
UNIT 8 FOLK NARRATIVE POEMS AND FOLK SONGS

Structure

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- appreciate what we understand by the term folk, both in terms of ‘people’ and ‘folklore’, and what we mean by ‘narrative poems’ in literature;
- understand the meaning of the terms ‘folk narrative poems’ and ‘folk songs’ and how they are related to folklore; and
- gain insights into how the people of India perceived their world of folklore and its functions and phenomena.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

What are ‘narrative poems’ in literature?

Now that you are doing this unit on the broad theme of ‘Folk narrative poems in Literature’, the first thing that you need to ask yourself is, what are ‘narrative poems’? What does the word mean? Narrative poetry is a form of poetry that tells a story, often making use of the voices of a narrator and characters as well, and the entire story is usually written in metred verse. Narrative poems usually do not follow rhythmic patterns. The poems that make up this genre may be short or long, and the story it relates to may be complex in nature. It is usually dramatic, with objectives, diverse characters, and metre. Narrative poems include ballads, epics, lays and idylls.

The focus of narrative poetry is often the pros and cons of life. Some narrative poetry takes the form of a novel in verse. Epic poems are very vital to narrative poems, although it is thought that narrative poems were created to explain oral traditions. Speaking in terms of narrative poetry, a romance is a narrative poem that tells a story of chivalry. On the other hand, shorter narrative poems are often similar in style to the short story.

What are ‘folk narrative poems in literature’?

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary says that “folk” means “people in general”. According to the Macmillan Dictionary it means “people of a particular type or from a particular place”. In India majority of ‘people’ or ‘folk’ are non-

literate: they cannot read and write, and their learning is dependent on what they see and hear, remember and imitate. Folk narrative poems are formed and transmitted from the perspective of time and space and are passed on from generation to generation. Furthermore folk narrative poems are an essential part of the social and cultural life of India. Generation after generation, people narrate these poems, relish them, interchange them and enrich them. Over the centuries, the unsaid things were said in the folktales as well as in the folk-songs in India. A folk narrative can have both a moral and psychological scope. It has a distinctive entertainment value, depending upon the nature of the teller, the style of telling, the ages of the members of the audience and the overall context of the performance.

8.2 BENGALI FOLK POETRY

Bengali is an Indo-Aryan language possessing a history and tradition of many centuries, and has a rich tradition of folklore and folk literature. Folk rhymes form an important part of this century-old tradition. The origins of many Bengali folk rhymes are obscure, no doubt, but are often thought to be of considerable antiquity. Folk rhyme exists in many Indian languages, but is often of secondary importance compared to other forms of folk literature, such as folktales and ballads. In Bengali folk literature, however, rhyme holds a place of equal importance to these other forms. Bengali folk rhyme is not simply an instrument for the amusement of children but a subject which requires serious study; it essentially bears most of the important characteristics of folk tradition: anonymous and collective creation, dynamism, textual variation, and social function.

Bengali has a rich tradition of folklore and folk literature. This tradition is the creation of the rural folk, transmitted orally from one generation to another. In addition to the rhymes, Bengali folk literature includes such forms as folktales, riddles, proverbs, maxims, and songs. Folk rhymes exist in one form or another in most areas of the world. Common examples are the nursery rhymes of Europe, the Mother Goose verse of America, and the *warabe uta* and *komori uta* of Japan. The origins of many Bengali folk rhymes are obscure, a large portion of them are known to have existed in the oral tradition for several centuries at least. This is a characteristic they share with the folk rhyme traditions found in most other cultures. Siddiqui quotes the famous folklorist M. Bloomfield:

There are many popular rhymes which cannot be definitely assigned to any specific moment in history. The very same popular [144] rhyme may have been in existence for decades, each time adopting itself, now to one and now to another manifestation of actual life, and being subjected sometimes to slight, sometimes to very extensive changes. (1963, 203)

Like many other folklorists, Bloomfield considers rhymes to be “striking examples of the poetic primitive” that existed as early as “primitive archaic” times. Many scholars consider rhyme to be the “genesis of all songs” and hence older than even the earliest of songs. This opinion is shared by experts on Bengali folk rhymes as Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumar Sen, and Muhammad Shahidullah (Shahed 53-54). On the basis of available evidence, Bengali folk rhymes appear to be at least as old as the Buddhist mystic verses *charyapada*, which are considered to be the earliest literary works in the Bengali language. If this hypothesis is proved correct, Bengali folk rhymes share the thousand-year history of the Bengali language itself.

Jawaharlal Handoo in his book *Folklore: An Introduction* divided the growth of Indian folklore studies into three distinct periods: the missionary, the nationalistic,

and the academic (127-44).

Let us now discuss some of the Basic Characteristics of Bengali folk narrative poems which are rhythmic in nature:

Folk rhyme may be basically defined as that segment of folk literature or oral tradition that consists of rhyming verse, usually recited or sung. There are certain other characteristics of Bengali folk narrative poems these include:

- a) Short verses with lines that almost invariably rhyme;
- b) A basis in sound, sometimes with a musical setting;
- c) A structure with, generally, no logical idea, story, or continuity of event, but composed rather of a series of images;
- d) Composition in simple meter and language;
- e) Marked by nonsense, fantasy, absurdity, impossibility, etc. – most are free from didacticism and idealism.

This definition of folk rhyme excludes several rhyming forms of Bengali folk literature that do not show all of the essential characteristics of folk rhyme; these forms include mantras, magical rhymes, proverbs, riddles, and maxims (the most popular of which are those of Khona and Dak). The following may be presented as examples of true folk narrative poems:

*Ghumparani masi-pisi¹ moder bari eso,
khat nai palong nai khokar
chokhe boso.
Bata vore pan debo gal vore
kheo,
Khokar chokhe ghum nai
ghum deye jeo.*

Translated into English as:

Oh aunts of sleep! Come to our home,
There is no cot or bed, so be
seated on child's eye.
A tray² full of betel leaf will be
served, eat them with full
mouth,
Sleep has gone away from child's
eye, give him some sleep.

Another example:

*Brishti pare tapur tupur
node elo ban,
Shib Thakurer biye holo tin
konney dan.
Ek konney radhen baren arek
konney khan,*

*Arek konney na khey baper
bari jan.*

Translated into English as:
It is raining *tapur tupur*³, rivers
are flooded,
The marriage of Shib Thakur held
with three brides.
One busy with cooking, another
eating.
The other left for home⁴ without
taking food.

Another example with some of its versions is as follows:

*Agdum bagdum ghoradum*⁵ *saje*
Dhak mridong jhajhor baje
Bajte bajte challo dhuli
Dhuli gelo shei komolapuli.

Agdum bagdum ghoradum saje
Phai mirgel ghaghor baje
Bajte bajte porlo thuli
Thuli gelo komolaphuli.

Agdum bagdum ghoradum saje
Lai mirgel ghaghor baje
Bajte bajte elo dhuli
Dhuli gelo shei komolapuli.

Agdam bagdam ghoradam saje
Dan mecra ghaghor baje
Bajte bajte parlo turi
Turi gelo komolapuri.

Agdum bagdum ghoradum saje
Lai gheghor ghagor baje
Bajte bajte challo dhuli
Dhuli gelo shei komolapuli.

Translated into English as:
Agdum bagdum ghoradum are preparing,
Drum, tom-tom, and gong are being beaten,
The drummer is moving while beating,
The drummer goes to that Komolapuli.

Agdum bagdum ghoradum are preparing,
The drummer is beating the tomtom and cymbals,
The beating continues and blinkers fall [on the eyes],
The blind man goes to Komolafuli.

Agdum bagdum ghoradum are preparing,
Red tom-tom and cymbals are being beaten,
The drummer comes while beating,
The drummer goes to that Komolapuli.

Agdam bagdam ghoradam are preparing,
To the right, *mecra*⁶ and cymbals are being beaten,
The beating continues and blinkers fall [on the eyes],
The blind man goes to Komolapuri.

Agdum bagdum ghoradum are preparing,
Cymbals are beating and [the woman in the] red skirt [is dancing],
The drummer is moving while beating,
The drummer goes to that Komolapuli.

Let us cite another example with its variants:

Chhele ghumalo para juralo
borgi elo deshe
Bulbulite dhan kheyechhe khajna
debo kise?

Moni ghumalo para juralo
gorki elo deshe
Gulgulie dhan kheyechhe khajna
debo kise?

The English translation:
Kids slept, locality silent, looters
came,
Birds have eaten the paddy, how
can I pay the tax?

Baby slept, locality silent, land
flooded.
*Gulguli*⁷ has destroyed the paddy,
How can I pay the tax?

The first of these two variants was collected in the western part of Bengal, while the second version was recorded in Chittagong which is now in the eastern part of Bangladesh⁸. The word *borgi* in the first rhyme has been transformed into *gorki* in the second variant; the other changes are minor. *Borgi* is the local Bengali name for

the Maratha cavalry; they are plunderers, notorious for their freebooting inroads. Their raids into the western part of Bengal in the first half of the eighteenth century led to social and economic disruption (Hossain 11-15), the memory of which is depicted in the first version of the rhyme. The eastern part of Bengal had very little experience of this event, but the coastal areas were frequently affected by the *goriki*, a high tidal wave that flooded the paddy fields and destroyed the rice. This difference in folk experience is reflected in the above textual variations of these rhymes.

Some rhymes are also classified according to function, others according to subject matter or main theme.

- i) The first of these are the Lullaby and cradle songs which the grand-mothers/fathers used to narrate to their grand-sons/daughters:

Ay ay chad mama tip diye za,
Chader kopale chad tip diye za.
Machh katle muru debo,
Dhan vangle kuru debo,
Kalo gorur dudh debo,
Dudh khabar bati debo
Chader kopale chad tip diye
za.

The English translation is as follows:

Come uncle moon! Give a *tip*⁹
Give a *tip* on the moon's [baby's] forehead, O moon!
When I cut a fish I shall give you the head
When I husk the paddy I shall give you the chaff,
I shall give you the milk of a black cow,¹⁰
I shall give you a pot for drinking the milk,
Give a *tip* on the moon's forehead,
O moon!

Another popular one is:

Dol dol duloni
Ranga mathay chiruni,
Bor asbe ekhoni
Niye zabe tokhoni.

The English translation is as follows:

Swing, cradle, swing
A comb in the colourfully decorated bride's head,
The bridegroom will come right now
And take you then and there.

- ii) Folk Narrative poems which sing of the feminine rhymes of marriage and other domestic functions:

Alta para pa'go
Jamai ante ja'goy

The English translation:

O lac-dyed feet,
Go and bring the bridegroom,
The second example:

Jamai ana emni noy
Tinti taka khorochh hoy.

The English translation:

It is not so easy to bring the bridegroom,
It would cost *taka*¹¹ three.

iii) Let us now look at poems used in rituals and folk-religious ceremonies:

Helencha kobmi bbbk lore
Rajar beta pokkhi mare,
Maren pakhi Sukor bil
Sonar kouta rupar khil.

The English translation:

Watercresses are dangling,
The prince is hunting birds,
Hunting birds in the Sukor¹² marsh,
The container is made of gold, the bolt of silver.

A very popular one is,

Laria re laria-haioi
Hatir pithe charia
Hati gelo Korimpur
Peye elo Chompaphul.

The English translation:

Fighter! O Fighter— *haloi*¹³
Riding on an elephant's back,
The elephant goes to Karimpur,
Back with some *champak*¹⁴ flowers.

iv) These are rhymes which are used in games and leisure:

*Shai kabadi Brindabon*¹⁵
Ghori baje thonthon.
*Ghorir kopale phota,*¹⁶
Moish mare gota gota.
Lal ranga ghuri ayna uri
Nil ranga ghuri ayna uri,
Korchhe kemon gata
Porli tobe tui kata.
Royal kabadi Brindabon,

The English translation:

The clock sounds *tthontthon*.

A round-mark in the clock's forehead,

Kills whole buffaloes.

O red kite! Let us fly,

O blue kite! Let us fly,

Are you stricken with nausea?

Then you are cleaved.

- v) Let us now discuss rhymes on weather, nature, and animals:

Khajur pata holdi,

Megh nam joldi.

Ek bira pan,

Jhupjhupaya nam.

The English translation:

The date leaf has yellowed,

O rain, come quickly!

One *bidazo*¹⁷ of betel leaf,

Fall splashingly!

Another one goes as follows:

Chad uthechhe phul phuthechhe

Kodom talay ke?

Hati nachhe ghora nachhe

Ramshaliker be.

The English translation:

The moon has risen, the flower has bloomed,

Who is there under the *kodom* tree?

Elephants and horses are dancing

At Ramshaiik's¹⁸ wedding.

- vi) Some examples of historical narrative folk- poems:

*Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni*¹⁹

Bom phelechhe Japani,

Bomar maidhe keute sap

British bole bapre-bap.

The English translation:

Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni,

The Japanese have dropped bombs,

There is a cobra in the bombs.

The British shout, *bapre-bap*²⁰

vii) Examples of Folk Work songs and counting rhymes :

O buri o buri suta kat
Kail biane Olir hat,
Olir hatot zabi ni?
Chorka bandha dibi na?

The English translation:

O old lady! spin some thread.
The Olir-bazaar is tomorrow morning,
Would you go to the Olir-bazaar?
Would you mortgage the spinning wheel?

viii) Let us now discuss folk narrative poems which are extensively used in folktales, fairy tales, etc.

Amar kothati phuralo
Note gachhti murlo,
Keno re note muroli?
Goru keno ghas khay?
Kenore goru ghas khas?
Rakhal keno choray na?

The English translation:

Thus my story ends
The Natia-thorn withers,
Why do you wither, Natia?
Why does the cow eat grass?
Why do you eat grass, cow?
Why does the cowboy not let me graze?

Bengal has a rich treasury of folk literature, of which folk narrative is an integral and important component possessed in its own universe and notable in terms of both quality and quantity. In many Indian languages and cultures, folk narrative poems and songs are of secondary importance in comparison with folktales, ballads, etc., but in Bengali folk literature narrative poetry and folk songs hold a place of equal importance. Bengali folk narrative poetry is not simply an instrument for the amusement of children but a subject worthy of serious study, bearing most of the essential characteristics of folk tradition: anonymous and collective creation, dynamism, textual variation, social function, etc. (Bungi 101-103). Local culture and folk experience play a dominant role in the composition and variation of these poems. The origins of most Bengali folk narrative poems are obscure, possibly sharing the thousand-year history of the Bengali language itself. Classification of folk narrative poetry as well as folk songs is difficult and still in a fluid stage, although certain hypotheses have been drawn up by many experts of this field. The collection and compilation of Bengali folk poetry in a systematic way has a history of a millennium. It was inspired by the worldwide interest in folklore collection on the one hand, and by the rise of Bengali nationalism and cultural consciousness on the other. However, that is not the purpose of our discussion.

8.3 PUNJABI FOLK POETRY

Punjab, Land of Five Rivers, (*Panj* is five, and *ab* means water) now lies divided between Pakistan and India. It is united by a common language, *Punjabi*. While South India has preserved the ancient arts, classical dances, rock cut temples, sculptures, and rituals, Punjab has stronger secular and folk culture. The Punjabis usually are not preservers of tradition but breakers of it. They are uninhibited, extrovert, explosive people. They believe that folk poetry is essentially collective and anonymous. People compose spontaneously while involved in their ordinary daily activities. It is primarily a verbal art. A village woman's speech in rural Punjab is full of images, proverbs, poetic flashes. She improvises her curses and her lullabies and her wails. Farmers while tilling the land, women at their spinning wheels, girls embroidering shawls, artisans at their crafts, sing and compose. Those poems touch all aspects of life: love, hate, birth, death, marriage, murder, infidelity, war, famine, theft, rain, splendor, poverty. In India our poems are sung. The word and the music are inseparable. For centuries folk songs have been passed orally from generation to generation. Every village has a large number of people who preserve this oral tradition by memory. At festivals and fairs, contests are held even today where village bards and troubadours compete through the night. They recite hundreds of poems from memory on a theme and spontaneously compose new ones. At domestic functions, marriages and births, young girls sing and compose in competition with each other. Their imagery is startlingly fresh, evocative, and picturesque.

Folk poetry openly portrays human conditions. It does not camouflage emotions. It reveals the bare truth which sometimes comes as a shock. Punjabi folk poetry has many meters, many variations, but the most popular is a two-line short poetical form, the *tappa*. It is like a miniature painting, and could be compared to the Haiku of Japan which etches out a picture in a few strokes. The folk poet sings his lines. Our poets were always singers. The great gurus of the Sikh religion, who composed brilliant poetry imbued with metaphysical truths, set the raga and the tala of their compositions. Even today, a literary poet mostly sings out his poem to the audiences. So does a folk poet. Here is a *tappa* poem. It describes the heroism of a famous bandit whose name was Jagga. Hundreds of poems have been written about his valor.

Pakke pul te laraian hoieyan

Chhavian de kil tut ge

It means:

On the stone bridge, they clashed

And the nails of their hatchets broke.

It is a difficult process to capture the meaning of the original. You must be aware of the fact that every word carries a stream of consciousness – hundreds of associations and images. The same word which in the Punjabi language lights up areas, when translated, becomes opaque. The music is lost and all the smells and sensations become dead. The poem gives the picture of the bandit who is running away on horseback, perhaps eloping with his beloved or escaping after robbing a rich, corrupt moneylender, and he is being pursued by the police. Suddenly he stops at the narrow bridge and turns and challenges his pursuers. Their hatchets clash and sparks fly. We see their grinding teeth and bloodshot eyes. The poet sums up this entire fury by describing only the hatchets.

Here is another poem:

Teri sajari par da reta
Chak chak lavan hik.

It means:

Your fresh footprints on the sand
I gather and press them to my heart.

A lover is either going to the war or to a distant city to earn money leaving his beloved behind. She follows him and collapses kissing his footprints on the sand and pressing these to her heart. This describes the entire saga of their separation. Another popular folk poem is

Rann nha ke chhappar vichon nikli
Sulphe di lat vargi

It means:

The woman emerged from the pond
Like a flame shooting out of an opium pipe

To a man who knows Punjabi life, the picture would be of a pond on the outskirts of the village where women and cattle come to bathe. A *sadhu* (hermit) sits nearby in meditation before his holy fire smoking a small clay pipe. The worshippers of Shiva are often addicted to smoking *ganja* (cannabis). This lifts them above humdrum reality by generating false euphoria, and gives their eyes a hypnotic glaze. In the folk song the woman is described coming out of the pond, her clothes dripping, her body gleaming in the sun. She is compared to the flame of the hermit's pipe. The flame sways and dances and is temperamental. So is the woman. These poems touch almost every social activity. There are poems about the love of mother and son, sister and brother, bandits, money-lenders, elopements, and even about political themes. Some poems are about Gandhi. These were composed by peasant women when they followed him in the freedom movement. Here are a few of them:

Saano de ke khaddar da bana
Aap Gandi kaid ho gia

It means:

Giving us rough *khadar* to wear
The Old man, Gandhi,
Sits comfortably in the prison of the British.

And another poem translated as:

The fine English muslin
Has strangled the throat of our handspun shawls.
A farmer has been arrested.
His wife sings out in anger:
I shall sell my gold bracelets
And get you released from the jail.

This song is quite old. Originally perhaps it was about a woman whose lover was imprisoned for theft or murder. There is a subtle implication that the lover fought with the husband who got him jailed. The woman defies her husband, sides with her lover and hires a lawyer by selling her bracelets. The songs often mock the religious prudes. Village people are earthy and react emotionally to situations. They might invoke the gods in anger, gratitude, or helplessness. But their compositions are not religious in the traditional sense. They often mock the priests and well-fed ecclesiasts. This famous *tappa* is known to everyone:

*Singh bhul gia guru di bani
Jhanjaraan di gaj sun ke.*

This can be translated as:

The devoted Sikh forgot the Holy Scriptures
when he heard the jingle of ankle bells.

Another poem describes a mendicant who is on his rounds in the village asking for alms. The women never turn a monk away from the door without giving him some food. But there are many lazybones dressed in orange-colored garments of a monk. One such lecherous monk is described thus:

*Kithe chalia en boobana sadha
Chher ke bharind rangian*

It means:

Where are you slinking away
You rascally monk
After disturbing a nest of hornets?

Here the hornets are village women who will not tolerate a fanny-pincher, but will beat him up.

In folk poetry, we have songs not only of valour and love, but also of pathos. Women express their pain in their songs. They are not conscious of their meter; and cannot analyze; they pour out their heart spontaneously. In villages, the songs of joy and grief are sung collectively. When someone dies, the women hold a session of collective mourning. Generally the barber woman conducts this mournful gathering. She stands in the center while wailing women, with their hair loose, stand in a circle expressing their sorrow loudly. This collective mourning is called "siapa". The barber woman, like the conductor of an opera, controls the form, the beginning, of the mournful chant, the refrain, and inspires women to compose spontaneous new dirges. She injects fury and pathos in the harrowing ritual of grief. But our most expressive poetry is that of love and war. These reflect almost the entire social life. Here is a *tappa* on war:

*Mahi mera lam noo gia
Nale dhar kadhan nale rovan*

My lover has gone to the battlefield
I milk the cow and weep

Here is another *tappa* on war. It has pungent comment. The soldiers from Punjab during the British rule went abroad to fight without knowing where they were going. The poem is translated as:

He went to earn
And what did he earn?
A handful of red bangles
His wife wept at night
And her tears stained the bed.

There are many poems celebrating a woman's beauty. Here is one of the songs:

With silver crescents in their ears
The two women walk the village path
Like vermilion-painted elephants
Graceful and swaying.
The sly old hag watches them from behind a door
The hag who could patch the torn skirt of the sky
The moneylender's fat wife crochets a shawl and peers
through the window.
The young Preeto comes
Her eyes black like night
And she dances
All the women clap and say
She is the queen of the dance!

8.4 LET US SUM UP

- Narrative poetry is a form of poetry that tells a story, often making use of the voices of a narrator and characters as well, the entire story is usually written in metred verse.
- Narrative poems usually do not follow rhythmic patterns. The poems that make up this genre may be short or long, and the story it relates to may be complex in nature.
- “Folk” refers to “people in general”. It also means “people of a particular type or from a particular place.”
- Folk narrative poems are formed and transmitted from the perspective of time and space and pass on from generation to generations.
- Over the centuries, the unsaid things were said in the folktales as well as in the folk-songs in India.
- A folk narrative has both a moral and psychological scope. It has a distinctive entertainment value, depending upon the nature of the teller, the style of telling, the ages of the members of the audience and the overall context of the performance.
- Folk narrative poems are an essential part in social and cultural life of India.

- Folk rhyme exists in many Indian languages, but is often of secondary importance compared to other forms of folk literature, such as folktales and ballads.
- In Bengali folk literature, rhyme holds a place of equal importance to these other forms. Bengali folk rhyme is not simply an instrument for the amusement of children but a subject which requires serious study. It essentially bears most of the important characteristics of folk tradition: anonymous and collective creation, dynamism, textual variation, and social function.
- While South India has preserved the ancient arts, classical dances, rock cut temples, sculptures, and rituals, Punjab has stronger secular and folk culture.
- The Punjabis believe that folk poetry is essentially collective and anonymous. People compose spontaneously while involved in their ordinary daily activities. It is primarily a verbal art.
- A village woman's speech in rural Punjab is full of images, proverbs, poetic flashes. She improvises her curses and her lullabies and her wails. Farmers while tilling the land, women at their spinning wheels, girls embroidering shawls, artisans at their crafts, sing and compose. Those poems touch all aspects of life: love, hate, birth, death, marriage, murder, infidelity, war, famine, theft, rain, splendor and poverty.

8.5 NOTES

- 1) The phrase *ghumparani masi-pisi* in this rhyme has many textual variations, such as *ghumparanir ma* and *nindorolir ma*. Sometimes these lines indicate that the common people in Bengal imagined a supernatural power that controlled sleep and was able to distribute it to the masses.
- 2) The word 'tray', which suggests a flat-surfaced container, does not convey the full meaning of the word *bata* in Bengali. The traditional *bata* used for betel leaf has a cylindrical shape and is usually made of metal, with three or more compartments separating the betel leaf, lime, nuts, etc.
- 3) The sound of the rain as traditionally imagined in Bengal.
- 4) The journey of a bride to her parent's house after marriage is a ceremonial one. The journeys usually continued at regular intervals, and were known as *naior*. It is apparent from many folk narrative rhymes that the bride never considered her in-laws' house as her own, and used to return to her parents' house whenever undesirable incidents occurred.
- 5) *Agdum bagdum ghoradum* has no apparent meaning, but it has been explained in this unit as follows: Dom is a lower-caste Hindu whose responsibility is to burn dead bodies and look after the crematorium. Fishing and playing musical instruments are their alternate professions. *Agdum* means "Advance, Dom soldiers"; *bagdum* means "sideline Dom soldiers"; *ghoradum* means "Dom cavalry" since *ghora* means "horse" (Bhattacharya 1962, 228). Bhattacharya relates this rhyme to a Dom-Brahmin war (294).
- 6) Meaning uncertain; perhaps a type of musical instrument.
- 7) Yet to be identified; it may be an imaginary creature. Another possible explanation is that the sound "gulguli," which sometimes means rolling, may suggest the advancing form of a tidal wave.

- 8) Horizontal differentiation of Bengali dialects is very extensive both in terms of the number of regional dialects that occur and in terms of their mutual divergence. The extreme eastern dialect of Chittagong, for instance, is unintelligible even to many speakers of other eastern Bengali dialects (Klaiman 511).
- 9) The most common meaning of *tip* is a finger impression of vermillion on the forehead common to Indian women. But here no actual impression is made. The reciter of this rhyme stretches his or her hand toward the moon and then, turning the fingers, puts an imaginary impression on the forehead of the child whom he or she is trying to lull to sleep.
- 10) It is generally believed in Bengal that the milk of a black cow is superior.
- 11) The monetary unit of Bengal is known as *taka*.
- 12) In Bengal almost every household, bazaar, marsh, tank, pond, etc. has a popular name. *Sukor bil* and *Olor hat* in these verses are examples.
- 13) '*Haloi*' is a popular refrain used in rhymes and songs.
- 14) The *Michelia Champaca*, a flower of the magnolia family, common in rural Bengal.
- 15) *Shai* is the corrupt form of *shahi* which means royal, *kabadi* is the name of the game, and *Brindaban* is a sacred place in Mathura (near Delhi) associated with Radha-Krishna.
- 16) The literal meaning of *phota* is a drop or blob of liquid, but the word has a special connotation in Bengal. A *phota* or roundish mark on the forehead symbolizes a victorious person. Sometimes it is used as a sectarian mark for religious preachers like Vaishnavites.
- 17) *Bida* means a bunch of twenty leaves. In Bengal there is a tradition of counting things in which twenty (*kuri*) is the highest number.
- 18) A *shalik* is a special kind of black sparrow with a yellow beak. *Ram* is an adjective meaning big or large, a usage that derives from Rama of the epic *Ramayana*. A number of folk beliefs center around the sparrow in Bengal. For example, it is believed that the appearance of a yellow sparrow indicates the imminent arrival of guests.
- 19) It is the Indian equivalent of *do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do*.
- 20) '*Bapre-bap*' is a common exclamation in Bengal indicating fear or surprise.

8.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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In this unit, all Bengali poems have been translated to English by Ashutosh Bhattacharya; and all Punjabi poems have been translated by Balwant Gargi.

8.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Note: Your answers should be in about 300 words.

1) What do you mean by the term ‘folk’?

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2) What is a narrative poem in literature?

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3) What are the various dimensions of a folk narrative poem? Give your answer with reference to the folk narrative poems illustrated in the course.

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4) "Folk poetry openly portrays human conditions. It does not camouflage emotions. It reveals the naked truth which sometimes comes as a shock." Comment.

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5) Write a note on Bengali folk poetry.

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6) Who is the author of the book, *Folklore: An Introduction*? Why is it a seminal book on folklore studies?

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7) What are the salient features of folk rhymes in Bengali folk poetry?

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8) Write a note on Punjabi folk poetry.

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9) How do the issues of a Punjabi woman's life intervene in Punjabi folk poetry?

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10) What do you understand by the term *borgi*?

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