitute a significant folk form generally in tribal society. Totems are usually mythical figures, mostly naturalistic, which spiritually represents a group of people or a community. Totem poles are the poles on which totems are crafted. Totems are generally placed at the head of the pole. It is called the crest of the pole. But it is not necessary that all totems be crested on a pole. Through totems, it is believed, a community tries to make nature and human life comprehensible to itself. Totems and totem poles not only tell the story of the origin of a given community but also a worldview of that given community. Thus, it is evident that totems and totem poles are also narratives, but those that speak through the symbolism of craft. Like textiles, it does not use human language to perform its narration. Totems have been found in various communities all over the world. In other words, it is a universal phenomenon. Study of totems emerged as a significant branch of knowledge in the 19th and the 20th centuries to understand the religion of not only the so called 'aboriginal' or 'tribal' societies but also to understand the origin of religion in general as well.

Masks are another category of craft that play an important role in the social life of a community. Masks are also based on the totemic figures of a community. However, masks can be on non-totemic figures as well. It could be on animals or birds or also on human beings. Dragon masks in Tibet are one of the most popular examples of masks as folk forms of culture. Masks are also often based on some popular characters that are found in the myths and folktales in a community. For example, in Assam, there are different kinds of masks that are found on the character of Ravana from Ramayana. Since there are many Ramayanas, the masks of Ravana also vary accordingly. Like textiles or totems, masks are also symbolic versions of aspects of life of a community or its worldview. The nature of masks would reveal what is perceived as good and what is perceived as evil in a community, its relation to the natural world or its understanding of the meaning of human existence. Thus, masks too are narratives in which it is not merely an action that is portrayed; rather the thought system and practices of a community are expressed. Like textiles or totems, masks too do not use human language to perform their narration. The narration is in the coded signs that the masks stand for.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** 1) Your answer should be about 100 words each;
2) You can check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.
3) List out two similarities and two differences between folk dance and folk music.

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- 4) What, according to you, are the similarities between textiles, totems and masks as forms of non-verbal narrations?

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1.3 RELATION BETWEEN VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL FOLK FORMS

In the preceding sections, we have seen what the different kinds of verbal and non-verbal folk forms are. Some of them are in the form of narratives, i.e. having a certain sequence in the content of what they try to convey, while others are not narratives. In this section, we will try to see if the various verbal and non-verbal folk forms are inter-related in nature and if it is through their inter-relations that they can be more meaningfully understood.

In most cases, it is found that different verbal and non-verbal folk forms are related to one another. In numerous instances, folktales or myths or other kinds of oral narratives are performed. They are generally called textual performances. The *Ram Katha* tradition in the Indian subcontinent is an example of textual performance. Textual performances are forms of story telling performed through dance and music. They are often based on texts, especially the epics. Texts are written narratives. However, they could also be based on oral narratives, i.e. folktales or myths. But the more distinguishing feature about textual performances is that the performance itself does not have any specific rule or grammar. The combination of dance, music and the story being narrated could be spontaneous or based on the needs of a given condition while being performed.

Textual performances are found in most societies in South Asia. It is generally found irrespective of the nature of the social group, i.e. whether the group is based on religion, or caste, or tribe. Textual performances emerged as one of the most popular and powerful means of popular culture during the Bhakti movement. Another kind of folk performance in which numerous other folk forms come together is in the Sufi tradition. In both *qawwali* tradition as well as *sufi-kalam* tradition, oral or textual narratives are sung and performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Trance is a part of *sufi-kalam* tradition which is based on frenzied body movements. It is believed that trance is the state where the human can spiritually unite with the divine.

In most of the popular traditions found across South Asia, there are many situations in which the strict distinctions between classical and folk forms are not maintained. Whether in textual performances or in Sufi performances elements of both folk and classical culture are used liberally. For example, in the *Ram Katha* tradition found among different caste or tribal groups in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, the liberal use of classical and folk culture can be found at three levels. In terms of the story being narrated, both the classical text (the epic) as well as local folktales on the episode of the epic being narrated could be used in the performance. In terms of music, it is found to be based on combination of

classical ragas and forms of folk music. With regard to dance, both classical and folk dance movements are used during the performance. The Satriya or the Oja Pali dance forms in this regard are based on both classical and folk traditions prevalent in the region.

Similarly, in the Sufi performances, especially qawwali, classical music (vocal) is an important component. They generally sing episodes from Quranic texts. But they also sing folktales of romance and tribal wars, such as Heer Ranjha or Laila Majnu. Traditionally, Sufi performances do not take place in mosques. The core of Sufi belief is communication of the individual with god without anyone else as an intermediary. The same could also be said of Bhakti tradition, of which the *Ram Katha* tradition is a part of. Thus, though these cultural performances use both written and oral narratives, classical and folk music or different kinds of folk music, they remain firmly rooted in the people and continue to be part of folk culture. It is to be noted here that these performances use both verbal and non-verbal cultural forms to communicate themselves to the people.

It is often pointed out that in living civilizations (i.e. civilizations with long continuous history), cultural forms exchange from one another in the course of their development. As a result, it may be difficult to identify a pure 'type' in this regard. Whether it is classical or folk, or it is verbal and non-verbal, elements of either can be located in one another. This inter-relation is part of the larger historical process of social and cultural developments among various social groups and in different regions of the subcontinent.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 100 words each.

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of each Unit.

5) In what way, according to you, different cultural forms come together in textual performances or Sufi performances?

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1.4 LET US SUM UP

In the section, (1.1.1) we have tried to know what folklore is in general and what is a folktale or a myth in particular. Folktales and myths are long narratives in the form of stories which are generally oral in nature, i.e. they are not written down. They are passed on from one generation to another verbally. Folktales and myths are sources of knowledge about the society and culture of a given community. There are many societies in the world where the oral traditions are more significant than written traditions. In such cases, tales and myths become important sources of knowledge on these societies. Different kinds of oral narratives are collectively called folklore. The other issues that were discussed

in the section were how folktale is different from myths, how folktales and myths have been classified to know their meaning and some of the problems faced in such attempts at classification. We have also tried to address the question of whether a folktale or myth can change from time to time or when it spreads from one society to another and if such changes occur, does it affect the meaning of the folktale or myth.

In the section (1.1.2), we have tried to discuss oral short narratives. There are various kinds of short narratives such as lullabies, proverbs and sayings, idioms / phrases and clauses, omens, street narratives and vows and swears. Their primary differences from long narratives like folktales and myths are that (a) they are shorter in length and (b) they are not generally organized into plot and characters, i.e. story. However, in a given community, they share the same language in terms of syntax and vocabulary and they also are based on the same social and cultural context (of the community). Thus, there are cases, as in the case of 'David and Goliath', when the same thing can be a folktale as well as a clause, both referring to the same general principle of life.

In the section, (1.2.1) we have discussed (a) what is folk dance and (b) what differentiates folk dance from classical dance. Folk dance is a dance that belongs to an entire community or a social group and in which the entire community or that social group can participate. There are different folk dances for different events or occasions. However, as we have seen above, there could be dances in which many events or occasions could come together. Folk dances differ from classical dances in terms of codified expressions or body movements and in terms of process of institutional training that is required to acquire the skills and understanding to perform the dance. However, there are some folk dances which too are based on well developed codes of movements and expressions. Therefore, there always remains the possibility a folk dance coming to be accepted as a classical dance.

In this section (1.2.2), we have tried to highlight what is folk music and what are the similarities and differences it shares with folk dance. Two kinds of similarities and differences were pointed out between folk music and folk dance. Similar to folk dance, folk music too is all those forms of music that belong to an entire community or a social group and in which the entire community or that social group can participate. Certain forms of folk music and folk dance share close relation with classical music or classical dance genres as well. The differences between folk music and folk dance are that in folk music, the role of language (due to the role of human voice) is far more important than in the case of folk dance and that this role of language allows folk music to not only refer to various actions associated with economic production or procreation as in folk dance but also to the larger philosophical ideas of life and living. Therefore, we can see that unlike in folk dance, folk music has a more organized narrative structure, i.e. a sequence in telling something. Without a narrative of some kind, it may not be possible to convey larger philosophical ideas about life and living.

In the section, (1.2.3) we have tried to discuss the non-verbal folk forms that are generally found in a society. These non-verbal forms were discussed under the three heads of folk dance, folk music and craft. One of the main reasons why they are non-verbal is because they do not rely on human language to convey their meaning. The narration is done through the form of dance or music or

through symbolisms in craft forms. In dance, the different kinds of body movements or facial expressions express the meaning of social norms and beliefs. In textiles, it is the fabric, or colour or design that indicates these aspects of the society. Similarly, in totems or masks, the thought system and practices of a community are expressed through coded signs. The only difference in this regard is folk music. Since music in South Asia has been generally based on the human voice, role of human language has remained crucial in the narration of folk life through folk music. In the other cases, as we have seen, the narration takes place through a system of signs or codes.

1.5 ACTIVITY

- Try collecting a few folk tales and some myths from your culture and see what are they to say in the light of the discussion in the preceding sections.
- Try collecting a few oral short narratives as listed in the previous section from your culture to see what they trying to convey in the light of the discussion in the earlier section.
- Try and see if you can identify inter-relations or lack of inter-relation in cultural forms that you are aware of as discussed in the section- relation between verbal and non-verbal folk forms.

1.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- 1) There are two basic differences between long and short oral narratives. Firstly, short narratives, as is evident from the terms itself, are shorter in length than long narratives. Secondly, short narratives are generally not in the form of a story that is being told to listeners. A story usually would have a plot, i.e. a beginning and an ending. Story also has characters such as hero/heroine or villain. In both folktales and myths, plot and characters can be found. However, in short narratives, plot as well as characters need not be present. Short narratives do not aim to tell a story. They are aimed at indicating or highlighting or referring to an aspect of the social life of the community. In that sense, short narratives are closer to being seen as abstractions of reality or social life than long narratives. It may be noted in this regard that in lullabies, though there could be characters, whether animate or inanimate, there are rarely any plots in which the characters are organized.
- 2) An important difference between folktales and myths is with regard to 'time'. Unlike folktales, since myths are explanations of origin of life and universe, most myths generally explain it in terms of a time sequence (giving a sequence of what happened and when it happened). For example, in the Hindu origin myths, the concept of *yugas* or ages is a specific time sequence. One of the most common origin myths in Hindu religion is that of the ten incarnations or *avatara* of the god Vishnu on earth. However, all myths do not use such an abstract concept of time. In many tribal beliefs, origin is often explained in reference to nature such as the sun, or the moon, or the wind, or water or natural phenomenon, i.e. events related to nature. The universe and life forms emerges from nature. The role of an individual or a family or a community is associated with this process of emergence and subsequent spread of human

habitation across geographical spaces. These individuals or families or communities are not historical in nature. They are creations of people's faith and their attempts at explaining the origin of life and the universe, i.e. explaining how they themselves came into existence in the world.

- 3) Two similarities and differences between folk music and folk dance can be pointed out as follows. Similar to folk dance, folk music refers to all those forms of music that belong to an entire community or a social group and in which the entire community or that social group can participate. Certain forms of folk music and folk dance share close relation with classical music or classical dance genres as well. The differences between folk music and folk dance are that in folk music, the role of language (due to the role of human voice) is far more important than in the case of folk dance and that this role of language allows folk music to not only refer to various actions associated with economic production or procreation as in folk dance but also to the larger philosophical ideas of life and living. Therefore, we can see that unlike in folk dance, folk music has a more organized narrative structure, i.e. a sequence in telling something. Without a narrative of some kind, it may not be possible to convey larger philosophical ideas about life and living.
- 4) One of the major similarities between textiles, masks and totems is that they do not rely on human language to convey their meaning. The narration is done through the symbolisms in craft forms. In textiles, it is the fabric, or colour or design that indicates these aspects of the society. Similarly, in totems or masks, the thought system and practices of a community are expressed through coded signs. The only difference in this regard is folk music. Since music in South Asia has been generally based on the human voice, the role of human language has remained crucial in the narration of folk life through folk music. In the other cases, as we have seen, the narration takes place through a system of signs or codes.
- 5) Textual performances is one of the primary forms in which various cultural forms come together, as is often seen in South Asia. For example, in the Ram Katha traditions, there is a mix of literature, especially poetry, folk and classical music and dance forms as well as puppetry. These various forms of culture are used in the performance of a text to communicate to the fullest extent the thought or interpretation of the text. Similar exchanges among more than one cultural form can also be seen in the case of Sufi music as well as some of the genres of classical music such as thumri. The extensive prevalence of such cultural exchanges in the region can be attributed to the strong simultaneity of verbal and written tradition that has historically developed in the South Asia.