
UNIT 5 FESTIVALS AND RITUALS

Impact of Technology in
Transforming Folk Art to
Commodity

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
 - 5.1.1 Etymology
 - 5.1.2 Defining festivals and rituals
- 5.2 Festivals and rituals of antiquity
 - 5.2.1 Case study: an Indian festival
 - 5.2.2 Festivals of egypt
 - 5.2.3 Festivals of greece
 - 5.2.4 Festivals of rome
- 5.3 Types of festivals
- 5.4 Types of rituals
 - 5.4.1 How are festivals and rituals transformed: two case studies
- 5.5 Festivals in a globalised world
 - 5.5.1 Demand of a new cultural milieu
 - 5.5.2 Demand of the workplace
 - 5.5.3 Decreasing participation quotient
 - 5.5.4 Increasing independence of the individuals
 - 5.5.5 Threat of terror
- 5.6 A case study: religiosity behind Orissa folk traditions
- 5.7 The UNESCO initiative
- 5.8 Let us sum up
- 5.9 Activity
- 5.10 Suggested readings
- 5.11 Glossary
- 5.12 Check Your Progress: possible answers

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- describe the beginnings of festivals and rituals from the primordial to the present times;
- analyse festival and ritual act as means of communication and social exchange within communities;
- examine how cultural practices are regulated by the agencies of religion and state in order to bring about the social change desired by those in power; and
- define the key concepts, identify different types of festivals and rituals, and distinguish between festivals and rituals.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Festivals and rituals are cultural performances which serve to keep alive the spirit of social communication. In ancient cultures all over the world, specific days and seasons were marked for public festivals. A large number of people participated in these events. Over a period of time, with the advent of new religious forms and practices these primitive celebrations underwent great change and transformation.

You must have realized that age old festivals are undergoing gradual change. *Deepawali*, is not celebrated over a period of three days any more, and rituals like the Hindu *Upanayana* (thread ceremony) and the pre Christmas stirring of puddings by children have become symbolic. We are continually adding to our repertoire new occasions to celebrate such as Mother's day, Friendship day and many more. We also celebrate our National festivals and the birthdays of our National icons.

5.1.1 Etymology

A study of the origin and semantic development of words reveals the various connotations these have occupied on the coordinates of human enterprise and its ever changing contexts. Festivals and rituals have been perceived and actualized differently by people across space and time. For example, we speak of a 'food festival' being organized at a particular shopping mall or we describe our morning cup of coffee as a 'ritual'. These connotations would have been completely alien to our ancestors. Let us look into the origin of these concepts:

Festival: Its origin is in Middle English derived from Old French, derived from Low Latin "*festialis*" which in turn is derived from Latin "*festivus*"

L. *festivus* = belonging to a feast

L. *festum* = a feast

L. *festus* = bright, joyful

Ritual: It is an English word derived from Latin "*ritus*"

L. *ritus* = custom

L. *ritu* = crude form of "*ritus*"

We can observe that in its origin, a festival was a community event which included food, entertainment and merry-making. A ritual grew out of customary practices performed on specific occasions.

(Source: *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* by Walter W. Skeat)

5.1.2 Festivals and rituals: definition and characteristics

A festival is a public event in which members of a particular social/religious group take part. Festivals serve as markers of historical or mythological events and commemorate the legends and heroes intrinsic to the identity of a particular community. They also mark the end/beginning of seasons, of important phases in the solar/lunar/agrarian cycle. The celebration of festivals involves specific ceremonies, use of special crafts such as clay-work/drawing of ritual motifs/symbols, ceremonial preparation of particular food items. Thus public rituals are an essential part of festivals. As compared to festivals, rituals have a deeper reach into the social fabric. There are rituals which mark the life of individuals

from birth to death. There are daily rituals which mark the passage of each day from dawn to dusk. Each culture has its own set of rituals which symbolize particular aspects of existence and human endeavour through which the community defines itself, its place in the universe and its relationship with nature.

Activity 2

- 1) Name one important festival which is celebrated in your family. List the activities performed in its celebration.

.....
.....
.....

- 2) Which of these activities would you classify as a ritual?

.....
.....
.....

- 3) Are any of these activities performed specifically by your caste/clan/ community?

.....
.....
.....

Festivals essentially involve interaction between a large numbers of people whereas rituals may be performed by individuals, groups, or communities.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: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) What are the definitions and characteristics of festival and ritual?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5.2 FESTIVALS AND RITUALS OF ANTIQUITY

The earliest rituals known to man were those related to death. Ritual burial of dead was known to the early Palaeolithic man and it showed that the Neanderthals exhibited concern for their dead and treated them with careful last rites. As civilization progressed, man became more closely engaged with natural processes like the changes of day and night, the coming and going of seasons and the cultivation of crops. Festivals and ritualized rest from work have marked the life of people across cultures since ancient times. The lives of the ancient people were centred round agriculture. They were mainly agrarian communities whose existence depended on a good harvest. These communities were also subject to the ravages of changing seasons with little or no means of protection. The earliest festivals are related to these aspects of human existence. People welcomed the coming of Spring and the end of Winter with celebrations. The spring equinox, the autumn equinox, the summer solstice and the winter solstice were occasions for celebration. Planting of new crop was also an important event. People prayed for a good harvest and expressed this through various rites. Planting and harvesting of crop were occasions for community celebration and merry-making. Man being governed by the elements of nature, attributed the mysteries of nature to various elemental forces such as sun, wind, rain, fire, earth. Later gods and goddesses came to be associated with these forces.

5.2.1 Case study: an Indian festival

Literature of the Vedic period contains references to public events organized to appease and honour gods, ancestors and seasons. *Yajnas* were performed to give the gods a share of the grain, milk and ghee. The fire god *Agni* was referred to as the *purohit* (priest), who carried these items to their destination. The first oblation was always given to the fire. In the later period, celebrations were also made though *Samajas* – gathering of people for entertainment and rejoicing. *Utsavas* (festival) were organized through the intervention of the state. Thus the celebrations were formalized and performed as per the instructions issued by the king. There were masculine displays of strength and virility such as wrestling, chariot-race, and animal fights.

Makar Sankranti is an ancient festival that is still celebrated across the length and breadth of the country on 13-14 January. It is known by different names such as *Uttarayana*, *Lohri*, *Pongal*, *Bihu*, *Khichdi*. In its origin, this festival marks an astronomical phenomenon. However there is considerable debate among scholars as to the “actual” date of the festival. It is a festival of farmers and peasants as is evidenced from the special use of new crop in the food rituals associated with the festival. It is celebrated with enthusiasm in towns and cities as well and is a reminder of our agrarian roots. According to the Hindu scriptures, during the churning of the sea in quest of the divine nectar, the Gods were chased by the demons. As a result drops of nectar were spilt over four cities which are considered sacred ever since. Thus Allahabad, Nasik, Haridwar and Ujjain became sites of the *Kumbh Mela* or ritual bathing sites on the day of *Makar Sankranti*. In urban metropolitan spaces where lifestyle and work requirements do not leave scope for ritual bathing and lighting of bonfires, people perform actions which are symbolic of the celebrations in their home towns/ villages, like wearing their traditional attire. Very often these celebrations merge with urban symbols of revelry and take on new forms.

5.2.2 Festivals of egypt

The ancient festivals of Egypt are mostly linked to the seasons and to the movement of the moon and the stars. Some ancient festivals are the Thoth Festival, Wag Festival, Sokar Festival, Sadj Festival. In later times there was a greater intervention and control through the King and the Priests. The King was considered semi-divine and the temple rituals practised by the Priests served to impress upon the people that ritual regulations were created by God for the larger good of the people. The Festivals and Temple Rituals of Egypt served to create and enforce and regulate patterns of social conduct.

5.2.3 Festivals of Greece

The Greek festivals were seasonal and celebrated the passage of days according to the lunar calendar. For the Greeks, the new day began at sunset. However, each celebration honoured a particular God or Goddess. Prayers, processions, mysterious rites, sacrifices, and dramatic performances were integral parts of celebrations. The Ancient Olympic Games were an important festival held in the honour of Zeus. The Eleusinian mysteries, Dionysian Mysteries, Haloa, Soteria, Hermaea, Delia were highly ritualized celebrations.

5.2.4 Festivals of Rome

Like other ancient festivals, the festivals of Rome are centred on astronomical phenomenon. Different Gods and Goddesses are assigned to these special days. The Roman celebrations usually included community dining in the form of large feasts. The Rites of Bona Dea, Saturnalia and Lupercalia were important festivals. Consulia was a festival of Games and Sports, Bacchanalia was an ancient wine festival.

5.3 TYPES OF FESTIVALS

Festivals originated in man's natural urge for bonding with his fellow men, to reaffirm solidarity within families, clans and communities. These concerns have manifested themselves in various forms of festivals. One must remember that in the earlier times, man's dependence on his fellow men was greater than what it is now. There are many types of festivals.

- festivals of seasons
- festivals of crops
- festivals of cattle
- festivals of Gods/ Goddesses
- festivals of saints/legendary heroes
- festivals of the state/national festivals
- Modern fests

However, most of these categories are overlapping and flexible, so that a single festival can be seasonal, agrarian, and religious. In the United States two festivals are celebrated to mark seasonal changes. The Mother Earth Gathering is celebrated to mark the Summer Solstice and the Middle Earth Gathering is celebrated to mark the Fall Equinox. The ancient Romans celebrated Saturnalia and Sol Invictus to celebrate the Winter Solstice. The Summer Solstice is celebrated variously as

Feast of St John the Baptist, Feast of Epona, All Couple's Day. Similarly, *Deepawali*, the festival which celebrates Ram's return to Ayodhya, was originally a three day harvest festival. In the month of October-November the members of the Oraon tribe celebrate a festival named *Sohrai* in honour of cows, buffaloes, bullocks and goats. *Gau Giraaj Vrat*, *Go-vatsa Dwadashi*, *Govardhan Puja* are other cattle festivals celebrated in India. Modern Fests are celebrations structured to commemorate important events such as the foundation day of a particular organization, the launching of a new brand or product.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: 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) Write a brief note on Makra Sankranti.

.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What are the types of festivals?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5.4 TYPES OF RITUALS

Rituals are characterized by repetitive and highly symbolic features. Each society has its own set of rituals. These may involve specific performances by an individual or a group of people. The site of performance may be one's own house, or a public site such as a river banks, wells, hills, fields, water tanks. It may involve only a specific community or may create opportunity for exchange between more than one group occupying different hierarchies. Over a period of time ritual practices have come to be associated with particular religions. The Hindu *samskaras*, the Christian ceremonies of christening, baptism, and confirmation are also rituals. The Jewish observance of the *Shabbat* is highly ritualistic. In the Vedic period there were special fire rituals to be practiced by every householder.

- rituals of birth
- fertility rituals
- rites of initiation
- secret rites

- rituals to appease Gods
- mourning rituals

Rituals deeply affect the individual and collective lives of people. They serve to reaffirm one's allegiance to a particular social order. Rituals occur at each stage of our lives. From sunrise to sunset, from summer to winter, from birth to death, rituals are the milestones which measure out our existence. Rituals are not only performances, they also serve to create and validate our identity.

In ancient times, rituals were cult practices related to nature, welfare of the community, protection against disease, protection of crops and cattle. The elders of the community attempted to pass on this knowledge through rituals. Often the knowledge component was lost in transmission or eclipsed by the ritual performance. Thus, rituals survived in communities long after the reason behind conducting these was lost.

Rituals being highly symbolic and intrinsic in nature became an indispensable tool for those in power. Rituals served to attain various goals. An external authority like the king or a religious head could prescribe rituals which ensured compliance, create power and prescribe margins. Control over consumption of food and drink, manipulation of knowledge, power and wealth could be achieved through rituals.

5.4.1 How are festivals and rituals transformed: two case studies

In this section we will discuss about two festivals of western world; Halloween and April Fool's day.

Halloween

Halloween is a festival which continues to enjoy great popularity in the western world. It includes activities like trick or treat, jack-o'-lantern, bonfires and fancy dress parties. It was brought to North America by Irish immigrants and has spread over other parts of the world. It was originally a festival of the ancient Celtic tribes and was known as *Samhain*.

The first day of November was the Celtic New Year which marked the onset of the Winter season. According to Celtic belief, the spirits of the dead visited the earth on the night prior to the New Year. The Celtic priests known as Druids sought help from these visiting spirits to make predictions about the weather, harvest and the lives of the Celts.

Huge bonfires were built and sacrifices were offered to please the visiting spirits. The people wore animal costumes. During the Roman conquest which lasted for four centuries, two Roman Festivals were integrated into the *Samhain*. These were *Feralia* and *Pomona*. *Feralia* was observed for the passing of the dead and *Pomona* was celebrated in honour of Pomona, the Roman Goddess of Fruits who is symbolized by the apple. The game of Apple Bobbing may be a feature of this integration. After the spread of Christianity, the church sought to remove these pagan practices. This was done by issuing orders or by creating an alternative Christian festivity on the same day. In a similar attempt the Church instated All Saints Day on the first day of November. Another name for All Saints Day derived

from Middle English is All-hallows or All-hallow mass. The night prior to the All-hallow mass came to be known as All-hallows Eve which was later transformed to Halloween.

April Fools' Day

The practice of fooling one another on the first day of April also has its origins in antiquity. There are diverse opinions regarding the origin of April Fool's Day. While some scholars attribute the origin of the celebration to the 16th century calendar reforms carried out in Europe, others trace the origin to the Renewal Festivals of antiquity, which marked the end of the winter season. The 16th century calendar reforms aimed at moving the commencement of the New Year from the vernal equinox in March-April to the beginning of January. Those people who were rigid or slow to accept change continued to celebrate the New Year on the old dates. Such people were subjected to tomfoolery, and had pranks played on them. In France, such people were compared to the fish of April, which being newly hatched, were easily caught on lines and nets. The trick was to stealthily paste a paper fish on the back of unsuspecting victims. The French word for the April Fools' Day is *Poisson d'Avril*, meaning "April Fish". The Renewal Festival theory links the April Fool's Day to ancient Roman festivals like *Saturnalia* and *Hilaria* and medieval Celtic festival of *Lud* celebrated to honour the Celtic God of humour. It is also considered to be a development of the medieval Feast of Fools or *Festus Fatuorum*., which itself was derived from the *Saturnalia*. The Feast of Fools involved the parody of the hierarchy of the church by ordinary people. There would be a mock bishop, archbishop and even a mock pope. These characters would indulge in hilarious mock ceremonies. However this practice was banned by the church in the late 15th century. The present day celebration of the April Fools' Day is very different from the older forms. These two examples explain how festivals undergo constant transformation.

5.5 FESTIVALS IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

The world today has become a small place. Populations have moved from native spaces and people now live in close contact with each other. The mass dislocation of people which started with the colonial enterprise was furthered by the forces of industrialization and urbanization. This has led to an intermingling of cultures often termed as the "melting pot". Festivals and rituals provide an important interactive interface to the members of a multi cultural society.

5.5.1 Demands of a new cultural milieu

With the loss of familiar landscape, people have devised from the sources available to them, new symbolic features for their rituals and celebrations. Thus distinctive features of these practices are becoming homogenized. Communities try to resist this homogenization through varied means. For example, the Hindu communities in the United States send their children to weekly scripture reading sessions similar to the Bible reading groups. Hindu children in contemporary India however do not frequent any such sessions. Through this example we can see how communities adopt features of a different culture while attempting to preserve their cultural uniqueness.

5.5.2 Demands of the workplace

The modern work culture views holidays, feasts and festivals as a loss of productive potential which translates into economic loss. The policies are framed so as to achieve optimum profit. Festivals, ritual holidays and celebrations which served to break the monotony of life and provide a period of rest after intense activity are either overlooked or compressed into the minimum possible time span. Since work remains the source of livelihood the cultural expression is pushed into the margins. As a result some festivals and rituals have been completely wiped out whereas others have undergone major transformations. For example, the austerities of the month of *Ramzan*, the celebrations of Easter, the solemnities of Lent, the three day celebration of *Deepawali* ending on *Bhratra Dvitiya (Bhai Dooj)* are curtailed and in some cases restricted to a single evening. The rituals related to marriage, birth and death are also curtailed and performed in an abbreviated style.

5.5.3 Decreasing participation quotient

The preparations for festivals and rituals traditionally required active participation from all members. For example, the preparation of garlands from flowers and leaves, drawing of ritual designs, ritual pounding of food-grain, cleaning of houses and barns, worship of weapons and agricultural tools such as plough and axe involved men women and children of all age groups. The older members supervised and instructed the processes. Various caste groups or clans had special roles assigned to them. The barber and his wife, the potters, the water bearers had their own place in the scheme of things. With changing social structure and the emergence of a consumer culture, most of these roles have been eliminated or replaced by readymade products in the market. It is no longer possible or necessary to involve the whole family in preparations. In the absence of active participatory roles, the public celebration becomes a personal event.

5.5.4 Increasing independence of the individual

Although individuals live in close contact with diverse cultures in the present day world, they are not dependent on their fellow men or neighbours. In traditional communities, man's dependence on his neighbour was immense. People looked up to their neighbours and kinsmen in times of trouble and need. Festivals served to strengthen this bond. Today this responsibility has been taken over by the state. The state machinery is responsible for nurturing and protecting the individual. As a result the individual has become totally independent. Lack of dependence combined with changing attitudes to wealth has led the family/individual into self imposed isolation.

5.5.5 Threat of terror

Festivities and revelry have encountered a new enemy in the form of terror. Celebrations by organized religious bodies or by co-operative housing societies have witnessed a sharp decline in the number of people attending these functions. The urban populations are wary of fairs and festivals and prefer to remain away from large religious gatherings. This has seriously limited the possibility of community celebrations for city dwellers.

5.5.6 Will our festivals and rituals be lost ?

Are we to assume that festivals, rituals and traditional revelry will succumb to the pressures of modern existence, that the old festivals will be lost over a period of time? There is a general conjecture that the number of festivals and rituals in modern society is drastically reduced. Industrialization, secularization, mass movements of populations, and numerous other forms of entertainment are bound to take the place of festivals.

In this connection, let us take up a case study and discuss in detail regarding the rituals and festivals in Orissa folk traditions, the religiosity and historicity connected to those.

5.6 A CASE STUDY: RELIGIOSITY BEHIND ORISSA FOLK TRADITIONS

In this case study, I would like to discuss the different cultural identities and the homogeneity associated with the folk culture as well as the tribal culture in the rural villages of Orissa and how there is the obvious presence of historicity, religiosity and oral tradition in their literature and culture. Even if folk culture and tribal culture are correctly and commonly used as synonymous to each other, folk culture, as a policy, is different from the tribal culture. Both are fundamentally different in the sense that folk culture is dependent on different traditions whereas tribal culture is independent; it is an end in itself. A larger social unit, an elite culture, rural Hindu traditions are the components of folk culture. The folk group was interpreted as a contrast to the tribal tradition in the 1950's by critics like Robert Redfield. Folk tradition is a substructure of the macro tradition of the tribal. The idea of cultural identity and group feeling is less in the folk tradition. Qualities like regional identity in terms of culture, sharing of the common group behaviour, common religiosity, historicity, oral traditions, caste and tribe are the factors that constitute the folk tradition. It is all the more so in case of Oriya folklore literature. Common characteristics like homogeneity, cultural consciousness, group identity, language, speech, folk beliefs, rituals and practices, less interaction with the outside world are found in the folk culture of Orissa from every section and subsection. The distortion of cultural items, meanings and values are a threat to its literature which needs a constant evaluation. It is an accepted opinion that folklore literature follows an oral tradition which is handed down to us from generation to generation through folk songs, folk tales, legends, mythology, superstitions, and proverbs. To Foster, "a folk culture may be thought of as a common way of life which characterizes some or all of the people of many villages, towns and cities within a given area" (Foster, G.M.), which emphasizes on the ideas like sharing a culture, group identity in terms of the culture and regional identity. In this study, I will be emphasizing on these characteristics and their presence in the folklore literature of Orissa and the role played by religious, historical and oral traditions behind the rich cultural heritage of the folklore literature of Orissa. A group may belong to different sub-groups in sharing a common way of life which creates a cultural awareness and a sense of oneness among the folk which may be defined as homogeneity. This wider cultural system which may be tribal, rural, ethnic, urban or industrial—all of which have the common religiosity and historicity—will be the point of focus in this case study.

Orissa folk culture has always been in a vulnerable situation due to alien influences

which has given rise to the distortion of cultural items, values and morals from time to time. Amid all these changes, too, Orissa folklore literature has maintained a paradigm of its own. The folklorists have a view that folklore is the oral literature and it is handed down to our progeny generation-to-generation, sometimes without having any written text. Folksongs, folktales, myths, legends, superstitions, proverbs, riddles, stories are orally transmitted. Efforts have been made to exclude these orally transmitted genres from the mainstream literature, but till today folkloristic studies are evident in Orissa and some other states in India. It has always been a matter of debate that all folklore literature is orally transmitted, but all orally transmitted literature is not necessarily folklore. Non-verbal aspects of the folklore such as games, dances, street-plays may not be truly oral, those are learnt by the progeny as a habit. But there are folklore songs in Orissa which are now slowly evolving into written texts like *Dalkhai*, *Sajani*, *Rasarkeli*, *Rangabati*, songs of Sambalpur, Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Nowrangpur, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Sundergarh had been following an oral tradition till date. Localization of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* has also given birth to stories which are orally transmitted from generation-to-generation. The worship of the *Sakti* has also been taken as a process of tribalisation in these areas. The oral nature of the folklore is the biggest hurdle to trace out the origin of most items of the folklore.

Now, I will illustrate some epitomes and customs that would emphasize the historicity and religiosity in Orissa folklore literature. *Dandanata* is a popular folkdance of Orissa which is treated as a source of folk entertainment and popular folk ritual since time immemorial. It starts with *Chaitra Purnima*, the full moon day of the month of March-April and continues till *Pana Sankranti*. The origin of *Dandanata* goes to the worship of Lord *Shiva* and *Sakti* (Goddess *Parvati*). The mythological story behind this ritual is that a *Brahmin* teacher had many students, and a child of lower-caste used to observe him teaching *yoga* and meditation. The child developed interest and started practicing *yoga*, as a result of which the teacher bit him mercilessly. The child uttered some incantations which almost burnt the teacher. The other students took away the knowledge forcibly from the child and concealed it in the cave of Lord *Shiva* who later came to know about it and ordered his bull *Nandi* to release this knowledge of higher order and distribute it among the people of lesser origin. Lord *Shiva* introduced *Tandav Nritya* to purge the lower caste people from all sins. *Dandanata* is performed by the lower caste people of Orissa which is a reaction against the *Brahminical* domination in the past. As per historical reports, the origin of *Dandanata* dates back to the *Somagupta* period of western Orissa till the *Kesari* period of western Orissa which might be the reason behind the amalgamation of Hinduism and Buddhism prevailing in the rituals of *Dandanata*. Buddhists were hated by the caste Hindus for which they got a chance to worship Lord *Shiva* only once in a year during *Dandanata*. An important aspect of *Dandanata* is that the lyrics are very poetic in nature. With the use of local dialects, cultural components, conversational songs, satirical stories, myth and history, use of decorative dress and ornaments, *Dandanata* is an important source of entertainment for the people of Orissa. The female characters in *Dandanata* and most folk dances use conventional ornaments like *ganthi*, *sikia*, *jhalka*, *bentia*, *guna*, *phuli*, *dandi*, *kalangi*, *kaudi*, *ghanti*, *ghagudi* etc. *Dhol* and *flute* play a predominant role in tribal dances, and songs are conversational, satirical and colloquial in nature. The kings of the *Kesari* Dynasty who ruled Bhubaneswar from the 5th to the 11th century where the worshippers of Lord *Shiva* and introduced

this ritual into Oriya culture. *Danda* means a pole, *Nala* means dance, which means a pole represents the God. In *Dandanata*, dance, songs and physical feats are meant to praise Him. The songs are composed by village poets who have great knowledge of the *Puranas*. Some songs have the oral tradition, some are composed in the form of questions and answers like:

Why was *Krishna* born in a prison house?

Why did *Draupadi* have five husbands?

Why did not *Sita* destroy *Ravan* herself?

The answers to these questions are given by another party in lyrical language and this is the main attraction. Some of the songs are didactic and pedantic; some are too simple to be easily followed by an illiterate audience. Overall, the *Dandanata* is a popular performance by the village folks of Orissa.

One of the important festivals of the tribals in western Orissa is the *Nuakhai* festival, which literally means the consumption of the new crops of the year. The process of Sanskritization, Aryanization is closely associated with this festival, thus leading to a tribal festival into a Hindu one. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in Orissa and majority of the tribal population belonging to *Saura*, *Gond*, *Binjal*, *Mridha*, *Bhumia*, *Kondh* tribals are the cultivators, farms servants and laborers. *Nuakhai* has a major influence on the life and culture of these people; it is the day of merry-making and celebration because it is the day of the harvest of rice, paddy and other crops. On the occasion of *Nuakhai* ritual, the tribals and the caste Hindus worship Goddess *Lakshmi* along with the whole family as this day brings friendship, equality, cooperation, help and prosperity. On this occasion they eat grains of the new harvest like pongol in South-India.

Another important and colourful tribal ritual observed by the tribals of central and western Orissa is the *Karma* festival. The festival is generally observed in the month of *Bhadra* (August - September) and Sal tree is worshiped by the tribals. Economically Sal tree is one of the most useful timbers used for the furniture, railway, bridge constructions, boat building, tent houses, carts and carriages etc. Thus, most folk traditions and festivals have a social, economic or scientific reason behind them. Another probable reason behind the association of the Sal tree with this festival may be the influence of Buddhism on the tribal people of this area. Sal tree is regarded as most sacred by the Buddhists as they believed that *Goutam Buddha* died in a grove of Sal trees.

Karma worship is a famous festival in the autumn season in rural Orissa, and the *Karma* tree represents the God of Fate which is worshipped as the incarnation of God. *Karma* controls the human destiny, gives people prosperity or pain. This festival owes its origin to an ancient story of rich merchant and his six sons. The five elder brothers punished the younger one and their wives for worshipping the *Karma* God, after which they themselves had to face the pangs of destiny. The elder brothers repented and worshipped the *Karma* God, and they got prosperity. The *Karma* dancers have a professional party; they roam from village to village and sing the mythological songs, say the folk tales and entertain the people. *Karma* is a famous harvest festival among the coastal districts of Orissa. The *Karma* God is an aboriginal God whose influence gradually spread from the tribal areas to the urban Orissa.

Chaitighoda -Nata is one of the most prominent festivals of the fishermen of Orissa celebrated in the coastal tribal areas. A Goddess possessing the head of

The bnrse nme *Basuli* is worshiped. It is well decorated and a man enters the head and dances. Its origin goes to the *Ramayana* where Lord *Ramachandra* rewarded a horse to the boatman for rowing him safely during his exile. *Basuli* is worshiped at *Puri*, the land of Lord *Jagganath*. *Chailighoda-Nata* is an occasion for the lower caste people to display their taste for literature and also their martial arts. *Chadak Puja* is a puja of Lord *Shiva* and *Gauri* in some districts of Orissa and Bengal. The devotees worship *Tarkeshwar* and display physical exercises. They worship the *Ghata* which means destruction of desires. They practise hard exercises like walking on a pole and on fire. Wine and meat are strictly prohibited while sanctity and spirituality dominate.

Dalkahi is a ritual folk dance of western Orissa in Sambalpur region. This is dedicated to *Dalkhai Devi*, *Goddess Durga*, *Parvati* and *Kali*. It is the form of *Shakti* or power of the Goddess which is worshiped during *Dalkahai*. On this day the devotees create a rectangular or square shaped area and arrange sixteen Gods all around with *Dalkahi Devi* at the center. *Ravana* is also worshiped for his wisdom. It is a festival of nine days. It is a matter to consider that *Dalkahi* songs and dances are becoming modern day by day and the village folks are using these for commercial purposes. It is difficult to trace out the tribal religious tradition of Orissa in the remote past. The major religious movements such as Buddhism, Saivism, Saktism, Jainism had patronages from the rulers of Orissa, and the local *Rajas* made it a point to release these rich local festivals from the hand of the tribals and make those widely accepted in the urban areas.

Pala is a popular institution which aims at propagating the ancient Oriya literature through songs which have an oral tradition. The richest Oriya and Sanskrit literature of the middle age is delivered in simple language in the rural as well as urban areas by street poets and singers. *Sirini*, a sweet dish is distributed among the devotees after being offered to Lord *Salyanarayana*. *Pala* derives its origin from an effort of the Hindu-Muslim unity, for the avoidance of fanaticism and intolerance. After the reign of *Aurangzeb*, the people of both the communities attempted to live together, exchange their ideas and culture, teach the principles of their religion to each other. The Sufi poets like *Kabir*, *Gurunanak*, Hindu poets like *Sri Chaitanya* took up the charge of writing such devotional songs that could satisfy the spiritual quest of both the communities. These songs were mainly propagated by the *Pala* singers by which *Pala* could gather an audience from both the communities. *Pala* singers are great entertainers. It continues overnight, there is a main singer and another follower and they say the story in the form of questions and answers. Use of comic relieves and tragic relieves, anecdotes, use of attractive outfits, jewellery and traditional musical instruments are the common features of *Pala*.

The religious functions of the Orissa rural folks are mainly left to their women who perform the rituals with all sanctity and sincerity as they believe that the security of the village and the home depends on their deities. These women worship clay, stone or metal gods, gods of rice powder, flowers, plants, herbs by taking fasts and vows. *Kukkuli Brata*, *Kp.dar Brata* *Baira Mahakali Brata*, *Rabinaravan Brata*, *Sudasa Hrata*, *Rai Damodar Brata*, *Nisha Mangalbar Brata*, *Janhi Ossa*, *Buddhei Ossa*, *Khudurukuni Ossa*, *Kharkhari Ossa*, *Sathi Ossa*, *Kanjiana*, *Dutiya Ossa*, *Balitrutiya*, *Bada Ossa*, *Pana Sankranti*, *Akhay Trutiya*, *Sitala Sathi*, *Raja*, *Jagulei Panchami*, *Rekha Panckmi*, *Garbhana Sankranti*, *Prathmastami*, *Panchdol* or some of the common religious festivals are being performed by the rural Oriya women in particular.

The tribal art and architecture have also some popular religiosity behind them. The Puppet play of Orissa which is internationally adapted is an art of making the lifeless puppets dance and sing on the stage. With the skill of the artist, the inanimate puppets are made into characters on the stage delivering great performances. Puppet show is closely associated with Oriya folklore literature and culture. In Orissa this puppet making has developed as a family art since long. Four persons are required to stage a puppet play, one *Sutradhara* who controls the threads of the puppet, two singers and one drummer. Usually religious stories are taken as theme of the puppet plays.

The sacred Gods and Goddesses have their own images in the society as perceived by the tribals. The villagers are ignorant of the higher metaphysical concepts of Hinduism for which the Hindu Gods like *Vishnu*, *Rudra*, *Varuna* are mere names for them. The caste Hindus have a feeling that they are the chosen few of God for which they do not allow the tribals to touch or approach their Gods. This has made the tribals create their own Gods taking ideas and offsprings from their daily lives. The financial status of the tribals can be easily comprehended by looking at their wretched Gods, who are phenomena of nature like earthquake, sun, moon birds, beasts, fish, reptiles, trees and plants, stones and articles of daily use. Some famous Gods of these folks of Orissa are *Budki Pallien* (the Goddess of forest), *Hilli PaHien* (a huge piece of stone), *Banka-Mundi* (Goddess of hunting), *Bhuan* (a vigilant God to keep an eye on the crops), *Hada Bai* (Goddess of wealth and power), *Mounabati* (a Goddess to destroy the enemy), *Banaspati* (the Goddess of the mango trees), *Bentakumari* (Goddess of water), *Batighanta* (a Goddess in the form of a light guarding the animals), *Ranaghan* (Goddess of war), *Swapnabati* (Goddess to help against evil dreams), *Sauruni Debi and Mundabarik* (a wonder woman who was killed by the king into two, the body being *Sauruni Debi* and the head being *Mundabarik*). These fetish Gods are instituted by the roadside, in the river banks or under some shady tree. "In the lower strata of religion, men figure to themselves a certain moral order of the world, although in a very primitive form and this moral order must have a Director and an origin. Such Directors then becomes the Gods whom they identified with the powers of Nature which inspires them with hope and fear. Thus they come to ascribe to them mental faculties' Singh, T.R). The tribals make every effort to ascribe dignity and splendor to their fetish Gods like the Vedic and the Hindu gods. For example Goddess *Durga* manifests into *Jagulei*, *Hengulei*, *Paneswari*, and *Patrasuni* in Orissa. Animal sacrifice is common among the tribals. There was a time when the *kondhs* of Phulbani (a central Orissa district) used to steal a boy or a virgin girl to sacrifice him/ her in their fields to satisfy their Gods. Later on, his practice vanished and now they sacrifice a buffalo or a goat. cut the limbs of the live animal till it bleeds to death. Some Mexican tribes also have the same practice. *Hercules*, the Greek hero, worshipped running streams, which again is found among some tribes of Orissa. Also, a few tribes in Philadelphia have the practice of worshipping earthquake, which again is found in some tribal areas of Orissa. The bull is worshipped as conveyance of Lord *Shiva* and the snake as his garland, the rat as the pet of Lord *Ganesh* and *Biccha* or the scorpion as the pet of Goddess *Saraswati*, monkey as the favorite of Lord *Rama*, cow as *Kamadhenu*— a wonder cow of the heaven. Worship of trees and plants, like Basil plants, Peepal tree, rice plants articles of daily use like the husking paddle, a painted coconut, sword, shield, wheels, potters is a common practice. Also these people believe in throwing up their hair in the religious places.

Folktales and folk music play a vital role in the lives of the village folk of Orissa. The folk songs are the spontaneous overflow of their feelings, joys and sorrows. The villagers are conservative in their outlook and they love to stick to their hoary past and cultural tradition. A little digression from the norms prescribed by their ancestors is considered as a punishable sin. They believe in ghosts, spirits, witchcraft and sorcery, and their age old superstitions keep them away from modernization and keep them undeveloped and a prey to diseases. They retain the most savage customs and are proud of the same. These customs and social taboos are evident as the theme of their folktales and folksongs. Storytelling is an ancient and rich folk art. The stories may not be didactic in nature, but they are told in a sing-song manner. The folk stories can be classified into legends and folk tales: a legend is a historical narrative and the folk tales are purely imaginative stories which might be having an oral tradition. Dr.Kunja Behari Dash classifies the folk tales thus, "The folk tales of Orissa may be broadly divided into five classes:

- 1) Tales of Kings who are stupid, whimsical and despotic.
- 2) Tales of adventure by the sons of Kings, Ministers, Merchants and Police Officers.
- 3) Tales of giants, witches, ghosts and demigods.
- 4) Tales of birds, beasts, snakes, flying horses, magic boats, magic jewels and fishes.
- 5) Tales of sea voyage reminding us of the golden age when Orissa had an overseas empire and trade with China, Indonesia, Cambodia, South Africa and Ceylon (Examples: Stories of 'Tahpoii' and 'Khulanasundari')

A folk tale is a blend of illusion and reality, depicting the faith, taste, social customs, outlook and imagination of the village folk. Among the folksongs of Orissa, the *Sajani* Songs of Sambalpur and East Madhya Pradesh depict the worries, joy and sorrows of women. These folksongs have an oral tradition, and no one has taken any step to preserve record or select these songs for the future generation and in this process most of the *Sajani* songs have disappeared. Due to urbanization and industrialization, these songs are going to oblivion. *Sajani* forms the main strain of the culture of family in Orissa society; the songs express the creative imagination of the people. The folk song is a popular of entertainment for the tribals. Their songs are entertaining and lyrical. They are ballads, are meant to be sung on occasions like the village festivals. *Puchi Khela* is a game of the voune airls where the village sirils sit in a circle and olav a same of throwing their lees and hands while singing romantic, somewhat meaningless songs, quite rhythmical in nature. A few of their songs are fading away due to their oral nature in course of the modernization of the villagers.

The life of the tribals, these village folks, are predominated by history and myth, music and folk tales, traditions and cultural heritage. Their religious ceremonies, their fetish Gods, their thoughts and language, beliefs and customs, acts and rituals, songs and tales, are a part of their living and stay complimentary to them during their life. Their proverbs, which are called *Dakabachans*, have an oral tradition since time immemorial, which speak of their lives and their different traits. Folk culture is susceptible to the outside world in the sense that it is constantly open to anonymous influences. In such a situation, sufficient care must be taken by the rural folk to test out the distortion of their cultural items

and their value system.

5.7 THE UNESCO INITIATIVE

The 2003 Convention of the UNESCO has addressed the above mentioned issues. According to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) – or living heritage – is the mainspring of our cultural diversity and its maintenance a guarantee for continuing creativity. The Convention states that the ICH is manifested, among others, in the following domains:

- *Oral traditions and expressions* including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- *Performing arts* (such as traditional music, dance and theatre);
- *Social practices, rituals and festive events*;
- *Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe*;
- *Traditional craftsmanship*.

The 2003 Convention defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. The depository of this heritage is the human mind the human body being the main instrument for its enactment, or – literally – embodiment. The knowledge and skills are often shared within a community, and manifestations of ICH often are performed collectively. Many elements of the ICH are endangered, due to effects of globalization, uniformization policies, and lack of means, appreciation and understanding which – taken together – may lead to the erosion of functions and values of such elements and to lack of interest among the younger generations.

Source: <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002>>

The initiative taken by the UNESCO is an important step towards creating awareness about the immense value of cultural heritage and the important role played by festivals, rituals and such performances in its preservation and transmission. There is enough evidence to support the claim that new festivals are constantly created and older ones are revived in various forms. Therefore an attempt to preserve a particular ritual or performance will make it more archival than real.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** 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) Write a brief note on Halloween.

.....

.....

.....

.....

5) What are the festivals of globalised world?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

5.8 LET US SUM UP

In the present times festivals and celebrations also serve to showcase cultures. India in the late 1980s had witnessed a sudden spurt of International Festivals. Festivals of India being performed in some or the other country were regular news features. The Music festivals at Varanasi and Gwalior, or the Dance Festivals at Konark, Khajuraho and Hampi are at once sites of preservation, transmission and display of culture. Festivals are being used as cultural packages in a major way by the tourism industry. At a much smaller level this process can be observed in various towns and cities. Each city has its own Bengal fest, Rajasthan fest, Gujrat fest etc., which are usually celebrated during the major regional festival season. This kind of fest show cases some of the traditional culture of the respective region such as costume, music, dance, food and handicrafts etc. Our most popular festivals are derived from ancient agrarian and astronomical rites, for example the *Bohag Bihu* (spring festival of Assam), *Baisakhi* (spring festival of Punjab) etc., are celebrated around Mid-April to Mid-May. Both these festival are closely associated with agriculture. The manner in which these are celebrated has undergone in constant change through the ages. Intervention made by the agency of Religion and State has transformed the performative aspect of these celebrations but has not succeeded in wiping out these traditions. The ancient State festivals have not survived because these were not linked to the day to day life of the people. Therefore in spite of the multiple pressures of modern existence, festivals and rituals will continue to attract the human mind. Festivals and rituals serve as components as well as products of a society. This dual function endows them with the unique position of being sites of cultural exchange.

5.9 ACTIVITY

List some festivals and rituals you were acquainted with as a child, which are no longer celebrated in the same manner.

5.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

Agrawala, V.S. Ancient Indian Folk Cults. Varanasi: Prithvi Prakashan. 1970.

Crooke, William. The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India. Vol-2. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.1968.

Frazer, J.G. *The Golden Bough*. London: Macmillan & Co. 1959.

Geertz, Clifford. "Religion as a Cultural System," *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, (ed). Michael Banton, London: Tavistock Publications. 1966.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger (eds). *The Invention of Traditions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1983.

Weston, Jessie L. *From Ritual to Romance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1920.

5.11 GLOSSARY

- Apple bobbing** : A ritual of Celtic origin practiced during Halloween. Apples floating on water are to be caught by teeth without the use of hands.
- Consulia** : Derived from an ancient harvest festival, the Consulia was a public festival which commemorated the famous rape of the Sabine women.
- Deepawali** : Festival of lights celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs in the month of October-November. It is spread over five days and marks Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya. According to the Puranas, it is the day goddess Lakshmi appeared, the day Shiva became *Ardhanaarishwar*, and also the day of the killing of Narkasur.
- Delia** : Ancient Greek festival celebrated at an interval of four years to honour Apollo.
- Dionysian Mysteries** : An ancient rite with primitive origins, it flourished in Greece in the form of public celebrations. It involved people from all ranks and classes of society. Induced intoxication through wine and herbs was used.
- Druids** : A Celtic priest and scholar.
- Eleusinian Mysteries** : Secret rites held in ancient Greece which later spread to Rome and became a major festival. These rites centred around the Greek goddess Demeter and her search for her abducted daughter Persephone.
- Feast of Epona** : A public feast of the Romans held in honour of the 'Horse Goddess' Epona who is originally a Celtic goddess.
- Feralia** : A Roman feast held in the honour of the dead.
- Festus Fatuorum** : The Feast of Fools, a medieval festival which evolved out of the Saturnalia. It involved

- parodying of Church officials and was later banned.
- Haloa** : Ancient Greek agrarian festival held in the honour of Demeter.
- Hermaea** : Ancient Greek festival held in the honour of Hermes.
- Hilaria** : A generic name for a day which involves any form of celebration, festivals, birth, marriage etc. Romans celebrated a special festival by this name just after the vernal equinox, in honour of Goddess Cybele.
- Lud** : Celtic God of humour. The festival of Lud is said to be the precursor of April Fools Day.
- Lupercalia** : A Roman fertility festival celebrated in the month of February. Young men clad in sacrificial goat skins would run across the city with thongs in their hands, hitting people who got into their way with those thongs. It was believed that those women who were struck by these thongs were blessed with children, and eased from pains of childbirth.
- Oraon** : A tribe that inhabits central and eastern parts of India.
- Pomona** : A goddess of the woods who causes trees to bear fruits.
- Ramzaan** : The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, divided into three parts of ten days each. The ten day divisions are called 'Ashras' and each 'Ashra has a specific value of earning God's mercy, forgiveness and salvation. It is a month of fasting for all muslims and ends with the celebration of Id-ul-Fitr
- Samajas** : A classical term for huge gathering of people for festivities and entertainment often linked to days of special religious significance.
- Samhain** : An ancient festival of the Druids which involved holding a vigil for the Celtic God of Death. Considered to be the precursor of Halloween.
- Saturnalia** : An important Roman public festival of pre-Roman origin celebrated in the month of December. It involved feasting and merry making in which people of all ranks participated. It involved a symbolic reversal of social order as slaves changed places with their masters. A mock king 'Lord of Misrule' was appointed amidst much revelry.

Shabbat

: The Jewish day of rest in accordance with the Torah.

Sohrai

: A tribal festival of northern and eastern India which coincides with Deepawali. It involves sacrifice of animals and birds and is celebrated to safeguard cattle from disease and death.

Soteria

: Ancient Greek festivals involving sacrifice.

Upanayana

: It is the sacred thread ceremony which marks the initiation of an individual into brahmacharya. It is one of the major Hindu *samskaras* for the twice-borns — Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes signifying the beginning of formal education under the tutelage of a Guru.

Yajnas

: It is ancient vedic ritual practised in various forms by individuals and groups. It involves worship through prayer and offering of oblations to the Gods through Agni, the Fire God.

5.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Answers

- 1) see answer in section 5.1.2
- 2) see answer in section 5.2.1
- 3) see answer in section 5.3
- 4) see answer in section 5.4.1
- 5) see answer in section 5.5