UNIT 2 'FOLK' IN INDIAN LITERATURE

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction: emergence of modern Indian literature

2.2 Relation between modern Indian literature and language

2.3 'Folk' in modern Indian literature

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2.4 Examples of 'Folk' in pre-modern Indian literature

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the Unit, you will be able to:

- describe the modern Indian literature and how is it different from pre-modern Indian literature;
- analyse the relation between language and literature; and
- examine the nature, concept and function of 'folk' in modern Indian literature.

2.1 INTRODUCTION: EMERGENCE OF MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE

In this Unit, we will try to understand what constitutes modern Indian literature and how it is different from pre-modern Indian literature. In the process, we will also try and understand to what extent modern Indian literature differs or whether it shares commonalities with pre-modern Indian literature.

One general factor that distinguishes modern Indian literature from pre-modern Indian literature is that of print culture. Print culture as a distinctive element of literature is, however, common to literatures across the world rather than being in any way peculiar only to India. Nevertheless, print culture played a major role in the emergence of modern Indian literature. The primary critical role that print culture were in two spheres of literature, viz. (a) mass production of books, and (b) changes in the narrative structure used in literary texts. The relation of 'folk' to modern Indian literature is also fundamentally associated with these two spheres of change.

In South Asia, the culture of literature (i.e. writing and reading of literature) is historically ancient. If oral literature (which will be taken up in the next unit) is kept out of the discussion, and the focus is made on written literature only, the historical antiquity of the culture of literature is proved. If one seeks to identify points of differences between this pre-modern culture of literature and modern culture of literature that emerged from the 19th century, one of the notable

differences was the transformation of texts to books. In other words, in the process of change of literature as texts to literature as books signifies the comodification of literature. Literature, as mass produced books (due to the availability of print technology) could now be bought and sold as commodities in the market. It is important to note in this regard that it is not merely the role of print technology that made the change possible. If print technology made possible mass production of books, it also required a consuming market of buyers to sell the books. This market of buyers was generally provided by the emerging educated middle class in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Recent researches have shown that much of the books that were produced and consumed during the period dealt with themes that were traditional in nature, whether in terms of religion or culture. Unlike in the case of English literature, which was a major influence in this regard, Indian literature of the period did not deal with themes pertaining to urban middle class existence in the context of industrial or industrializing society. One of the reasons for this difference was because, unlike in England, colonialism or modernism in India did not entail industrialization. In fact, historical studies indicate that the subcontinent a process of de-industrialization during the period rather than its opposite.

Therefore, the question emerges that in what capacity was the literature modern? The literature of the period is considered modern generally on four accounts, viz. (a) literature and nationalism, (b) literature and market, (c) literature and literary narrative, and (d) literature and emergence of modern Indian languages (which will be discussed in the next unit). One of the basic differences in the literature of the period is the new method of conceptualizing people, i.e. in terms of nation. It is from the second half of the 19th century that literatures in various languages across South Asia began to engage with or critique colonialism and emerge as a vehicle of nationalist politics. Behind this process was the new method in which the people of the subcontinent came to be conceptualized, viz in terms of nation. For example, the role of the writings of Bankim Chandra or Rabindranath Tagore in this regard is extremely well known. The concept of nation and the attempt to conceptualize anti-colonial resistance in terms of nationalism was a new phenomenon in South Asia. Though this relation of literature with nationalist politics clearly distinguished it from pre-modern literature, it did not mean that all such literatures were ideologically similar. The ideological content of the nationalism could be socialist, could be liberal or could also be religious. Yet the politics that it aimed at or sought to conceive was nationalist in nature.

The close relation between modern literature and market has already been discussed. When seen in terms of role of literature in nationalist politics (or any politics in general), the factor of market (has) historically played a crucial role. Market as the mediator of exchange or consolidation of ideas/ideology among the people became helped in the spread of nationalism. The relation between literature and market became crucial for the consolidation of politics other than that of nationalism as well. For example, among the educated, politics of caste, politics of tribe, or politics of class were equally mediated through the relation between literature and market. These methods of politics, which emerged more powerfully in the post colonial period, were in existence even in the colonial period and became modes of serious interrogation of nationalism of the period. In other words, literature as commodity was crucially linked to the formation/ consolidation of ideas/ideologies and politics during the period. This role of literature was largely absent in the pre-modern period.

The third characteristic that made literature of the period 'modern' and thereby different from pre-modern literature was the relation between literature and literary narratives that developed during (and since) the period. The most significant literary narratives that came to be practiced in the subcontinent in (and since) the period were those of novels and short stories. As narrative methods, novels and short stories were distinctly different from most pre-modern literary narratives that were practiced in South Asia. The most fundamental difference was separation of text and its performance, a bond or relation which was central to most pre-modern literary narratives. As a result of the relation, the meaning of a text was located both in the text as well as in its performance. Novels and short stories (narratives that were imported from Europe) facilitated that the meaning can be located only in the text itself. Novels and short stories as narratives also emphasized the role of realism in literature to communicate its meaning to the readers. In pre-modern literatures of the subcontinent, the role of traditional anti-realism was far more significant. In it, the meaning was conveyed not through a realistic depiction of the subject, but rather through its non-realistic depictions. The popularity of novels and short stories due to print technology and market was also connected to these narrative features that they carried in them as a result of which it was possible for authors and the readers to communicate only through the mediation of the market than any direct communion (as was generally the case in the earlier literary performances).

In this Unit, we have discussed the three major characteristics that distinguish modern Indian literature from pre-modern literatures of the subcontinent. We have discussed the characteristics under the heads of (a) literature and nationalism, (b) literature and market, and (c) literature and literary narratives. In literature and nationalism, you have seen that the concept of nation and the politics of nationalism that literature in the 19th century engaged with, conceived or sought to conceive the people of the subcontinent within a new category of people, i.e. nation. In the process, literature, like other factors, also emerged as a vehicle for anti-colonial nationalism during the period. Nation, as a concept of people, was new in the 19th century. In literature and market, you have seen how the role of print technology changed literature from texts (as was the case in pre-modern period) to books or commodities in the modern period. Market played a crucial role in this change of literature from texts to books. In the process, market also became the mediator of ideas/ideologies among the people which could consolidate into various kinds of politics in the given contexts. In literature and literary narrative, we have focussed primarily of the difference that novels and short stories shared with pre-modern literary narratives. It was highlighted that the popularity of novels and short stories was not merely due to the print culture/ market, but also due to its intrinsic narrative features that facilitates its comodification vis-à-vis pre-modern literary narratives.

2.2 RELATION BETWEEN MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE

The emergence of modern Indian literature in the 19th century was closely associated with another development, viz. the division of languages in India into 'major' and 'minor' languages. In the multilingual context of the subcontinent, the languages which came to represent the cultures of the middle classes, i.e. the dominant educated group, that emerged across the subcontinent were the ones

which came to be categorized as 'major' languages. The process of formation of 'major' languages was also linked to the national movement. In other words, besides being the cultural markers of the respective middle classes of the various regions, these languages also became the political markers of the educated middle classes of the respective regions.

It is important to note that much of what came to be recognized as modern Indian literature, especially in narratives like novels and short stories were written in these 'major' Indian languages. Some of the recognized 'major' languages that emerged during the period were Hindi/Urdu, Bengali, Assamese, Tamil, Kannada, Maharastrian, Gujrati and others. In India, after Independence, the languages that came to be recognized by the Sahitya Akademi (The National Akademi of Letters) as 'major' languages could be taken as the role the state played in the further consolidation of the process of formation of 'major Indian language. To be noted is that new languages have been added in recent years to the earlier list of 'major' languages in India.

One of the significant debates on language in South Asia has been that what constitutes the differences between 'major' and 'minor' language. This is in the given context that South Asia is not merely of multiple languages but also that each language could have multiple variants. Though there are no evidences of a 'major' language transforming into 'minor', there are many cases of 'minor' language changing into 'major' language. It is generally argued that which language or which variant of a language becomes 'major' among others is conditioned by the extent to which the speaker of the language or of the variant is the/a dominant linguistic group among dominated groups in the society. For example, in the case of Assamese language, between the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, the Sibsagar variant of the Assamese language emerged as the 'major' language due to the socio-economic dominance of the region to which the variant belonged. The process of middle class formation took root strongest in the region. However, by the turn of the century, the recognition of the Bodo language as 'major' language was a result of the political significance that the community came to exercise in the Brahmaputra valley.

Modern Indian literature can be understood in two broad ways, viz. (a) literatures that has come to exist in the 'major' languages of the subcontinent due to the above mentioned historical process, and (b) the attempts of these languages to exclude or include other linguistic or narrative variants within the given language in its becoming of cultural or political marker of a given region or community. Since the first feature has already been indicated, it is the second feature that will be discussed here. Since most modern Indian languages have their own variants, literatures in the languages have attempted to deal with the problem as well. The variants of the languages do not exist as mere linguistic variants (till recently also referred to as 'dialects'), but also as cultural or political markers of social groups within the larger socio-economic and cultural group/region that the language seeks to represent. For example, in the multi-ethnic society of Assam, though the modern Assamese language and literature in the language sought to inclusively represent the entire Assamese society, the fact that linguistic or narrative variants did not become a part of 'modern' language structure or literary narrative emerged as a problem. In recognition of the problem, whether in terms of language or in terms of narrative, literature tried to become inclusive. This can be found in the writings, for example, of Indira Goswami, wherein the attempt,

through the use of linguistic registers like direct-indirect speech, variants other than the Sibsagar variant is conceptually included in the narrative of the text. In the process, representation of society through literature is also made more inclusive than otherwise.

In other words, even if 'modern' Indian language could emerge in the context of dominant socio-economic or cultural unit of people within a larger socio-cultural-regional framework, the literature that comes to be produced in the language, due to the necessity of engaging with society and its dynamics of multiplicity, has to develop methods of inclusive literature. In conclusion, therefore, one can argue that the relation between modern Indian language and literature is dynamic in nature, being closely related to the nature of politics of language in the given socio-cultural-regional framework that a language operates in.

In this section, you have seen how modern Indian language and literature are closely related to each other. We have highlighted the historical context how Indian languages developed in the 19th century in terms of 'major' and 'minor' languages. We have also seen that 'minor' languages can become 'major' languages as well. In other words, what constitutes 'major' and 'minor' languages is determined by the extent that a language is a cultural or political marker of/in a given community. Further, through the example of modern Assamese language and literature, we have also seen how literature through uses of linguistics registers or in terms of narratives attempts to engage with the politics of language and language formations in the heterogeneous socio-cultural context of the subcontinent.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 300 words each;

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

1) Discuss three characteristics of modern literature?

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2) What is the relation between modern Indian language and literature?

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2.3 'FOLK' IN MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE

In the previous sections, we have discussed some of the characteristics of modern literature and the examples of relation between modern Indian languages and literatures. In this section, we will focus on how to understand 'folk' in modern Indian literature. The objective of the previous sections was to emphasize that to understand 'folk' in modern Indian literature, it is extremely important to realize (a) what 'modern' literature is and (b) the significance of relation between modern Indian language and literature.

'Folk' in modern Indian literature can be seen in two categories, viz. (a) as conceptualization of people, and (b) nature and use of literary narrative in accordance to the conceptualization of people in/through literature. As is evident, both the processes are inter-related. The development or the emergence of modern literature in South Asia was not based on rejection of the pre-modern literature. Modern literature continued to engage with themes, such as religion, customs and traditions, or social relations that were to be found in pre-modern literatures as well. However, broadly speaking, there were also two fundamental differences that could be seen in this regard. Firstly, the concept of people that literature dealt with was that of 'nation', whether actual or putative. Secondly, 'folk' as narrative technique in the modern literature assumed meaning that was very different from what it meant in pre-modern literatures. In other words, despite similarity of themes, the meanings of literatures underwent change.

The concept of people that modern Indian literature attempted to convey or construct could be seen in terms of nation, caste, tribe, ethnicity or even region. To be noted is that each of these categories was a political construct that emerged especially since the 19th century. Further, all the categories also operated directly or indirectly with reference to the politics of nation that came to be practiced since the 19th century. It is in this context of construct of people that 'folk' in literature assumes significance. Through the use of traditional folk narratives, for example, oral narratives such as songs, proverbs, tales and myths or riddles, modern literature attempted to depict the category of people that it dealt with as culturally authentic, indigenous, and therefore politically valid. We have already seen that novels and short stories were modern literary narratives. Folk narratives that were extensively used in these modern narratives played a crucial role in indigenizing such literary narratives in the context of South Asia. Similarly, in the case of poetry, the difference in the Romantic genre between English literature and that in South Asia in the 19th and early 20th century is also worth taking note of. Whereas in English literature, Romantic poetry emerged as a response to industrialization of society, in South Asia, it emerged as means of legitimizing constructs like nation, ethnicity and the other categories indicated earlier. The objective was to depict these categories of people as culturally traditional and authentic, and therefore politically valid.

It is such difference that not only highlights the peculiarity of modern literary narratives in South Asia vis-à-vis, for example, English literature but also how that the particular type in which modern literary narrative exists in a given context in the world differs from region to region, i.e. across cultures.

Further, 'folk' in modern literary narratives could also be studied in terms of literature being socially inclusive or exclusive in nature. For example, in the

case of modern Assam, by the close of the 19th century, the Sibsagar variant of the language became standardized as modern Assamese language. However, culturally and politically, there were multiple differences among the various social groups that inhabited especially the Brahmaputra valley. They also shared different variants of the language. In modern Assamese literature, different methods of literature came to be practiced vis-à-vis the situation. In one category of literature as typified by writers like Lakhminath Bezbarua in the late 19th and early 20th century, a peculiar variety of narrative structure was developed in which the difference between the written and the oral/folk was reduced to minimum. Similar narrative strategies were also seen in the case of Fakirmohan Senapati in Oriya literature. In the process, a new technique to integrate the modern and the pre-modern narratives was also attempted.

In another category of the late 20th century, the Sibsagar variant of the language was used as the referent while the other variants were used as indicators of socio-cultural diversity that existed within the larger referent. In such writings, for example those of Indira Goswami, the other variants were used as oral or folk indicators of cultures of people that existed within the Sibsagar variant, i.e. the marker of modern political identity of the people. In other words, the point that such literature make is that cultural variety can be subsumed within a larger political identity. Therefore, by using the variants or 'dialects' as markers of 'folk', and as cultures existing within the larger political identity, such literature make a fine example the simultaneous use of 'folk' as both concept of people and as narrative strategies to emphasize its concept of people.

In this section, you have seen in what ways 'folk' exists as integral part of modern literatures in India. 'Folk' exists both as concept of people as well as narrative techniques to emphasize its concept of people. The use of 'folk' or the oral as narrative techniques distinguishes modern literature and literary narratives in South Asia from European literatures, for example English literature. This feature can be found in both modern fiction and poetry in South Asia. Through particular devising of relations between folk and modern narratives, there were also examples wherein new forms of writings were developed in South Asia, especially in the 19th and early 20th century. Therefore, one can say that whereas the meaning of 'folk' in terms of narratives changed when placed in modern narratives, the latter too needed the former to realize its political objective of literature being a marker of identity during the period.

2.3.1 A case study: an interpretation of *'Paraja'*

In this case study, we will see how a people and their culture are represented in literature, with special reference to famous Oriya novelist Gopinath Mohanty's masterpiece, *Paraja*. Folk culture of Orissa, the cultural and the political identity of the people belonging there is successfully represented through literature, which will be discussed in this section.

In his portrayal of tribal life, Gopinath Mohanty invites comparison with the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe. At one level, their visions are almost identical: they visualize the disintegration of a primitive community under the impact of a new faith or an alien value-system. But to see the disintegration of Lulla village (in the novel, Dadi Budha) and the tribal community in Umuofia (in Things Fall Apart) as parts of the same process of change is to play down the role of

colonialism as an agent of disruption. Gopinath Mohanty (1914-1991) is an eminent Oriya novelist of the mid-twentieth century.He is arguably the greatest Oriya writer after Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918). He and his elder brother, Kahnu Charan, exercised tremendous influence on Oriya fiction for about three decades.He received Visuva Milan citation in 1950. He won the central Sahitya Akademi Award in 1955 for his novel, *Amrutara Santan* (Sons of Nectar; 1947) and the Bharatiya Jnanapith Award in 1974 for his prose-epic, *Matimatala* (The Fertile Soil; 1964). He was awarded the Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1970 for his Oriya translation of Gorky's work, *My Universities*, the D. Litt. Degree by Sambalpur University in 1976 and a Fellowship for Creative Writing in Oriya by the U.G.C. in 1979. In 1981, the Government of India conferred on him Padmabhusan in recognition of his distinguished contribution to literature. He was an Emeritus Fellow of Government of India for creative writing.Born at Nagabali in Cuttack district on 20th April 1914, Mohanty received higher education at Ravenshaw College. He got his M.A. degree from Patna University in 1936 and joined the Orissa Administrative Service in 1938. Most of his service career was spent among the poor tribals of the undivided Koraput district. He retired from government service in 1969. In 1986, he joined San Jose State University in the U.S.A. as an Adjunct Professor of Social Sciences. He passed away at San Jose, California on 20th August 1991. Mohanty appeared in the literary scene of Orissa a crucial moment of history. Poets like Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, Sachidananda Routray, Anant Patnaik, Mayadhar Mansingh, Radhamohan Gadanaik and writers like Kahnu Charan Mohanty, Nityananda Mahapatra, Surendra Mohanty and Laxmidhar Nayak were, among others, at this time trying to shape a distinct cultural identity for the newly-formed province of Orissa. The English version of *Paraja* was published by Faber and Faber (U.K) and Oxford University Press (India) in 1987.

The vibrant life of people of Orissa, rural as well as tribal, found expression in the works Mohanty. In his fiction Gopinath Mohanty explores all aspects of Orissan life : life, both in the plains and in the hills. He evolves a unique prose style, lyrical in style, choosing words and phrases from the day-to-day speech of ordinary men and women. Among his novels, *Dadi Budha, Paraja, Amrutara Santana* and *Apahanca* are remarkable for their portrayal of tribal life in the densely wooded hills and forests of the Eastern Ghats. In the novel *Paraja*, the Kondhs and the Parajas are two colourful and proud tribal communities living in tiny clusters of hamlets in the southern parts of Orissa. People of these primitive communities have been exploited by moneylenders and petty government officials for many years. They have felt in their blood and bones that exploitation is as old as the hills and forests surrounding them. Yet they celebrate the joys of life; they drink and dance and sing; they find joy in nature, in buds and flowers, in green leaves, in the chirping of birds, in the swift-flowing streams and in the mist-covered hills. They find life constantly renewing itself in the quick-fading flowers and slow-blooming buds of the forest.

(Source : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oriya_literature)

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.

3) What, according to you, has been the nature of inter-dependence between folk narrative and modern literary narrative in modern Indian literature?

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2.4 EXAMPLES OF 'FOLK' IN PRE-MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE

The distinction between 'folk' and written narratives in pre-modern literatures of South Asia is difficult to locate. Pre-modern literatures in South Asia were not premised upon the strict differentiation of oral and written narratives. For example, many of the epic traditions in pre-modern South Asia were in the form of *katha* which were tales that were also performed before the audience. In other words, they not only existed as texts but also as performing traditions. In that capacity, these epic traditions were both oral and literary at the same time. They were oral because their *mode of practice or communication* was verbal and they were literary because their *mode of existence* was textual, i.e. written. One of the best cases of such inter-relation between oral and written narrative are the various Ramayana traditions across the subcontinent. It is also possible to find literary traditions in South Asia which existed as oral traditions and later transformed into written traditions. The early epic tradition of the Gangetic area was oral in nature, i.e. the epics were orally transferred from one generation to another through specific methods of memory. It was only towards the close of the first millennium BC, i.e. after nearly centuries of existence as oral literature that they were written down and came to exist as literary texts.

The culture of writing is historically ancient in South Asia. However, it did not marginalize the oral culture in the region. One of the reasons put forward has been that all social classes did not have access to written knowledge, primarily on ritual grounds. Thus the oral narratives became an important means and method of preserving culture among social classes without or with limited access to written knowledge. But the role of the oral narratives was also strongly present among social classes which had access to written knowledge. For example, oral narratives and memory remained the primary means of preserving and transferring ritual hymns and prayers even among the Brahmin social class in the region for centuries.

The inter-dependence between the written and the oral became far closer during the second millennium AD. This has also been seen as a part of the development of 'regional' languages since the period. Other than linguistic factors, the role of the Bhakti and Sufi movements during the period has also been considered significant reasons for this particular nature of linguistic formation in the subcontinent. One of the basic features of Bhakti and Sufi movements during the period was the historical development of popular culture. Language and literature were also a part of this historical development. In terms of methods of culture, since the movements were located at popular culture, both the use of folk narratives, i.e. oral narratives, in literary texts as well as the performance of the literary texts assumed significance. The growth of the *katha* tradition, i.e. performance of tales which exists in written form, was closely related to this period. The Ramayana or Mahabharat traditions, the epic traditions, which could be found across the subcontinent during the period, were also mostly performing texts, i.e. *kathas*.

The *katha* traditions in terms of performing texts were, however, not the only kind of relation between the 'folk' and written that could be found in South Asia. For example, in the case of the *Panchatantra* or the *Jataka* tales, though they were written narratives, they were also 'folk' because of their mode of narration or communication. In other words, though they were written narratives, in terms of narrative methods, they were also oral. Further, they also existed as people's tales or knowledge rather than existing as produced by individual authors. This characteristic also made such tales 'folk' along with being literary. It is this relation of inter-dependence that became differentiated with modern literary narratives such as novels and short stories. Whether in terms of narrative structure or in terms of mode of narration or communication, modern literary narratives discounted the role of the oral as well as the role of the social as producers of literature in favour of an individual author. In the pre-modern period, names of individual authors (for example, Kalidas or Tulsidas or Madhab Kandali) as producers of literature existed along with that of community, i.e. the social, as producers of literatures. The latter constituted an example of people's literature or culture as literary practice.

In the previous sections, we have given couple of examples (Fakirmohan Senapati in Oriya literature, Gopinath Mohanty in Oriya literature or Lakhminath Bezbarua in Assamese literature) wherein the inter-dependence between written and oral narratives was sought to be developed, but within the paradigm of modern literature. Their literature was modern because they were both mass produced and consumed books (i.e. market and print culture) as well as did not need performance as part of literary practice (i.e. the consumption of text were independent of the role of its performance). The role of 'folk' narrative in their writings was a stylistic innovation in modern literary method as it came to be practiced in South Asia.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed some of the salient features of literature and literary practices in pre-modern South Asia. We have come to know that 'folk' narratives and written narratives shared a close relation in pre-modern South Asia. Though examples of *katha* traditions, the epic traditions, the Vedic traditions and traditions

such as the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka* tales, we have seen that the relation between 'folk' and written traditions was variegated. Whether in terms of performance of texts or in terms of mode of textual narrative, the clear distinction between 'folk' and written, as is found in modern literary narratives, did not exist in pre-modern literature of the region. In conclusion, we have also noted some of the attempts during the modern period in developing literary practices that combines 'folk' narrative techniques within modern literature and how such literatures differ in their modernity from other modern literatures such as English literature.

2.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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Macherey, Pierre. *A Theory on Literary Production*. Routledge and Kegan & Paul: London. 1978.

2.7 GLOSSARY

Katha: story telling tradition.

Gangetic: areas covered by the River Ganga.

2.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1) Three characteristics of modern literature are relation between (a) literature and nationalism, (b) literature and market, (c) literature and literary narrative. One of the basic differences in the literature of the modern period is the new method of conceptualizing people, i.e. in terms of nation. It is from the second half of the 19th century that literatures in various languages across South Asia began to engage with or critique colonialism and emerge as a vehicle of nationalist politics. Behind this process was the new method in which the people of the subcontinent came to be conceptualized, viz in terms of nation. For example, the role of the writings of Bankim Chandra or Rabindranath Tagore in this regard is extremely well known. The concept of nation and the attempt to conceptualize anti-colonial resistance in terms of nationalism was a new phenomenon in South Asia. Though this relation of literature with nationalist politics clearly distinguished it from pre-modern literature, it did not mean that all such literatures were ideologically similar. The ideological content of the nationalism could be socialist, could be liberal or could also be religious. Yet the politics that it aimed at or sought to conceive was nationalist in nature.

   When seen in terms of role of literature in nationalist politics (or any politics in general), the factor of market (has) historically played a crucial role. Market as the mediator of exchange or consolidation of ideas/ideology among the people became helped in the spread of nationalism. The relation between literature and market became crucial for the consolidation of politics other than that of nationalism as well. For example, among the educated, politics of caste, politics of tribe, or politics of class were equally mediated through the relation between literature and market. These methods of politics, which emerged more powerfully in the post colonial period, were in existence even

in the colonial period and became modes of serious interrogation of nationalism of the period. In other words, literature as commodity was crucially linked to the formation/consolidation of ideas/ideologies and politics during the period. This role of literature was largely absent in the pre-modern period.

The third characteristic that distinguishes literature of the period 'modern' from pre-modern literature has been the relation between literature and literary narratives that developed during (and since) the period. The most significant literary narratives that came to be practiced in the subcontinent in (and since) the period were those of novels and short stories. As narrative methods, novels and short stories were distinctly different from most pre-modern literary narratives that were practiced in South Asia. The most fundamental difference was separation of text and its performance, a bond or relation which was central to most pre-modern literary narratives. As a result of the relation, the meaning of a text was located both in the text as well as in its performance. Novels and short stories (narratives that were imported from Europe) facilitated that the meaning can be located only in the text itself. Novels and short stories as narratives also emphasized the role of realism in literature to communicate its meaning to the readers. In pre-modern literatures of the subcontinent, the role of traditional anti-realism was far more significant. In it, the meaning was conveyed not through a realistic depiction of the subject, but rather through its non-realistic depictions. The popularity of novels and short stories due to print technology and market was also connected to these narrative features that they carried in them as a result of which it was possible for authors and the readers to communicate only through the mediation of the market than any direct communion (as was generally the case in the earlier literary performances).

2) The emergence of modern Indian literature in the 19th century was closely associated with another development, viz. the division of languages in India into 'major' and 'minor' languages. In the multilingual context of the subcontinent, the languages which came to represent the cultures of the middle classes, i.e. the dominant educated group, that emerged across the subcontinent were the ones which came to be categorized as 'major' languages. The process of formation of 'major' languages was also linked to the national movement. In other words, besides being the cultural markers of the respective middle classes of the various regions, these languages also became the political markers of the educated middle classes of the respective regions.

Modern Indian literature can be understood in two broad ways, viz. (a) literatures that has come to exist in the 'major' languages of the subcontinent due to the above mentioned historical process, and (b) the attempts of these languages to exclude or include other linguistic or narrative variants within the given language in its becoming of cultural or political marker of a given region or community. Since the first feature has already been indicated, it is the second feature that will be discussed here. Since most modern Indian languages have their own variants, literatures in the languages have attempted to deal with the problem as well. The variants of the languages do not exist as mere linguistic variants (till recently also referred to as 'dialects'), but also as cultural or political markers of social groups within the larger socio-

economic and cultural group/region that the language seeks to represent. For example, in the multi ethnic society of Assam, though the modern Assamese language and literature in the language sought to inclusively represent the entire Assamese society, the fact that linguistic or narrative variants did not become a part of 'modern' language structure or literary narrative emerged as a problem. In recognition of the problem, whether in terms of language or in terms of narrative, literature tried to become inclusive. This can be found in the writings, for example, of Indira Goswami, wherein the attempt, through the use of linguistic registers like direct-indirect speech, variants other than the Sibsagar variant is conceptually included in the narrative of the text. In the process, representation of society through literature is also made more inclusive than otherwise.

3) 'Folk' in modern Indian literature can be seen in two categories, viz. (a) as conceptualization of people, and (b) nature and use of literary narrative in accordance to the conceptualization of people in/through literature. As is evident, both the processes are inter-related. The development or the emergence of modern literature in South Asia was not based on rejection of the pre-modern literature. Modern literature continued to engage with themes, such as religion, customs and traditions, or social relations that were to be found in pre-modern literatures as well. However, broadly speaking, there were also two fundamental differences that could be seen in this regard. Firstly, the concept of people that literature dealt with was that of 'nation', whether actual or putative. Secondly, 'folk' as narrative technique in the modern literature assumed meaning that was very different from what it meant in pre-modern literatures. In other words, despite similarity of themes, the meanings of literatures underwent change.

   The concept of people that modern Indian literature attempted to convey or construct could be seen in terms of nation, caste, tribe, ethnicity or even region. To be noted is that each of these categories was a political construct that emerged especially since the 19th century. Further, all the categories also operated directly or indirectly with reference to the politics of nation that came to be practiced since the 19th century. It is in this context of construct of people that 'folk' in literature assumes significance. Through the use of traditional folk narratives, for example, oral narratives such as songs, proverbs, tales and myths or riddles, modern literature attempted to depict the category of people that it dealt with as culturally authentic, indigenous, and therefore politically valid. Folk narratives that were extensively used in these modern narratives played a crucial role in indigenizing such literary narratives in the context of South Asia.

   Further, 'folk' in modern literary narratives could also be studied in terms of literature being socially inclusive or exclusive in nature. For example in the case of modern Assam, by the close of the 19th century, the Sibsagar variant of the language became standardized as modern Assamese language. In one category of Assamese fiction, the Sibsagar variant of the language was used as the referent while the other variants were used as indicators of socio-cultural diversity that existed within the larger referent. In such writings, for example those of Indira Goswami, the other variants were used as oral or folk indicators of cultures of people that existed within the Sibsagar variant, i.e. the marker of modern political identity of the people. In other words, the

point that such literature make is that cultural variety can be subsumed within a larger political identity. Therefore, by using the variants or 'dialects' as markers of 'folk', and as cultures existing within the larger political identity, such literature make a fine example the simultaneous use of 'folk' as both concept of people and as narrative strategies to emphasize its concept of people.

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