
UNIT 2 ORAL, PERFORMATIVE AND KNOWLEDGE- BASED

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit the student will be able to:

- describe the various forms of tradition;
- discuss the genres of Oral Tradition in detail;
- identify and classify aspects of performance in tradition i.e. music, dance, theatre and games; and
- classify knowledge based traditions.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Tradition can be described as the culturally sustained, repeated pattern of behaviours, beliefs or enactments that are passed down from one generation to

another. Folklorists have maintained an interest in those traditions that are orally transmitted. However tradition can cut across performance genres and also be based on knowledge production and transmission. The term 'tradition' elicits a variety of responses. One definition deems tradition as being essentially passed down from one generation to the next with little or no change in the transmission.

However, in the latter part of the twentieth century many folklorists have asserted that tradition entails a complex set of relationships between the past and the present. This is also defined as an adjective in relation to many genres such as 'traditional narrative' or 'traditional belief'. In this definition it becomes clear that tradition represents a set of preexisting values and materials particular to one genre that has been passed down from one generation to another.

Tradition maintains a connection between the past and the present. This links both the past and the present and forms a person's identity. Tradition is group based and community oriented. It manifests itself through various forms and can be divided into three main categories:

- 1) Oral
- 2) Performative
- 3) Knowledge based

However one should understand that tradition does entail some innovation and deviations from the original always are maintained. An item becomes a tradition through the passage of time and is also subject to group dynamics. In some cases, such as that of college students, certain vocabulary, greeting gestures, etc. becomes a part of the tradition rather quickly.

Tradition consists of several features that can be identified with specific groups. Tradition gives meanings to present institutions and practices. They represent some kind of continuity and collective ownership. Let us now discuss the various categories of tradition in detail.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

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

1) Define tradition.

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2.2 ORAL BASED TRADITION

Oral based tradition emphasizes a specialized language or an idiom as the basis for performance. This can be seen in jokes, riddles, poetry, ballad, narration, legends, tales and myths. The performer maintains fluent and comprehensible compositions. Given below are the features of the various oral tradition forms.

2.2.1 Jokes

This is a form of a stylized verbal, visual or physical performance or utterance that is meant to provoke laughter and is humorous. This often takes the form of oral narratives that are brief and short, including tall tales (tales of exaggeration), comic anecdotes, humorous riddles or humorous folktales. Jokes are often short -consisting of a few lines and are often used in conversation. They can be said unintentionally or intentionally between two or more persons. Jokes are often spoken, written or gestured and are performed in small or large groups. They are often passed down from one person to another. Electronic forms of communication, including SMS and email often facilitate the passing of jokes one to another without any ownership.

Jokes often display power relations between two groups one having the upper hand and the other being the butt of ridicule. For example, in India we have a large number of jokes on various communities, making them the hapless victims of circumstances. This a common feature in many cultures, for example in America there is a long history of Pollack jokes, cross-culturally; we come across several jokes on different communities and religions.

Jokes can be related to the processes of life and often reflect social and kin structures. For instance we often come across jokes between the husband and the wife or the school teacher and a student. It establishes social propriety and decorum, enhances group identity, releases work related tension and enables social bonding. They enhance social solidarity and harmony. Jokes are also a way of destabilizing the social order.

2.2.2 Riddles

This can be defined as traditional enigma and puzzles. A riddle consists of description and a referent a question and an answer. Often an uncertainty in the description adds to the fun and makes it less obvious to the listener. The riddle often contains a metaphor that asserts cultural symbols. Concealment becomes one of the most parts of a riddle. The ultimate purpose of the riddle is to provide some knowledge or moral instruction in an amusing manner.

Its construction is often neat and imaginative and the element of mystery gives it a special meaning. The Indian tradition of riddles is very ancient and can be seen in the *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata*. The stories of the riddles of *Yaksha* asking questions to Yudisthar are very famous, which is a very important part of the *Mahabharata*. We can see many riddles in Indian folklore. In the *Tulu* dialect for example we come across the riddle, “I threw away gold and swallowed silver” which means the plantain tree. In Assamese it is said that an implement that cuts the wood without getting separated which means the axe. In Hindi we have another riddle that says “*katore main katora, beta baap se bhi gora*”. This means a cup inside a cup, son fairer than the father, which indicates a coconut.

Riddles hence reinforce culture and are based on the material life of the people. This figures in everyday expression of the people and it integrates people into the society.

2.2.3 Proverbs

This is a concise traditional statement expressing some kind of truth. These are short statements that contain wisdom, truth, morals and traditional world views that are handed down orally from one generation to another. They contain many poetic features, for example in Hindi we have a proverb that says “*meri billi mujse meow*” which means that my cat says meow to me which means that someone who talks back. We also have many proverbs in English such as “first come, first served”, “once bitten twice shy”, or “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

These are called *takia kalaams* in Hindi and we often see that relatively elderly members of the society make frequent use of the proverbs. Many of the proverbs are concerned with relationship between family members such as mothers-in-law and daughters in law and brother in laws and sisters in law. They exhibit tendencies of mutual love, sympathy, quarrel and envy. Several proverbs also refer to the status of the wife, for instance we come across proverbs such as “*Joru Jor Ki, nahin Kisi aur ki.*”

Social control and change are also reflected in the proverbs and we can see many proverbs on corruption, bravery personal pride etc. Proverbs thus can stand by themselves quite understood by the narrator. They add color and expressiveness to oral communication and can often be a humorous, ironic and satirical comment.

Case study: proverbs in Orissa folklore: Society is nothing but a system of relationships of a variety of persons composing it. Our ancestors believed that society was created by God who delegated his powers to the king. Disobedience to king was considered equivalent to disobedience to God. Individuals gave up many of their rights and privileges to the king in exchange of security, who, however oppressive he might be, was a lesser evil than the enemy. Leaders of the society, trying to play the puritan, sometimes acted in the most inhuman way. Some people were excommunicated. Thus many of the aspirations of the people were crushed under the wheels of social law.

Basic urges and interests of men are similar. But they are modified by social and cultural influences of primary groups of which the most familiar types are represented by family, caste, community or neighbourhood. In process of socialization, the child accepts the behaviour patterns, the values and ideals of the family group. The economic, the intellectual, the moral and aesthetic traditions play a part in moulding his character.

The society we notice in proverbs of Orissa is a feudalistic one dominated by kings, nobles and priests. Ideal characters such as those of great conquerors, famous heroes, poets, philosophers, artists or sculptors are rarely depicted. We come across mostly common people who are critical about one another.

We notice a procession of hundreds of these humans in proverbs the kind being whimsical and foolish, the money-lender miserly and hateful, the mother-in-law willful and arrogant, the daughter-in-law sad but revengeful, the neighbour

unsociable and quarrelsome. They appear in all their clearness of shape and freshness of colour, babbling with joy and murmuring with hope or pale with strokes of hard sufferings. Being lively in the lips of the traditional reciters they land as in a world of every-day experiences of the common man.

Every village has, to its credit, a number of intelligent men and women. Proverb or Dakbachan is their creation. It is neither philosophy, nor poetry nor any moral propaganda though its educative value is immense. It was created in some particular situation in connection with a particular person. But it was so remarkable that people remembered it and used it in connection with any man in the same situation. It carried the wisdom of its creator for ages, passed through hundreds and thousands of lips, but never lost its freshness and beauty. A proverb displays sharp intelligence, broad outlook, strong common sense, power of generalization and the intimate knowledge of life and the living world. Some commonly used proverbs in Orissa are:

Chhata regarding co-wife-

Is my luck so bad?
That I had to deal with a nine-lipped co-wife!

If this be given to the dark-skinned first wife my
beautiful second wife will get angry.
Given to the fair-coloured, the lady of black complexion
will be provoked
Let this be with me.
When the fair lady will prepare my bed for sleep.
I shall present it to her.
All the four quarters be scented.

Regarding worthlessness and vileness of Daughter-in-Law-

Mark your naughty daughter,
She breaks scores of pots and pitchers.

The daughter-in-law is of low family,
She came only yesterday, but mark her haughtiness.

Fie on you. Don't you get a rope of one cubit to hang
Yourself?
That widow mother had such a worthless daughter!
Why does she not drown herself in a pit?

All members of the family have been reduced,
But the daughter-in-law who cooks food has become
very fat.

Regarding Worthless Husband-

Husband's impotence makes the wife sleep in the jungle
Tankei Sahoo, the effeminate is ever elbowed by his
wife.

Rice without any curry is even inadequate for my meal.

Why have I married this worthless husband?

He cannot fight with a soldier,
Speaks highly of his valour before his wife.

(quoted from, Dos, K.B., Folklore of Orissa)

2.2.4 Gossip and rumors

People always make an effort to explain uncertain or unknown events. Gossips and rumors emerge usually after a breakdown of normal communication occurs. This is hence a specific kind of belief that is passed down from person to person by word of mouth and is not usually based on concrete evidence. Often rumors are associated with certain legends. For example, there is a rumor that if a cat crosses a path of a person it will bring bad luck. Most of the rumors and gossips are brief and usually contain unverified information.

Gossip is a kind of a communication that discusses the behaviour, character or situation of others. Often it questions morality and judgments are made. It often projects the interests of a single person and becomes the center of attention. Often it is used in political propaganda; this can be seen in the propaganda policies of the Nazis in World War II. It often targets or makes groups or individuals victims or targets.

2.2.5 Ballads and epic poetry

Ballads are a narrative song that characterize on a single episode and has some elements of dialogue and action and is rooted in repetitions. They often tell a story, legend or tale. They are often set in meter and poetic form and have certain melodies and rhythms. They are often sung and sometimes have little to do how the story is shown. They are often descriptive and have narrative images and heavily rely on repetition. Ballads greatly depend on style and they tend to be descriptive.

Ballads often use descriptive imagery and they also have several metaphors. There is also a deep interaction between the community, ballad story and the performer. The interaction between the story and the action of the ballad carries the story further with its stylistic form of narration.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are two very famous folk epic ballads. Ballads often form a part of the popular literature. There are many ballads that emphasize bravery and these are known as “*panwara*”. Usually a ballad starts with an invocation to the gods and goddesses. Many of the regional folk theatres of northern India such as *Nautanki* and *Saang* use folk ballads that also frequently use the film tunes in the form of parodies.

Ballads reflect the thinking about gods and goddesses and also many stories of myth and romanticism are linked with it. Historical components also form the basis of the texts. Local regional ballads of India are combined with the story of bravery and romanticism. Many emotions such as love, jealousy, hatred, envy, sacrifice and sympathy are displayed in them. Let us now discuss *Dhola Maru* a very famous folk ballad as a case study:

2.2.6 Dhola Maru

This is a poetic narrative containing long multi episodes and is very popular in the region of Rajasthan. It is said here that the king Pratham had 101 wives of which the youngest and the first wife Manjha had children. This makes the co-wives jealous and Manjha bears her son Nala in the forest. Nala faces several ordeals and in the first part of the *Dhola Maru* he marries Gajmotin and Nagande. Gajmotin with her magical powers helps Nala to overcome his problems and he finally meets his father, Pratham who hands him his kingdom.

In the second part of the *Dhola Maru*, Nala marries Damayanti and loses his kingdom to a game of dice and serves his life as an oilman. He begets a son Dhola who marries Maru. Dhola gathers information about his loved one with a help of parrot, Heeraman. Dhola faces several obstacles in his way when he tries to unite with Maru that he overcomes with magic. After many plots and subplots of his co-wives and sisters of Maru, Taro and Rewa, Dhola finally unites with his wife Maru.

2.2.7 Oral narratives: legends, myths and tales

Amongst the various components of folklore, folk narrative occupies a very important position. Prose narratives are capable of intense communication as it is written in regional languages. Legends are short, oral prose narratives, created by the people and passed from one generation to another. The stories are rather unusual, extra normal, fantastic or metaphysical. The bearers of such legends identify them as an account or a chronicle. The Grimm brothers collected several legends.

The legend has no definitive text and is often a part of informal communication. They often are ordinary situations with an extraordinary twist. They emerge out of social contexts and interactions and their themes are varied such as murder, violence, revenge, warnings, pleasant surprises, embarrassing situations and practical jokes. They have no single meaning and can be informative and entertaining.

Myth is a narrative defining cultural and religious beginnings. These refer to the beginnings in a sacred sense. Myths have heroes and archetypes and are often coded with metaphors. Myths are often held as true by the members of the society. They are also sacred and follow a mystical and poetic language.

Popular myths in India are divided into three categories. They deal with mythical gods, goddesses and sages. Many of the myths of our country are about the Gods like Shiva and Vishnu. We come across many accounts about the marriage of Shiva or the birth of his sons Ganesha and Kartikeya. Many stories about the goddesses Lakshmi, Parvati and Saraswati are popular. Many popular myths also refer to the *Satparishis* or the seven sages.

Many narratives pertain to the origin of towns and places. For example, the town of *Meerut* refers to the Demon Mai and Mandodari, the wife of Ravana and the daughter of Mai. Meerut is closely connected with the Mai Rastra(kingdom of Mai). The place of *Kurusshetra* is associated with battle field where the Kauravas are said to have fought with the Pandavas.

There are many myths connected with places of worship and religions. Many pilgrim spots are said to cure and reward persons. For instance, it is popularly believed that the Dargah of Kwaja Mouninuddin Chisti at Ajmer cures illnesses. There are many narratives regarding historical incidents like that of the Mughal King Akbar and Aurangzeb. The adventures of Jhansi Rani Laksmi Bai and Haadi Rani are very popular.

Another popular form of narrative texts is folktales that can be described to be a narrative plot that presents an outline of events. There are many variations found in the plot which has many genres like animal tales, magic tales, romantic tales and humorous tales. The tales do not rest on a single plot and have many episodes and sequences of events.

The folktales are popular and they serve the purpose of entertainment and amusement. They deal with various problems of human life, social customs and traditions, taboos and sanctions, folk beliefs (omens and superstitions) blessings and curses. The fables reflect upon the morals and characters of human beings, behaviour patterns, tact and wisdom and the ideals of life.

A large number of sayings and proverbs are also found in the tales and some reflect upon social and familial relations like between parents and children, husband and wife and in-laws. The characters in the folktales include both animate and inanimate objects. Often we see stories that deal with material objects such as water, stone, trees, clouds and sticks.

The *Panchatantra* is an example of very popular form of folktales and it has traveled endlessly all over the world. We often find humorous stories about Akbar and Birbal, Tenali Ram in southern India and Mulla Nasruddin. Many narratives popularly called the *Tota Miana ke Kisse* depict stories about wives and husbands.

2.2.8 Tongue twisters

This is a sentence that requires agility in articulating words of similar sounds at rapid rate. For example, a very popular tongue twister is “She sells sea shells on the sea shore.” Another famous example is “*kaccha Pappad Pakka Pappad*” in Hindi. One more tongue twister is “*Chand ke Chacha ne chand ki chachi ko chandni raat mein chandi ki chammach se chutney chatayi*”. This seems to flourish among the children who delight in challenging one another to demonstrate their speaking ability. The challenge is to say it several times as quickly as possible. Some twisters are in the form of an answer and question. Often people, especially children delight most when a pronunciation error occurs.

2.2.9 Folk speech

This is the expressive language of any group that shares a number of local cultural traits. Usually we can define this as modifying the dominant language by the peculiarities of sound usage, word shape, word order and sentence structure. This involves the use of narratives, songs, riddles and non standard vocabulary. Sometimes folk speech is also defined as “dialects”. We also find folk names for animals, fishes, insects and plants. Also in this field of interest is nicknaming and pet names given to domestic animals.

Tradition not only manifests itself in oral forms but also takes the form of performances that can be seen dance, theatre, song and games. The next section

will discuss the performative nature of tradition. Performance can be pure and classical as well as folk. The next section will deal exclusively with the folk genres for the purpose of this course and will not touch on pure and classical forms.

Check Your Progress

Notes: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

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

2) Define legend.

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2.3 PERFORMATIVE

What is a performative? Performance is an important component among the many expressions of folk culture. Performance indicates a heightened activity, usually separated from day-to-day life, but not always. Performance is usually defined as a repeated type of behaviour, which means that it is stylized, and fixed in some ways. Performance is also connected with rituals and seasonal festivals, and links communities in a variety of ways. Performance creates a shared cultural space and a means of cultural transmission through shared activities. Let us now examine some types of performances.

2.3.1 Folk performances: folk dance

Folk dance is said to belong to a specific strata of society that is culturally bounded and regionally defined; these dances are created and choreographed anonymously and passed down in tradition from generation to generation. They exist in many variants and are performed by un-self conscious, non professional dancers that often have some functional purposes such as religious rites, ceremonies and initiations or the promotion of social cohesion or cultural identity. One cannot give any one accepted definition of folk dances. We can say that folk dance is an authentic representation of an ancient heritage and cultural identity of a nation. Many define folk dances as national dances or primitive dances. Folk dances exist in societies where pure and classical art forms exist. Sometimes folk dance develops in strong associations with the old heritage as opposed to modern forms. Folk dances are also used to support national and cultural identity.

Generally people nourish a wrong notion that folk dance means that of the village life. Folk dance comprises of dances of the common people inhabiting both the

urban and rural areas. This is maintained with great fluidity without the aid of any traditional teacher or guru. It is also present in the everyday existence of man. Many folk dances are prevalent in India. We also see a great impetus being provided for them by the government of India. We see that every year during Republic day on 26th January several displays of folk dances take place in India Gate in front of several hundred people.

One can see the influence of the natural environment on the movements of the dance. For example, we see in Manipur in the Pung Chalom or drum dance, there are many abrupt sittings and vigorous swaying of the upper body. The abrupt sittings symbolize the uprooting of the trees and the agitated movements of the upper body represent the swaying of trees. One finds the dances of the plains much milder in comparison. We also find in the dances of the jungle tribes the enactment of tigers, wolves and elephants.

The folk dances of India are well known for their religious content, lyrical themes, vitality, enthusiasm and their intrinsic beauty. They are marked by their own artistic taste of color, dazzle of ornaments, rhythmic body movements, tender and nimble steps and judicious selection of costume, décor, masks and make up.

2.3.2 Folk theatre

Folk theatre can be defined as performances that deploy recognizably dramatic techniques in the presentation of traditional material. Many regional and local theatrical styles have emerged that have thematic components. They could be the dance dramas like that of the *Kutiyattam*, *yaksagana* or street theatre like that of *tamasha*, *Bhavai*, *Nautanki* and *terukootu* or ritual festivals like *ramalila* and *raslila*. They are often a part of the local culture and are often performed by non professional as well as professional castes and communities.

These dramas are performed as spectacular displays and are often associated with rituals, customs and have quasi religious status. They are often combined with human life cycle (death birth and maturity), agricultural events, and proceedings dealing with social, cultural and political changes. Many of them such as the Jatra are purely for entertainment. Many of these performances take the form of a parade or a procession. The traditional theatrical forms of India have elaborate costumes, stylized masks, characteristic dialogues, set movements, instrumentation and music.

The next section will discuss *chhau* of Jharkhand and Orissa as a case study:

2.3.3 Case study: *Chhau*

Chhau involves basic martial art techniques and is performed traditionally by males belonging to the three contiguous States of Jharkhand (Seraikela), Orissa (Baripada) and West Bengal (Purulia). While these three forms have the same basic stances, modes of expression and basic expressive symbols, there are some basic differences between the three forms. *Chhau* of Seraikella utilizes masks of soft tonal qualities almost looking graceful. The soft masks give it grace and a “feminine” quality. At the same time, since these masks make facial gestures impossible, it therefore involves elaborate footwork. The Mayurbanj *Chhau* on the other hand, does not use masks at all and lays more emphasis on facial expressions. The dramatic form of *Chhau* parallels the *Kathakali*, another all male martial art dance drama of southern India.

The techniques of Chhau are also based on basic principles of the *Natya Sastra*. However, *Chhau* does not use any set codification unlike some the classical forms like *Bharatanatyam*, *Kuchipudi* or *Kathakali* of the south. The basic steps involve imitation of nature. The basic plots of the dramatic form are taken from Hindu mythology, religion and history, for example *Chandrabhaga* (depicting love of the moon), *Ratri* (a love story between the moon and night) and *Meghdoot* (based on a popular Sanskrit play written by the playwright *Kalidasa*).

Chhau is associated with a major ritual festival of Eastern India, the *Chaitra Parva* (spring festival), held in the month of *Chaitra* or April. The *parva* has rituals that honor the Hindu god Shiva, the lord of destruction, of the Hindu pantheon. The festival is held over thirteen days involving the *Chhau* performances in the evenings of the days of the rituals, barring some specific days and thirteen men of some specific communities or the *Bhaktas*, the devotees, perform these rituals.

The dance drama is said to have evolved from local martial art dances (*Parikhanda Khela*) involving swordplay in the princely states of these Eastern regions around the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The warriors of the royal princely houses of *Singhbhum* and *Manbhum* dynasties (eighteenth century to early twentieth century) employed the techniques of the martial arts or *Parikhanda khela*, and used them to dramatize narratives. The royal princes of the *Manbhum* and the *Singhbhum* dynasties remained the major patrons of this form before Independence. They were not only instrumental in keeping the tradition alive by active support by funding the form, but also by being participants as performers.

2.3.4 Folk music

This can be defined as tunes that are sung with or without verbal texts, or played on instruments in folkloric performance settings. This can also be defined as the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. This involves a process that entails continuity, variation and communal selection. They seem to exist among a homogenous group of non elite people within a regional or local community.

Folk music has led to the development of ethnomusicology as a separate discipline and field of study. The folksongs are the songs of the unlettered and anonymous people. They are largely subject to oral transmission. Many of them are associated with rituals, fairs and festivals and also form a part of the popular worship.

We also find a large number of children's songs that are folk in content. They are small repetitive lines that provide temporary pleasure. They are also from a part of the games played by the children, which will be discussed later. Many of the songs contain nonsense words and amuse the children. Children's lullabies also form an important part of children songs. One example from northern India is given below:

Chanda mama door ke
Pooye Pakaye Poor ke
Aap Khaye Thali main
Munne Ko de Pyaali main
Thaali gayi Phoot
Munna gaya rooth

My moon uncle so far away
Is making pooris for me
He eats in big plate
While he gives the child in a small cut
The big plate breaks
And the child is sad

Women’s folk songs are concerned with social rites and ceremonies like births and marriages. Many mourning songs are also sung during the death of someone. The women also sing work songs that might pertain to domestic duties like grinding of the wheat, cooking and working on the spinning wheel. These are called “*Charkhi ke Geet*”. Many festival songs are also sung. During the rainy season and during the *Teej* festival in northern India many *Sawan* songs are sung. During the birth of the male child songs are sung.

Men sing songs of bravery and work songs while doing agriculture. Many specific castes and communities in India sing their own special songs. For instance, the labourers sing cane crushing songs or *Kolhu ke geet* that also serves as pastimes. Many of them are philosophical and refer to god and his creation of the universe. Many songs reflect the incidents from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

The folk songs reflect the social condition of the people. They also emphasize the virtues of morality and express the sentiments of bravery, courage, will power and determination.

2.3.5 Folk games

These can be said to be a form of play that has its own rules that is done during leisure and done for amusement. It might involve an equipment or sometimes some skill and knowledge. The examples of these games include chess, chasing and fighting games, cards and some popular Indian games like *kabadi* and *Pittu*. They could involve some action like hand clapping games played by children or jumping the rope and skipping. Many board games have also originated in India like *Saap Seedhi* or snakes and ladders.

Some games are seasonal like the games played during the rainy season or snow ball fighting. Many variations to games occurs like the game “oranges and lemons” are played all across the world. Another popular game is also hop-scotch which is played all over India.

Check Your Progress

- Notes:** 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.
3) Give examples of performative tradition.

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2.4 KNOWLEDGE BASED TRADITION

Tradition also takes the form of knowledge base. This will be discussed in detail in the next section. Knowledge can be transmitted by memorized stories, by traditions passed down by elders, through apprentice and initiation. It is also present in belief systems, and other practices. Tradition largely deals with magical and mnemonic devices which are based on the experience and the beliefs of the people. The next section will discuss folk belief.

2.4.1 Folk belief

This leads to production of knowledge. This can be described to be superstition, popular belief, magic supernatural tales, folk medicine, folk religion, omens, charms and taboos. Superstitions are traditional expressions that are said to have certain conditions and results (for example if milk boils over it will bring bad luck, etc.). This indicates to something that has not happened might just happen. Traditional knowledge based beliefs can help to study human behaviour. This is largely based on two major categories:

Magical formulae indicate to some hidden powers in situations that can be seen in the powers of Devi-shakti or goddesses or that of saints or peers. This can include sorcery, witchcraft and divination activities. All this leads to the folk belief.

Folk belief also contains many mnemonic formulae that are based on the experience of the people and which deal with the routine life of man. They include tact and wisdom, social behaviour, omens and taboos, weather conditions etc. They help in social control and are the regulators of conduct.

Magical Formulae: The folk knowledge divides the religious world into both the sacred and the profane. While the sacred world deals with the concepts of soul, birth and rebirth, gods and goddesses, the profane deals with sorcery, white and black magic and witchcraft. In India we see the practice of witchcraft amongst certain set communities like the *Ojha*, *Maulvi* etc. In India we see that a witch is believed to cause sickness, bad luck and unhappiness. The influence of these witches is undone by the Shamans. Many *Bhagats* serve as sorcerers and shamans. They are said to possess *Siddhi* or perfection over the powers of the goddesses. Often the temple priests or the Pandas are said to know many magical devices or Totkas that can help the people in times of distress.

The use of charms, spells, amulets and talismans are very popular. Many magical devices such as *mantras*, *tantras* and *yantras* that are associated with hymns and incantations are also used in aiding the process of magic. Appeasing the gods to control another person, attract others, causing financial or physical loss and removing evil influences are done with the help of magical devices.

2.4.2 Folk medicine

These can be termed as unofficial health practices and beliefs that are found in all societies. These can be either religious (the use of prayer for healing) or material (a belief that eating curds in the night will cause cold or eating ginger with honey to cure sore throats). Folk medicine should not be seen as “false” since they are helpful in many cases. Modern, sophisticated medicines all have developed from

folk ones. Many folk medicines such as magnetic therapy, *Yunani*, and *Ayurveda* are very popular in our country.

Folk medicines are born with the interaction of local, indigenous traditions with the dominant national culture. It is very sad that folk health traditions are not given official standing and often lack formal authority on its own. They also tend to rely heavily on oral traditions and it often combines natural elements such as herbs, massage and dietary rules with supernatural elements such as efficacy of prayers, witchcraft and evil eye.

Check Your Progress

Notes: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

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

4) What is folk medicine?

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2.5 LET US SUM UP

Tradition is culturally transmitted and substantiated within a society. It belongs to each and every member of the society without which the society will lose its meaning. Folklore studies have deeply led to the studies in tradition and have been subject to large number of interpretations. Tradition in folklore is largely seen as being something oral and communicated between members of a group. Tradition is much larger than just being oral based. It also entails performance and knowledge production. One can define belief systems and performance of music, song and dance as largely falling within the realm of tradition.

Tradition is recognized by the oral, knowledge based as well as the performative genres. This does represent some kind of innovation and continuity. Alterations to traditions often occur, however the essence of them remain the same and consistent throughout. This is a connection between the past and the present and is symbolically constructed. We can conclude and say that tradition represents a core set of practices or beliefs based on a connection with past practices and beliefs which are largely accepted by group members and fulfill a certain role in creating a homogeneous identity.

2.5.1 Reading list

- 1) Green, Thomas. *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art*. ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, 1997.
- 2) Arya, S.P. *A Sociological Study of Folklore: Projected Research in Kuru Region*. Indian Publications Folklore Series: Calcutta, 1975.

- 3) Banerji, Projesh. *Aesthetic of Indian Folk Dance*. Cosmo Publications: New Delhi, 1982.
- 4) Bhagat, Durga. *The Riddle in Indian Life, Lore and Literature*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay, 1965.
- 5) Gargi, Balwant. *Folk Theater of India*. Rupa and Co.: Calcutta, 1991.
- 6) Vatsayan, Kapila. *Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams*. National Book Trust: New Delhi, 1980.

2.5.2 Activities

- 1) Give examples of any two riddles or jokes that you might recollect.
- 2) Give an example of any folk song or lullaby that your mother or elder has sung to you.
- 3) How did your town/city/province/village gets its name and explain its historical significance.
- 4) Give an example of any superstition or household cure for any disease that you might know.
- 5) The Mahabharata is a great epic ballad. Do you agree with this statement?

2.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- 1) Tradition can be described as the repeated pattern of behaviours, beliefs or enactments that are passed down from one generation to another. These are culturally sustained.
- 2) Legends are short, oral prose narratives, created by the people and passed from one generation to another. The stories are rather unusual, extra normal, fantastic or metaphysical. The bearers of such legends identify them as an account or a chronicle.
- 3) Performative tradition includes dance, music, theatre and games.
- 4) These can be termed as unofficial health practices and beliefs that are found in all societies. These can be either religious (the use of prayer for healing) or material (a belief that eating curds in the night will cause cold or eating ginger with honey to cure sore throats).