
UNIT 13 FOLK MEDIA

Structure

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 The Concept of Folklore
- 13.3 What are Folk Media?
- 13.4 Role of Folk Media in Rural and Tribal Settings
- 13.5 Types of Folk Media
 - 13.5.1 Folk Dance
 - 13.5.2 Folk Theatre
 - 13.5.3 Folk Songs
 - 13.5.4 Puppetry
 - 13.5.5 Folk Art and Handicraft
 - 13.5.6 Oral Narrative Tradition
- 13.6 Effectiveness of Folk Media
- 13.7 Use of Folk Media in Training
- 13.8 Case Study
- 13.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.10 Glossary
- 13.11 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Folk media bring to our mind the images of folk dances and ballads, folk songs, puppetry, craft and oral tradition. These are the various media of the folk, the indigenous channels of communication.

Folk media have not disappeared, as many of us feared they would, in the presence of the overpowering electronic media. Rather they have been functioning effectively along with one another, reinforcing each other in the process.

Before telling you about “folk media”, this Unit introduces you to the concept of “folklore”. In order to understand “folk media”, one has to first understand the concept of folklore. This is because it is folklore that provides sustenance to the folk media.

This Unit introduces you to folk media, the role of folk media in rural and tribal settings, their effectiveness and use in training.

13.2 THE CONCEPT OF FOLKLORE

You would be surprised to know that the word “folklore” is quite new as compared to the subject matter it encompasses. It was in 1846 that William John Thomas, an English scholar, introduced the word into the English

language. That was the period when scholars became interested in tracing old customs, usages, notions, which came from the dim past and were still current among the “folk” meaning common people.

In India, we find that the study of folklore had begun in the 19th century. Many Indian scholars became interested in it and it was treated as a special subject in many journals. The journals gave special attention to myths, popular traditions and folk tales. The folklore of *Konkan*, Gujarat and Bengal were brought out.

It is interesting to know that till today, no exact agreement has been reached as to the meaning of folklore. We can discuss the meaning in the following ways:

- The common idea present in all folklore is that by tradition; something handed down from one person to another and presence by practice rather than a written record.
- In the words of Vladimir Propp, the Russian folklorist “the entire creative output of people is folklore”. Thus it involves dances, songs, legends, myths, tales, beliefs, superstitions, riddles, proverbs, art and craft.
- Folklore can be likened to language and not literature. This is because it has been invented by no one person. It has neither an author nor authors.
- Folklore changes constantly. The “folk” bring about changes in the folklore in the context of the changing times. For example, “anyone listening to folklore is a potential future performer who consciously or unconsciously will introduce changes”.

It would be useful for us to remember this process of change, the process of recreation in the folklore. It is precisely this aspect that makes the continuity in folk media possible. It’s not continuity alone, but it makes the folk media effective too.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) What is folklore?

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2) List four features or characteristics of folklore.

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13.3 WHAT ARE FOLK MEDIA?

Folk media are media of the folk— the common people. The various media that provide communication channels to the folk are: dances, theatre, song, art

and craft, puppetry, the art of story-telling. It can be correctly said that these media are “of the folk”, “by the folk” and “for the folk”.

When we say they are “of the folk”, we mean that the media belong to the folk. The media have originated with them in the context of their needs and aspirations. One example is Bhavai, the folk theatre of Gujarat. It had originated with the *Trigala* community in Gujarat and that community has been the preserver of the form. Another example is the Putkuli (Shawl) of the *Todas*. The complex combination of weaving and embroidery belongs to the *Todas*. These are the media through which the “folk” have expressed their creative need as well as the need for an inner cohesion. The various media revolve around their life-cycle and one who is born in that environment grasps it since childhood.

When we say that folk media are “by the people”, we mean that the media have not been imposed on them by an external force. The wall paintings of the *Warlis*, a tribe in Maharashtra are made by the *Warlis* themselves. Through different media of dance, song, painting, puppetry, they communicate what they feel and what they think and how they respond to their environment and experiences. It is the folklore which provides them with the environment that leads to the particular mind-set. The proverbs, the riddles form an important aspect of society. The same proverb may imply different meanings in different contexts. For instance, the proverb “It’s dark under the lamp.” means one thing in Kannada and another in Kashmiri. In Kannada, it means that the virtuous man may have vices that are hidden. In Kashmiri it means that a good king may have evil men around him. Proverbs and riddles play an important role in shaping the way people think. They are educative. All these provide seeds that help in the germination of ideas that lead to formation of the various channels of communication.

Folk media are “for the folk”. In order to understand folk dance and folk theatre, a deep understanding of the people is needed. Someone born in the environment of community dances of Punjab — Bhangra and Jhumar would be able to recognize the form the moment he/she watches it. But others may not. Others may need a guide to understand the differences. It is not merely the question of understanding it that matters. Rather it is the sense of joy one derives by experiencing it.

“For the folk” has a larger scope, a broad horizon to incorporate all those who are born outside the “folk”. When Patthe Bappurao, a brahmin high caste artiste, worked in the Tamasha theatre in Bombay (that was dominated by *Mahars* and *Mangs*), he was still somebody who came from outside the “folk”. But as a spectator, one can become a part of the experience.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) If you want to use folk media in gender training, list ways in which you can find out which folk media to use.

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13.4 ROLE OF FOLK MEDIA IN RURAL AND TRIBAL SETTINGS

Folk media, being a part of life in rural and tribal settings, have a significant role to play. We all know that the farmers in the rural areas constitute 80% of India's population. Farmers constitute innumerable groups, sub-groups based on caste, creed, religion and language. And they all differ in their behavioural pattern, the way they speak, the dress they wear, the food they eat, the houses they live in. When we get to know their world view, the things they believe in, we are struck by the uniformity which prevails in the diverse situation, i.e. the art of story-telling. For instance, when we have a look at the "origin tale" of the various communities we find the same pattern. The "folk" from all over the country, from north to south, from east and west, had visualized the earth in its beginning stages, to be filled with water. They all start narrating the tale by saying – "In the beginning, there was nothing but water" And then, there are diverse views that prevail in the uniform patterns. In rural society, various folk media are interwoven into the agricultural functions. The folk song and dance, drama and oral narrative tradition emerged out of their experiences with the environment.

When we look at the tribal belt, we find it running through all parts of India, from the Himalayas of the North-West to the eastern hills of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh; the plains of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal; the plateau of Maharashtra, Chota Nagpur, the areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh; the South-Western regions of Orissa and the coasts of the Eastern and Western ghats. The tribal belt comprises nearly 50 million people.

The major tribes of India in terms of numbers are *Bhils* (Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh), *Gonds* (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, part of Uttar Pradesh), *Mundas*, *Santals* and *Hos* (Eastern Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal), *Khasis*, *Garos* (Meghalaya), *Bodos*, *Kacharis* (Assam) and *Nagas* (Nagaland, Manipur), *Mizos* (Mizoram). There are other tribes like *Rathwas* of Gujarat, *Warli* in Maharashtra, *Korku*, *Kawar* in Madhya Pradesh, *Todas* in Tamil Nadu who are known for their distinctive economic and cultural traits.

In the pre-agricultural times, hunting-gathering tribes were spread all over the country. Even now in some pockets, we find the hunting tribes. Some examples include the *Van Vagris* in Western Rajasthan, the *Birhors* in Chhota Nagpur, the *Kanjars*, *Bahelias* in the Gangetic plains, the *Kuchbandhias* and *Pandhis* in Central India, the *Chenchus* and the *enadis* in the Eastern ghats in Andhra Pradesh, the *Kadars*, *Paniyans* in the Western Ghats in Kerala.

Economically there is also a great diversity. The *Todas* of Tamil Nadu, the *Dhangars* in Maharashtra, Karnataka and *Rabaris* in Rajasthan, the *Gujjars* in the Western Himalayas and many others in different parts of the country live by grazing animals in pastures wherever they can find them (pastoralism).

Folk media is found not only in the rural and tribal societies but also in some pockets in the urban areas. Folk media play a very important role in providing linkages with the past. The different communities have different types of songs, dances, drama, tales, legends, and myths. These give to the "folk" a

feeling of continuity, a dialogue with the past, a sense of security. In the mental – make up, this sense of security has a very significant role to play. You would understand it when you would discuss this with the older generation in the family. You would realize that you share common stories with one another, you know the common songs.

Most of the folk media have a collective format. Folk dances and folk songs, for example, illustrate this collective format. When the whole community dances together or sings together, it certainly grants them a sense of fellow feeling. It is this sense of fellow feeling that has made non-governmental organizations successful in organizing community activity in Gujarat. In Gujarat, the people participate in “Garwa” and it gives them a sense of togetherness. And this sense of togetherness has made them work harder for a cause, which they perceive as the common cause.

Each medium gives them a channel of expression. It boosts up the imaginative faculty and creativity of the “Folk”. When one grows up in an environment of creativity, it is natural that one would evolve into a creative being. Through folk media, positive values are being articulated till they became a part of the collective thought process. When we consider all these points, we certainly can say with conviction that folk media have a very significant role to play.

13.5 TYPES OF FOLK MEDIA

When we categorize the folk media into different types, we have to bear in mind that in reality a clear cut categorization is not possible. Dance, song, art and craft and drama are all integral to their life and they themselves do not separate one medium from the others.

We could have a look at them separately and we would not forget that they are but a part of the whole. For instance, *Pandav Lila* in the Garhwal region involves dance, dramatization and recitation of *Mahabharata*. All the media are used simultaneously.

The types of folk media include:

- Folk Dance;
- Folk Theatre;
- Folk Song;
- Folk Art and Craft;
- Puppetry; and
- Oral Tradition

13.5.1 Folk Dance

It is believed that among the arts, it is dance that was the first to evolve. It was even before human beings began to speak that they became aware of dance as a creative medium. It was before they found painting and song that they began to express their innermost feelings through the movement of the body.

The movement in the realm of the “folk” is highly spontaneous. If we observe the various forms of folk dance all around, we would be reminded of the various

stages of evolution. Hunt dances or dances of the food gatherers are reflective of the corresponding hunting stage in the journey of civilization. There are dances which are related to the agricultural functions, to seasons and festivals, to rites and rituals, to birth, marriage and death.

A series of festivals are held from January to December. They are held in mountain peaks, on the plains by the riverside, on the ocean beaches. In every festival, dances are being performed relating to sowing of seeds, and germination and to harvesting.

In Assam, among the agriculture communities, particularly the *Ahoms*, *Bihu* is the most important festival. It is an occasion of dancing and rejoicing. It is very interesting to know that at different stages of the cultivation of paddy, the *Bihu* festival is held. When the peasants are preparing the field, at the time of the transplantation of the paddy seedlings; and at the last stage when the harvest has been gathered.

In Punjab, we find two community dances – *Bhangra* and *Jhumar*. *Bhangra* is linked with the sowing of wheat. When the wheat crop is sown, young men gather and respond to the rhythm of the drum beats. *Jhumar* is another folk dance of the harvest seasons. When you watch *Bhangra*, you will notice that the performers do not show the movement of sowing and reaping the harvest. You will find this in the *Jhumar* dance. All the functions of daily life are shown and then there are dancers who come into the centre in pairs, and imitate the movement of the animals they rear. Two of them become bullocks in the field. The third and the fourth dancers become a plough and a farmer.

The *Kinnauris* of Himachal Pradesh perform *Losar Shona Chuksam*, a Kinnauri dance. It is fascinating to watch the Kinnaur dancers recreating all the agricultural operations of sowing and reaping barley and phaphar (a local grain.)

Another type of folk dance is the martial dance. The hill tribes of Himachal Pradesh and U.P. dance with swords. The Nagas, on the other hand, use weapons such as the javelin, spear, bow and arrow.

The sword dance of *Jaunsar Bavar* in U.P. recreates all the movement of warfare. Among the *Santals*, there are martial dances which are called *Golwari* and *Paikala*. The dance is extremely vigorous and it stirs one when one watches the men leap in mid air, wield bows and arrows, in perfect coordination and rhythm.

The martial dances are done by men alone. The acrobatic dance is also performed by men only. In Tehri Garhwal, there is the *Langvir Nritya of the Pandis*. The dancer climbs a high bamboo pole and balances himself on his stomach on top of the pole. He rotates on the pole, doing other feats with his hands and feet to the rhythm of the drum called *dhol*.

There are some dances performed by women only. The *Santhal* dances like *Dhang* and *Laghi* are by women alone. Then there is *Sua*, an interesting dance from Chhattisgarh. *Sua* is the parrot. *Sua* is the messenger of the newly wed girl whose sorrow and joy are reflected in the dance. In the Kashmir valley, we find “*Rouf*”, the folk dance restricted to women alone. It is full of mystical meanings. It is interesting to know that the dances of Kashmir though belonging to an agricultural society move around nature and are reminiscent of romantic poetry.

Religion is an important source of dance. The folk dance of Jammu called *Kud* is one of such dances. In this dance, the farmers express their gratitude to the local deity *gramdevta*. In Kumaon and Garhwal, there are communities that perform a variety of dances, which culminate in a trance. The ghost and spirit worship dances are extremely intense dances. *Pandav Jagor* is a dance form in which the epic of Mahabharata is being dramatized. The characters of Arjuna and Bhima go into a trance at the end of the dance.

There are dances that are related to the wedding ceremony and death ceremony. *Ladaladi* is a folk dance of the *Bhils* in which the bride and bridegroom are lifted upon the shoulders and others dance around the couple. *Dhurang* or *Dhuring* is a dance of the *Doms* and *Bhotiyas* in Uttar Pradesh which is connected with death ceremonies. Within a year of the death of the person, it is performed. They believe that the dance would liberate the soul of the dead person from evil spirits.

Thus we can say that folk dances are the traditional dances that developed together with the daily activities and experiences of the “folk”. These dances are highly spontaneous and participative. There is hardly any occasion that is not celebrated through dance. It is interesting to note that among most of the tribal communities, the women and men dance together. But in the rural societies, it is often the male who is the dancer.

Along with beliefs, customs, songs, these dances get transmitted to the generation ahead and provide a link with the past.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1) Mention folk dances which illustrate gender differences in performances.

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2) “Folk media play a very important role in providing linkages with the past.” Explain.

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13.5.2 Folk Theatre

Folk theatre involves the folklore in its totality. It has dance and song, proverbs, riddles, customs, humour, language, wit and wisdom, behaviour and dress of the particular folk. By folk theatre we mean the drama, dance-drama, ballads

— every form of it. When we watch folk theatre, we acquire a familiarity with the particular people, their culture. For instance when we watch *Tamasha*, the folk theatre of Maharashtra, we come to know more about the Maratha heroism, the *Peshwas*, their optimistic approach to life.

Folk theatre, like all other folk media, is highly spontaneous and participative. It is the traditional theatre — the dance-drama, the operatic ballads and folk plays which continue to entertain audiences of seven hundred thousand villages of India. It is just fascinating to know about the different folk theatres, prevailing in different parts of our country .

In North India, we find secular *Nautanki* and *Naqual* on one hand and religious *Ramlila* and *Raslila* on the other hand. *Nautanki*, an operatic drama is performed in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan. Initially this form was known as *Sangeets* meaning musicals. In the 19th century, a musician called *Shehzad Nautanki* became so popular that the form itself began to be called by the name.

It was out of ballads and recitals of bards that the *Nautanki* evolved. *Nautanki* is a blend of the Hindu-Muslim folk culture. They were mostly written in personalized urdu with a mixture of Hindi, Rajasthani and Braj. Tipu Sultan, Prithviraj Chauhan, Panna Devi, Raja Harishchandra are some of the famous *Nautankis*. *Ramlila* and *Raslila* are steeped in religion. They are operatic plays. *Raslila* is the popular love story of Krishna and Radha. The audience mostly constitutes the devotees.

In Gujarat, we find *Bhavai* which is performed during *navaratri* (nine nights coinciding with the Dussehra festival) in front of *Amba Mata*, the goddess they worship. *Bhav* means “life” or “sentiment” and *Vahi* means carrier. So *Bhavai* means “carrier of life”. There are mythological plays. And there are historical plays like Jai Singh, Shuro Rathaur. *Bhavai* generally emphasizes character acting like Chatki and Matki (two saucy wives), Teja Sethani. It is full of wit and humour and reflective of the society.

In Maharashtra, the folk theatre is known as *Tamasha*. *Tamasha* originated from satirical verses, story-telling and parody. *Lavni*, a kind of erotic song, is sung in *Tamasha*. *Tamasha* uses a mythological plot in order to say something satirical about the contemporary times. At present, there are about eight hundred full-fledged *Tamasha* troupes in Maharashtra. In 1910, Patthe Bapurao composed “ *Mumbaichi Lavni* — the ballad of Mumbai. It was a satire on Mumbai being grabbed by the machine age.

Another form of folk theatre is *Jatra* which had originated in Bengal and became equally popular in Orissa and the western part of Bihar. It was in the 15th century that the Bhakti movement swept Bengal and there were devotees singing and dancing in procession.

This singing with dramatic elements gradually came to be known as “*Jatra*” which means to go in a procession. In *Jatra* there is a character called “Vivek” meaning “conscience”. When any character does something wrong, Vivek turns up to warn him or her in song. Vivek has absolute freedom to appear in any scene. In Bengal, *Jatra* has shaped many artistic minds.

In Tamil Nadu we find *Therukoothu*, which has existed for centuries. *Theru* means street while *Koothu* means play. *Therukoothu* is essentially an operatic play. Only one-tenth of it is in prose. There are different themes built on epics

like Mahabharata, Puranas and the folk tales. The actors use head gear, crowns, jewellery and sparkling costumes and make up.

In Karnataka, the operatic dance drama is called *Yakshagana*. It is three hundred years old. It is full of valour, anger, terror. The themes used are from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas. The *Yakshagana* form has demonstrated almost all the important battles in the Mahaharata and Ramayana.

In Kashmir, there is *Bhand Jasna* that has evolved from folk tradition. *Bhand* is the clown who makes people laugh and at the same time makes them conscious of the social realities. This form makes use of dance, music, satire, clowning. It shows social evils like the cunning money lender, corrupt police, the dowry system. Some plays are about legendary heroes and lovers.

In Bihar we have the *Chhau* mask dance drama of *Seraikella*. *Chhau* means mask. It is a unique form of masked dance drama. The dancers wear a mask and utter no word. No song is sung. Only musical instruments accompany the dance drama. The dancers enact a variety of characters — animal, bird, human being, night, flower, rainbow, God. The whole body of the dancers, especially the feet have a special language.

13.5.3 Folk Songs

Folk songs accompany most of the folk dances mentioned. There are then folk singers who create songs spontaneously and then those songs become a part of the heritage and tradition of the folk of that particular region and ethnic background. There are songs for every event in life. They cut the first sheaves of harvest to a song. Birth, marriage, death – all have specific songs. India has a rich heritage of folk songs.

In Bengal, it was Rabindranath Tagore who drew the attention of the educated class to the treasure house of folk songs. It was in 1916 that he published many songs of the great folk singer, Lalou Shah, of undivided Bengal. After Tagore, Kshitmohan Sen and Muhammad Mansooruddin are the persons who did a lot of research in the field. Tagore would say about the folk singers – “Their words are very simple, and with the musical rhythm added to them, meaning acquires an unearthly radiance”. There are *Baul* songs in which the singer longs to know and merge with the ultimate being, the creator. There are songs of the boatmen which are called *Bhatiali*, songs of the cartmen known as *Bhawaiya*.

During the British rule many freedom fighters were declared outlaws. It was the folk singers who gave homage to the fighters, by creating and singing songs based on their lives. In Rajasthan, the *Bhopas*, who are the professional folk singers, sing about Dungji, a King in Sikar district of Rajasthan. Dungji, the King of a small kingdom had the courage to challenge the Britishers. There are other folk songs on other heroes like Surajmal Chauhan, Katan Singh and Raja Ranjit Singh of Bharatpur. In Bihar, there are songs on the heroic deeds of Bapu Kunwar Singh. The songs spoke of their courage and heroism and instilled hope in the minds of the folk.

Rajasthan has a rich variety of folk songs. There are songs which show the emotional life of women in their family relationships. The women folk sing the songs and keep on adding new words to the songs, words which reflect

their inner sorrow and the sense of deprivation. These songs provide an outlet to them. They have songs for every occasion. When a son is born, a song is being sung in honour of the new mother who is referred to as the Jachcha Queen. The word ‘jachcha’ means a woman at the time of giving birth.

There are women who have exposed other countries to our folk culture. We all know about Teejan Bai, popularly called “Pandavani”, who sings out and enacts different characters from Mahabharata in a perfect manner. It is amazing to watch her. By observing her, many women have gained confidence. We will read more about her in the Section 13.8 “Case Study”.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1) What role do folk songs play in the lives of the women of Rajasthan?

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2) Do you think folk theatre can be adapted for use in gender training?

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13.5.4 Puppetry

Puppetry is an ancient art form that is very close to theatrical performance. We can say that it is the indigenous theatre form of India. It has been a popular entertainment of rural Indians from time immemorial.

In India, we find four types of puppets: string puppets, shadow puppets, rod puppets and glove puppets. The traditional puppets of the South, made from leather, are some hundreds of years old and the shadow puppets of Indonesia look like them. The puppets enact the Mahabharata and Ramayana, year in and year out.

The other types of puppets found in the South are rod and string ones. There is a *Boomalattam* group of puppet players whose puppets are made from extremely heavy wood. These puppets are unique in the sense that the strings are attached to the performer’s hand while he manipulates the rods with his free hands.

In North India, puppets are made of papier mache and wood. The stories and legends are common in Rajasthan, the themes of the puppet plays are heroic deeds of warriors and princes or love romances like the story of Dhola and Maru. In almost every district of Orissa, traditional puppets perform on festive occasions.

Puppet theatre is fully integrated in the social milieu of the rural people in India. The puppet masters deal with the fundamental thoughts on the questions of life, creation and death. The puppet masters have a remarkable knowledge about the audience psychology and reach out to them with the help of their own wit and wisdom.

The traditional puppeteers are always men. The women folk help them in making the puppets, in creating the stories. They always remain in the background. In Section 13.6 on effectiveness of folk media, you would know about puppetry, how it is being used in the modern times, to make people aware of several societal problems. And in modern times, many women are being trained to be puppeteers to spread awareness among people.

13.5.5 Folk Art and Handicraft

Folk art and craft is another medium through which the “folk” especially the women express their creative needs. These artistic expressions are very much a part of their life and they brighten up the otherwise mundane activities of daily life. The folk art and craft in the form of wall paintings, textiles, wooden images, ornaments etc. reflect the highly developed sense of beauty and closeness with nature. When we have a look at the wall paintings made by different cultural groups, we would find that some of them are religious in nature while others are decorative.

In Gujarat, the *Rathwas*, the *Shilalas*, the *Naikas* paint their tribal god — the Pithura baba, on their hut walls. The *Saora* wall paintings in Orissa also have a ritual base. Among the *Warlis* in Maharashtra, the painting of the goddess of fertility was traditionally done by the *Warli* women. Among the *Chanduri* tribes in Gujarat, the ancestral worship includes painting the walls at the houses. They call it “Ghar Jamadyo” meaning offering a fast to the house. On the other hand, the wall paintings of the *Gadobas*, the *Kondhs*, the *Bhumiyas* in Orissa are more or less decorative in nature.

In northern Bihar, in the Mithila region, there is the interesting tradition of painting the walls of the nuptial chamber, with the images of the bamboo grove, the lotus plant, birds, fishes and snakes in union. It is in this chamber that the bride and groom spend three nights and it is on the fourth day that the marriage is consummated among these paintings. These paintings are always done by women.

The *Santal* huts are decorated with mostly floral designs. Daily activities are also depicted like bird trapping, hunting of animals, dancing, cock fighting. The wall paintings of the *Warlis* also reflect their daily life.

Different things are used by different groups in wall paintings. While the *Warlis* use rice flour paste, the *Santhals* use coloured earth. In their area, yellow, white and red earth – all three are available. The *Chanduri* tribe in Gujarat uses jowar flour. The *Godabas* of Orissa also use earth to paint different flowers and geometrical patterns on their walls. The huts of these groups look joyous and intimate.

The clothes worn by tribals reflect their creativity and imagination. They use colourful textiles. In Orissa, the *Dongaris*, the *Godabas*, create a range of textiles on locally fabricated looms. These textiles show their developed sense

of aesthetics. They use a rich spectrum of colours. *Santhal* textiles also use a large range of coloured threads. In the South, among the *Todas*, we find men and women wearing exquisite colourful textiles. The *Toda Putkuli* (shawl) is striking in its bold colour schemes. Both men and women wear this kind of shawl.

Among the tribes of the North Eastern region textile weaving is one of the more developed art forms. The geometric patterns and the colour they use carry specific meanings and symbols that could be understood only in their socio-cultural contexts. The motif called Japa pore, found in the textiles of the *Adi* tribe have 12 geometric patterns. It is amazing to see the textiles of the *Wancho* tribe. They have a three dimensional effect. The effect is created by the use of sharp contrasting colours. Many of the tribes have straight lines and zigzag lines which represent rivers, mountains, trees and animals.

The ornaments the various communities use are not mere items of adornment but have social, political and religious meanings. We find in Naga society that a boy receives his first ornament at the age of seven or eight. He wears a thick brass arm band called Khanshiri. He discards Khanshiri when he obtains the right to wear the Shipu (boar tusk necklace) by making payment to the village elders. Among the *Adi*, girls are given a brass disc waistband. This is replaced by a more elaborate band called beyop after the puberty ritual. Beyop is made of buffalo hide and round brass disc. Among the *Santhals* we find ornaments made from items that are provided by nature. Some of them are dry seeds, dry fruits.

Teracottas (made of earth) have always been great wealth from early times from the Harappan cities of the third millennium B.C. In various pockets, terracottas prevail. The *Gonds* of Sundergarh in Orissa make figures of pitchers, bowls, tall multilayered lamps, animals and other articles.

When we consider the art of wood carvings, we find them in the north eastern region. In Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, the art is common. Some of the motifs are: a dancing couple, dancing girls, a man in a sitting posture, women combing the hair of a man, tiger, bison etc. Certain art forms arose out of utilitarian considerations and certain art forms provided a channel for creativity and imagination.

13.5.6 Oral Narrative Tradition

Indian oral narrative tradition is the oldest in the world. The *Katha Vachana* (Story telling) and the *Katha Vachak* (Story-teller) have existed for thousands of years. It is this oral tradition to which folklore belongs. The tales, epics, songs, riddles, proverbs get transmitted to the next generation by orality. And this happens in the 1,600 dialects of the mother tongues of India.

It is significant to know that Ramayana and Mahabharata were initially in the oral tradition. They were passed on by word of mouth and it was much later that they were put into the written form. But there are “folk” who still have the epics in their oral tradition. It is simply amazing to note that some of the “folk” have the whole epic stored in their memory. The *Dungri Bhils* of Gujarat, for instance, have the whole epic of Mahabharata stored in memory. It would take them eighteen months of continuous recital to complete the recitation of the epic.

In different communities, there are story-tellers or Katha Vachaks. In Maharashtra, the *Mangs* are great story-tellers. A *Mang* man is addressed as *surata* or poet or story-tellers by other communities. So are the *Mahars*. In a similar way, the *Asadi* (priest) of *Madagi* communities are adept story-tellers.

India has a rich heritage and a variety of tales. Panchatantra, Kathasaritsagara, Jatakas, Hindu Jain Puranas are some of the sources. And moreover each region has its own epic. In Manipur, *Khamba- Thoibi* is an oral epic which has gained currency during the time of Kings. The transmission of this oral epic is found within the family, from grandfather to father to son. In the *Kumaon* hills, *Malushahi* or *Rajuula Malushahi* is the oral epic. This story is well known to the people of the region.

The oral narrative tradition grants flexibility to the text. Several versions of the epic could be heard simultaneously. In case of the *Malushahi* epic of the *Kumaon*, there are several versions, and out of these three stand out for their individual styles. It is the narrator's experience of the world that determines the content of the tale.

The Ahirs sing the oral epic *Loriki* or *Chaniani*. The Ahirs are the traditional milkmen or cowherds. There are about eight versions of the epic. The different versions have different lengths, ranging from 12 thousand lines to about 24 thousand lines to glorify, their hero Lorik, his love, his battles. Loriki is a caste epic and the narrators identify themselves with the heroic deeds.

Most of the professional singers and story-tellers are men. In some communities, women participate in the singing while the men are the lead singers. For example in Rajasthan, men and women of the Nayak caste tell the story of Pabuji, a medieval Rajput hero from Western Rajasthan. This takes place in front of Par (or long painted cloth) on which Pabuji's deeds are depicted. The male is the lead singer and he dances too while narrating the story. The women sing along and hold a lamp to illuminate the painting.

In India every cultural performance owes its existence to the oral traditions and folk forms. Mass media cannot live in a cultural vacuum. It is the folklore, the oral tradition, the various folk media that have provided the environment.

13.6 EFFECTIVENESS OF FOLK MEDIA

Folk media have been found extremely effective in contemporary times. The style of each medium has existed for centuries together but many new themes have been incorporated. The objective has been to reach out to people with new ideas and cause them to adopt the ideas as their own. For instance, to tell them about the evils of the dowry system through puppetry or song or drama and make them ponder over society and nature. The folk media, the indigenous channels of communication, have always provided ground for expressing socio-ritual moral and emotional needs of the group they belong to.

And therefore they have been proved to be effective in the context of the churning out of new ideas. The people are eager to accept them when the ideas come to them through their medium, the medium they are familiar with, the medium that belongs to them.

The Song and Drama Division of the Union Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting has been using the various media to reach out to people with new concepts and new ideas. Prohibition, eradication of untouchability, family planning, rural health systems and adult education are all common issues.

We also find other public sector enterprises using the folk media to propagate their policies like Life Insurance Corporation, Nationalized Banks. The Union Bank of India had taken the help of puppetry to convince the people how their money would be safe with the nationalized bank. It was amazing to note that within two months of the puppet shows, the rural deposit sources came into the banking fold. Apart from the public sector, there are NGOs and individuals who have taken the help of puppetry. For instance Disha, a non-profit organization based in Delhi is trying to make people aware of AIDS through puppetry. Mrs. Shreya Mangaldas of Ahmednagar has introduced puppetry in schools for its educative value.

When we look at the folk theatre forms, we find they have been of great value in churning out new ideas. *Jatra* in West Bengal, which originated in a religious need gradually changed to secular themes, historical political plays. In the early 20th century, *Swadeshi Jatra* had come into existence. Non-cooperation movement, removal of untouchability were some of the themes. At present an average *Jatra* troupe holds three hundred programmes in a year in front of an audience of seven to ten thousand in rural and urban areas.

Tamasha in Maharashtra produced plays in the 1920's for mobilizing public opinion. *Nautanki* in north India has been depicting plays through which the new values are being taken to the people. Some of the contemporary playwrights like V.D. Madgulkar, Vijay Tendulkar, Habib Tanvir, Utpal Dutt, Girish Karnad had been using elements of folk theatre. In the 1940's IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) had successfully used *Jatra* of Bengal, *Bhavai* of Gujarat, *Tamasha* of Maharashtra to increase social awareness and political education.

This is due to the inherent flexible nature of the folk media that they have been able to survive in the contemporary times. The flexibility is due to its orality. The various media have not only survived but they have been providing the basis of communication.

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

1) Why do you think folk media continue to be effective?

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13.7 USE OF FOLK MEDIA IN TRAINING

In the case study section, we would have a look at DISHA, a Delhi-based voluntary organization which uses puppetry for developmental purposes, for giving training to people. DISHA organizes workshops and provides training mostly to women.

The different themes taken up by DISHA are: 1) Environmental ethics, 2) AIDS awareness, 3) Sanitation, Cleanliness, 4) Prohibition, 5) Reproductive and child health, 6) Immunization, 7) Popularizing science through puppetry, 8) Child survival, Safe motherhood, 9) Literacy, 10) Fire safety, 11) Eye care, 12) Gandhi's messages, 13) Stories from Panchatantras, moral training and character building.

Target Group

DISHA provides training to: 1) Non-governmental organizations, 2) Community workers, 3) Youth volunteers, 4) Teachers, 5) Health Workers, 6) Auxiliary Nurse mid-wives, 7) Gram sevikas, 8) Anganwadi workers, 9) Women living in slums, villages, 10) students.

Puppets used by Disha

DISHA uses rod puppets and glove puppets because it is easy to make them and moreover it is quite easy to handle the puppets. The rod puppets are human sized.

Training

DISHA has a core group formed by the slum youth who are trained in puppet making and manipulation. This core team has been developed to train others as well as to present puppet shows. With the help of this core team, many areas of Delhi and places like Allahabad, Ghaziabad, Rohtak, Bihar and Nepal have been covered.

DISHA organizes workshops where participants from different target groups receive training in handling and manipulating puppets as a means of communication. In the workshop, the theme is first introduced. Before giving training to the participants, their awareness is assessed. And then, the areas are identified where specific information is needed. In areas, where alcoholism is a major problem, the prime messages are modified accordingly. The participants are introduced to puppetry: history, types of puppets, role of puppets in communication and role of folk media. And then, they are encouraged to participate, so that they can take the show to their specific areas and spread awareness.

13.8 CASE STUDY

In the present time, we have Teejan Bai who is a perfect story-teller who narrates the whole Mahabharata enacting different roles simultaneously.

Teejan Bai

Teejan Bai, the Pandavani artiste from Chhattisgarh, is an inspiring force to a great number of women. Pandavani means the story of the Pandavas. Pandavani is the ballet form of singing in which the performer enacts the scenes and events from Mahabharata. Teejan Bai was the only woman performer when she began her Pandavani. Today there are about fifty women who, inspired by her craft of story-telling, began to tell tales from Mahabharata. But, as Teejan Bai says, only a few of them could master the art. Pandavani is very long. Mahabharata, the world's longest epic has about 100,000 stanzas. Teejan Bai, who cannot read or write, has the whole of the epic stored in her memory. She

says that if she held a four-hour long programme, each day for three months, then only she could complete it.

As a child, she had to go to the jungle along with other family members to cut wood and she used to make baskets. She was extremely interested in folk tales. Her maternal grandfather, Brij Lal Pardhi, who was a well-known folk singer in the Chhattisgarh region, provided a role model. She used to listen to him and used to copy him. It was he who provided the initial training. She was fifteen when she made her first stage appearance in a village. She performed for 18 days continuously. And then it all began, travelling from one village to the other, telling the tales of Mahabharata.

When she was invited by Mrs. Indira Gandhi to Delhi to perform, she drew the attention of the whole country. She held the audience spell-bound and the vibrant narrations in her typical folklore style won the hearts of not only her country people but also people in other countries. She has performed in festivals of India in Moscow, Switzerland, Paris. She uses the *Kapalik Shaili* which involves gestures to illustrate the tale. By movements and gestures, she mesmerized the audience even though they did not understand a single word. She was honoured with the Padma Shri in 1988. She also received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award for her contribution to Pandavani.

She had a very disturbed family life but the folk medium gave her immense strength to face life. Her story now inspires many women and as she says “When I was thirteen and interested in folk tales, my mother used to beat me. Today in Chattisgarh, when girls are not interested in housework, people smile and say Teejan Bai was also like this.”

13.9 LET US SUM UP

Folk media are of and by the “folk” – the common people. Analyzing the Unit will introduce you to folk media used/performed/created by only men or only women or by both. This is an interesting study you can pursue further in your own area.

Folk media can be relevant for gender training. Using the traditional form we can adapt them to the modern themes especially in rural areas. This can be very effective in reaching out to rural women.

13.10 GLOSSARY

Folklore	: Traditional customs, usages, motions
Folk media	: Theatre, song, dance, emerging from folklore, art puppetry, story telling etc.

13.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Folklore relates to indigenous channels of communication. Folk media are based on folklore – the customs, festivals, usages, notions of the common people.

- 2)
 - i) The common idea present in all folklore is that by tradition; something handed down from one person to another and presence by practice rather than a written record.
 - ii) In the words of Vladimir Propp, the Russian folklorist “the entire creative output of people is folklore”. Thus it involves dances, songs, legends, myths, tales, beliefs, superstitions, riddles, proverbs, art and craft.
 - iii) Folklore can be likened to language and not literature. This is because it has been invented by no one person. It has neither an author nor authors.
 - iv) Folklore changes constantly. The “folk” bring about changes in the folklore in the context of the changing times. For example, “anyone listening to folklore is a potential future performer who consciously or unconsciously will introduce changes”.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1)
 - i) Discuss with rural women about the folk media they are familiar with.
 - ii) Have focussed group discussions with local trainers or resource persons on relevant folk media and how they have been used.
 - iii) Find out how to go about preparing appropriate drama. You can use local weaving to prepare designs or scenes relevant to the lives of the women. For example Adithi, an NGO in Bihar has trained women to prepare wall hangings depicting female foeticide.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) The martial dances are done by men alone. The acrobatic dance is also performed by men only. In Tehri Garhwal, there is the *Langvir Nritya of the Pandis*. The dancer climbs a high bamboo pole and balances himself on his stomach on top of the pole. He rotates on the pole, doing other feats with his hands and feet to the rhythm of the drum called *dhol*.

There are some dances performed by women only. The *Santhal* dances like *Dhang* and *Laghi* are by women alone. Then there is *Sua*, an interesting dance from Chattisgarh. *Sua* is the parrot. *Sua* is the messenger of the newly wed girl whose sorrow and joy are reflected in the dance. In the Kashmir valley, we find “Rouf”, the folk dance restricted to women alone. It is full of mystical meanings. It is interesting to know that the dances of Kashmir though belonging to an agricultural society revolve around nature and are reminiscent of romantic poetry.

- 2) Folk media actually record the history of a community, their shared past, their feelings, attitudes, religious beliefs. They are, therefore, vital in giving a sense of belonging, commonality, continuity.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- 1) Rajasthan has a rich variety of folk songs. There are songs which show the emotional life of women in their family relationships. The women folk sing the songs and keep on adding new words to the songs, words

which reflect their inner sorrow and the sense of deprivation. These songs provide an outlet to them. They have songs for every occasion. When a son is born, a song is sung in honour of the new mother who is referred to as the Jachcha Queen. The word 'jachcha' means a woman at the time of giving birth.

- 2) Yes, if we use the traditional form innovatively. Using the typical costumes, dialogue and rationale we may be able to manage an effective theatre presentation. But care has to be taken that there is no lack of relevance or that there is nothing offensive.

Check Your Progress Exercise 5

- 1) Answer based on your experience and/or readings. Your answer should reflect the current use of folk media in training situations particularly use of folk media such as theatre, songs.