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# UNIT 1 APPROPRIATION OF FOLK: *JATRA, KATHAKALI, TAMASHA, AND MARTIAL ART*

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- understand the reasons for the incursions of folk into the classical theatre of India
- appreciate the origin and development of various features of folk theatre
- know about some of the distinctive features of folk theatre in India
- get an overview of some of the important types of folk theatre in India

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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From 14th century to the 19th century a culture of folk performances emerged on the scene in India since, by the 14th century, Sanskrit theatre had completely lost its ground. Folk performances that prevail all over India are significant appropriations of folk traditions. The significant conventions of classical dramaturgy – like the *sutradhara*, the *vidushaka*, invocation to gods and goddesses at the start of a play, a brief introduction of the performance etc. – were adopted in the folk traditions of theatre. There were thus incursions into the existing classical theatre tradition. Talking of folk performances as theatre may lead to limiting and exclusivising of certain constructs of folk which generally do not belong to theatre, the reason being that theatre in the contemporary world is generally defined and perceived through the proscenium theatre borrowed from the west. But in India, theatre has come to be identified prominently through the paradigms of folk performance traditions since, unlike the theatre of the Greeks in Europe which was lost with the ravages of time, the Indian tradition of classical theatre was still identifiable.

Folk, in its essence, deals with the choices and tastes of the masses. Therefore, the constructs of the folk evolve over the time in order to appeal to and include most of the people. This can be witnessed in the generous use of the following in order to cater, to the maximum extent, to the entertainment choices of the masses:

- music
- dance
- different types of drums and other popular musical instruments
- extravagant and theatrical makeup
- masks
- singers
- chorus
- clown

The themes in folk theatre are along the lines of the folk literature involving stories retold and enacted from:

- mythological texts like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*
- romances, tales and legends of folklore
- social and political events and incidents of a given time

Folk theatre is not merely a production watched from a distance by the audience rather it involves a synergism of:

- customs
- beliefs
- observances and rituals undertaken by performers as well as the audience
- celebrations
- festivals
- special occasions like child-birth, marriage, coronation of an heir, victory in battle field, elections, sports etc.
- martial arts
- charity
- collective prayers, congregations etc.

The aforementioned lists indicate that folk theatre is never a one-way process since its pageantry involves audience, artistes, workers, production team and other people to participate in tandem before, while and after the performance. Some of the folk theatres in India are as follows:

| Name of the Folk Theatre Form | Name of the State/Region |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Akhyana, Bhavai               | Gujarat                  |
| Yakshagana, Bayalata          | Karnataka                |
| BhandPather                   | Jammu and Kashmir        |
| Burra Katha                   | Andhra Pradesh           |

|                                       |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Chhau                                 | Bihar and Odisha                  |
| Tamasha, Dashavatar, Keertana, Powada | Maharashtra                       |
| Harikatha                             | Southern India                    |
| Jatra                                 | West Bengal and Odisha            |
| Kalaripayattu, Kathakali, Kudiyattam  | Kerala                            |
| Kathakatha                            | West Bengal                       |
| Nach                                  | Madhya Pradesh                    |
| Naqal                                 | Punjab                            |
| Nata-Sankeertana, Tang-ta             | Manipur                           |
| Nautanki, Raslila                     | Uttar Pradesh                     |
| Pala                                  | Odisha                            |
| Pandavani                             | Madhya Pradesh                    |
| Ramlila                               | Northern India                    |
| Swang                                 | Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana |
| Terukuttu                             | Tamil Nadu                        |

Folk theatre is traditionally performed in the open on makeshift stages like round, square, rectangular, multiple-set which are almost always facilitated through the support of the audience, village people, community or panchayats. Here is a description of the site of performance:

The bhavai, enacted on a ground-level circle, and the jatra, on a 16-foot (5-metre) square platform, have gangways that run through the surrounding audience and connect the stage to the dressing room. Actors enter and exit through these gangways, which serve a function similar to the hanamichi of the Japanese Kabuki theatre. In the ramlila the action sometimes occurs simultaneously at various levels on a multiple set. Actors in nautanki and bhavai sit on the stage in full view instead of exiting and sing or play an instrument as a part of the chorus. In the ramlila the actor playing Ravana removes his 10-headed mask when he is not acting and continues sitting on his throne, but for the spectators he is theatrically absent.

(<http://global.britannica.com/art/South-Asian-arts/Dance-and-theatre>)

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## 1.2 FOLK IN INDIAN THEATRE

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### 1.2.1 Jatra

The jatra is a popular folk theatre tradition originating from Bengal. Jatra is also popular in Odisha and eastern Bihar. It began in Bengal in the 15th century under

the influence of the Bhakti movement. The devotees of Krishna and disciples of Sri Chaitanya would go on walking in small trains displaying their devotion through highly energetic singing and dancing, sometimes performing episodes from the life of Krishna. Sri Chaitanya himself is reported to have played the role of Rukmini (wife of Krishna) in *Rukmini Haran* more than once. This theatrical journey eventually came to be known as jatra – which means to travel or to embark on a journey. Towards the 19th century the jatra underwent changes and its repertoire got enriched with love sagas, and with social and political issues. Jatra was primarily operatic theatre, but by the beginning of the 20th century spoken dialogues were introduced in jatra along with the singing. Originally, it used to be a night-long performance, but was, over time, cut down to a few hours.

Jatra comprises melodramatic delivery of emotionally accentuated dialogues, gestures and orations. The musicians sit on both sides of the stage playing the pakhawaj, harmonium, tabla, flute, trumpets, violin, dholak, cymbals and clarinet. Music and singing is mostly based on folk tunes. The representation of the singing chorus on the stage is done by the bibek (conscience), who can appear at any moment in the play. He comments on the action, philosophises, and tells of possible dangers. His singing foregrounds the inner feelings of the characters and the hidden meaning of their actions. Another character, niyati (fate), is also present, and is often played by a woman. Niyati also has the role of warning the characters of the impending dangers. An interesting distinction of the jatra is that the performance, in order to captivate the audience, begins with the climax.

Traditionally, jatra used to have only male actors who would also dress up as females. By the 20th century women began to appear in the performances of jatra. The actors join early, and learn their acting and singing after their entry into the troupe. With growing years they polish their skills and master the art of improvisation. Like all the folk theatre performances jatra too is associated with special seasons and occasions. The jatra season begins around Durga Puja – roughly in September – and goes on till the advent of the monsoon season in June. On the occasion of festivities and special occasions, both personal as well as public, it is a common practice to organize jatra as part of the celebrations.

Jatra is an excellent example of how the elements of folk get appropriated in the theatre. During the 19th century, jatra was secularised and it became a composite representation of people's aspirations in its journey thereafter. With the advent of the 20th century, contemporary politics and social issues also found their way in. Jatra became a strong social institution during the pre-Independence period as swadeshi-jatra was used to mobilise and protest against the British regime. The jatra of this period focused on eulogizing the freedom fighters and inculcating patriotism among the masses. During World War II the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) used jatra to gather support for the Communist Party as Germany invaded Russia. As a true folk entity jatra, during the early 20th century, showed dramatization of Lenin's life as Communism increasingly became popular in Bengal. In the post-war era and with the advent of radio and television jatra remained restricted to mostly the rural areas. But it continues to be a living tradition which has inspired contemporary theatre practices in Bengal. After 1960s a revival in jatra was witnessed through the interest of patrons and through official recognition. In 1968 Phanibhishan Bidyabinod became the first jatra artist to

receive the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. Jatra has attracted the well-deserved attention of scholars, theatre-enthusiasts and patronage.

### 1.2.2 Kathakali

Kathakali is one of the most popular cultural identities of India. It is an interesting amalgam of dance, drama, classicism, music, folk, costumes, make-up and storytelling. Kathakali is an unmatched synthesis of the folk in the classical theatre tradition of India. The state of Kerala and the adjoining southwestern Indian region are the homeland to Kathakali. Kathakali performances are based on the stories from *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and Shaiva literature. It is a people's theatre in that it is traditionally performed throughout the night in the open, and there are no viewing restrictions. Kathakali is a mimed dance where the narration and dialogue are rendered by the singers/chorus sitting on one side of the stage, and is characterized by drumbeats and intense singing.

Kathakali originated in the 17th century in Kerala. The story of its origin substantiates its mass-oriented spirit. Once, the Raja of Kottarakkara was angered by the fact that a neighbouring prince did not permit the dancers of Kottarakkara to perform a Sanskrit dance-drama in his court. The Raja then created his own dance ensemble in Malayalam, the language spoken by his people. Kathakali is also influenced by *Natyashastra* and other classical theatre practices but it has its own distinctive repertoire created through the appropriation of the folk:

The makeup has its roots in the grotesque pre-Hindu Dravidian demon masks. Themes are taken mainly from the Ramayana, the Shiva-purana, the Bhagavata-purana, the Mahabharata, and other religious texts. The superhuman characters represent primal forces of good and evil at war. Because of its terrifying vigour, men play all the roles.

Actors in Kathakali are young boys and men who crossdress. These dancers have a life-long commitment to the form as training to be a Kathakali dancer begins in childhood and it takes years for an actor to deliver first formal performance.

The movement is vigorous and florid. Stylized gestures and facial expressions follow the rules of Bharata Natyam. Gestures are wide and strong, the pointing of a finger being preceded by a sweep of the body and a great circling of the arms. Faces are made up to look like painted masks. The costume consists of a full skirt, a heavy jacket, numerous garlands and necklaces, and a towering headdress. (<http://global.britannica.com/art/kathakali>)

The description of the dance is further given as follows:

Most Kathakali characters (except those of women, Brahmins, and sages) wear towering headgear and billowing skirts and have their fingers fitted with long silver nails to accentuate hand gestures. The principal characters are classified into seven types. (1) Pachcha ("green") is the noble hero whose face is painted bright green and framed in a white bow-shaped sweep from ears to chin. Heroes such as Rama, Lakshmana, Krishna, Arjuna, and Yudhishtira fall into this category. (2) Katti ("knife"), haughty and arrogant but learned and of exalted character, has a fiery upcurled moustache with silver piping and a white mushroom knob at the tip of his nose. Two walrus tusks protrude from the corners of his mouth, his headgear is opulent, and

his skirt is full. Duryodhana, Ravana, and Kichaka belong to this type. (3) Chokannatadi (“red beard”), power-drunk and vicious, is painted jet black from the nostrils upward. On both cheeks semicircular strips of white paper run from the upper lip to the eyes. He has black lips, white warts on nose and forehead, two long curved teeth, spiky silver claws, and a blood-red beard. (4) Velupputadi (“white beard”) represents Hanuman, son of the wind god. The upper half of his face is black and the lower red, marked by a tracery of curling white lines. The lips are black, the nose is green, black squares frame the eyes, and two red spots decorate the forehead. A feathery gray beard, a large furry coat, and bell-shaped headgear give the illusion of a monkey. (5) Karupputadi (“black beard”) is a hunter or forest dweller. His face is coal black with crisscross lines drawn around the eyes. A white flower sits on his nose, and peacock feathers closely woven into a cylinder rise above his head. He carries a bow, quiver, and sword. (6) Kari (“black”) is intended to be disgusting and gruesome. Witches and ogresses, who fall into this category, have black faces marked with queer patterns in white and huge, bulging breasts. (7) Minnukku (“softly shaded”) represents sages, Brahmans, and women. The men wear white or orange dhotis (loincloths). Women have their faces painted light yellow and sprinkled with mica, and their heads are covered by saris.

(<http://global.britannica.com/art/South-Asian-arts/Dance-and-theatre#toc65251>)

In its theme and presentation, Kathakali offers a multilayered text of folk appropriation. The evil and good characters are equally attractive in their demeanour while performing. The make-up of the dancers is so elaborate that it can only be facilitated with the support of a community dedicated to the form. This creates space for the masses in kathakali tradition. Kathakali as a folk institution runs with the collective effort of a range of artists, production staff and patrons, as well as the attachment of the audience. The participation of each and every section is almost ritualistic and that makes Kathakali a congregational performance. With the emerging national identity of India after the independence and Kerala as a state, kathakali has a reiterated presence in the iconography. It is difficult to envision a cultural ensemble of India without the presence of kathakali in it. This could not have been possible without the power of the folk which was also in spirit present in the birth of kathakali as a form of theatre rooted in people’s language and people’s texts.

### 1.2.3 Tamasha

Tamasha originated in the early 18th century in Maharashtra as an option to entertain the Mughal armies that would camp while on their war-expeditions in the Deccan region. In 18th and 19th centuries, tamasha flourished in the courts of the Maratha rulers and had its heyday in the Peshwa period (1796–1818). Tamasha is a Persian word which means a spectacle, or display. The word is a very common expression in many Indian languages even today. Thus the first identity that the tamasha tradition has is through its mass-oriented name which displaying a sense of belonging to the people.

Tamasha emerged through a combination of singing girls and dancers from North India and the local traditional singing and acrobatic performances some of the so called lower-castes like Kolhati, Mang, Dombari, Mahar and Bhatu. The most important form associated with tamasha is lavni but the other traditional forms

like kaveli, ghazals, kathak, dashavatara, lalit, kirtan, gondhal, and waghya-murali; parts of the Khandoba bhakti geetare also influenced by tamasha.

Tamasha, like most folk theatre forms, is a highly energetic performance with powerful drumming and loud gestures, sometimes with suggestive lyrics. In the traditional tamasha form the dancers comprise dancing-boys called as nachya, who also performed the role of female characters, and a poet-composer known as shahir who played the traditional role of a sutradhar or sometimes the role of a jester, called songadya, who would conduct the performance. Towards the later 19th century tamasha started incorporating brief comic dramatic acts known as vag. Tamasha is an essential folk tradition; it does not need a specific performance structure and can be performed anywhere.

The entry of the musicians (dholkiwala and halgiwala) marks the beginning of the performance. They are joined by a maniriwala and tuntune player. After the performers settle down on the stage, an invocation to lord Ganesha, called gana, is performed. Song and dance are the soul of the performance and the success of the performance depends on the connect established between the dancer and the audience. The audience have a significant role in the tamasha performance for the jeering and applauding are innately required to make the performance complete. Folk theatre generally upholds poetic justice and offers its audience a conclusive text which satisfies them and they go back enthralled and entertained. Tamasha performance also concludes with a message of victory of good over bad. The end of the narrative is followed by the arti as a mark of ritual. While the gana and arti are sung by the singers on the stage, the audience also joins in as it is familiar with these devotional songs and the ragas, tunes and songs used in it. Thus the whole ethos of the performance is highly energetic and is shared between the audience and the performers. The men on the stage wear gammat and phada whereas the women wear sarees draped in Marathi style. The prominent feature of the women dancers' outfit is heavy cymbals tied in their ankles. The makeup worn by women is quite loud and elaborate.

Discussion of the appropriation of the folk in theatre will remain incomplete without the mention of the fact that with the emergence of Bombay (now Mumbai) as a textile industry, the labourers and workers of the industry from the rural areas of Maharashtra settled in Bombay and its suburbs. These people brought along with them their love for tamasha and this is the reason that tamasha flourished and became a popular folk theatre form in the commercial capital of India. The other aspect of the tamasha's journey as a folk tradition is the reformist appropriation of tamasha by social reformers like Jyotirao Phule under the SatyashodhakSamaj founded by him in the late 19th century. He used tamasha to resist the caste system. The reformist and political use of tamasha in satyashodhakijalsas inspired by Phule led to the inclusion of elements of proscenium and street theatre in tamasha. Tamasha thus kept evolving with time, addressing the entertainment needs of the masses, and concurrently tweaking it with the social, political and reformist themes. Tamasha is a popular construct of entertainment even today and its influence and impact can be felt in various cinematic adaptations. Films centred on tamasha dancers, items songs inspired by the tamasha etc. have been regularly witnessed in recent decades. This foregrounds the fact that tamasha has not only projected the appropriation of the

folk elements in performance but also demonstrated the dynamics of folk theatre which keeps evolving with time and with the needs of the masses.

#### 1.2.4 Nautanki

Nautanki is a folk theatre tradition of North India. It has been the most popular source of entertainment in rural areas before mass media arrived on the scene. Like many other Indian folk theatre traditions, nautanki is also an operatic form of performance. Songs and narratives of nautanki are part and parcel of mass fanciful discourse. Although the heydays of the Nautanki are past, yet a performance of nautanki in the North Indian villages and towns still fetches the attention of people in big numbers.

Nautanki is a night-long performance in which a narrative is performed through singing and occasional dancing tweaked with few acts of humour. Most of the performers in a nautanki are singers too. Sometimes the use of chorus is also there. The musicians sit on the stage and are visible to the audience. During the heightened moments while the emotive energy peaks in the performance an interesting repartee between the performers and the musicians can be evidenced. It is effected and expressed through gestures of the performers and is responded to by a musical note or thump of the drums by the musicians. The informal ethos in a nautanki performance is quintessentially folk in nature. Hundreds and thousands of people settle in a makeshift arena (facilitated by the community or the village) where the performance takes place on a makeshift elevated platform, and is watched from all the three sides. The audience settles down in any place they can find – the ground, a charpoy, chairs, trees, terraces of the houses or from wherever the performance is visible. Traditionally, nautanki is performed throughout the night and there are no intermissions, but the audience takes breaks to eat, to visit their home or to smoke. A nautanki performance begins with invocation to gods. The costumes worn in nautanki are usually traditional. They may have variations depending on the characters. The dresses and makeup are not very complex and so it is not a difficult task for the artist to get ready for the stage. However, it is mandatory for the performers to wear make up to appear on stage.

The history of nautanki goes back several hundred years. First references of nautanki can be located in the account of Akbar's court given in Abul Fazal's *Ain-i-Akbari*. Nautanki was earlier called swaang and it enjoyed the patronage of the likes of Akbar and Wajid Ali Shah. It was thus a form of entertainment for all and sundry.

Nautanki has two famous schools: the Hathras school and the Kanpur school. The Hathrasschool followed traditional operatic nautanki with singing as the core whereas the Kanpur school adapted to adjust elements of Parsi theatre and used prose-dialogues too. Nautanki originally did not have women performers and like most of the folk theatre traditions men used to pplay the women's roles. Gulab Bai is known to be the pioneering female artist in nautanki and is generally said to be the most accomplished female practitioner of the form. She was associated with the Kanpur school. The troupes in nautanki are called akharas in colloquial parlance, a name generally attributed to wrestling schools, since nautanki performances demand a lot of physical energy. The themes in nautankis are inspired by mythology and folklore and address the concerns of all sections



of society. *Satya-Harishchandra* and *BhaktMoradhwaj* are mythological; *Indal Haran*, *BhaktPuranmal*, and *Narsi ka Bhaatare* examples of adaptations of folklore that construct the narrative purely around the aspirations of the masses. During the Independence struggle nautanki became a socio-cultural vehicle of spreading political awareness:

In pre-Independence India, Nautanki was used to spread messages of patriotism. Between 1924 and 1936, it was banned in Allahabad. Jawaharlal Nehru was deeply interested in the theatre form. During one of his stints in jail, he met Ramdas Tripathi, a well-known Nautanki director from Allahabad. They became friends, and Nehru started calling upon folk theatre directors/artistes to spread the message of nationalism. Nautanki groups would help to collect audiences when nationalist leaders delivered speeches at public meetings. There is a story of how Kamala Nehru, while addressing one such meeting where the audience was gathered by Nautanki groups, was taken off the podium by troops who pulled her by the hair. The incident is mentioned in a report in SurajiRanbheri, which was published by the Department of Culture and the Department of Information, Uttar Pradesh, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of India's Independence. The area where this happened started being called Kamla Nagar by its residents. (Zaman, 2012)

(<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2916/stories/20120824291610700.htm>)

With the passage of time the nautanki also evolved and its repertoire expanded to include themes of protest against the colonial and fascist rulers in the early 20th century – *Sultana Daku*, *Jalianwala Bagh*, and *Amar Singh Rathore* are some famous examples. In the contemporary scenario of social media and mass media nautanki may not have the audience like it had earlier, but nautanki has not lost its charm simply because it is people's theatre and the appropriation of folk that led nautanki to become a hugely popular theatre tradition is still associated with it. Devendra Sharma, a nautanki exponent, and his father, the great nautanki exponent, Pandit Ram Dayal Sharma have been writing and performing nautanki with an assimilation of the contemporary themes that are related to the masses and their movements:

These new Nautankis are centered on contemporary social messages such as health, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, dowry, immigration, and family planning. They are of a much shorter duration—around two hours. This is to give audiences an opportunity to watch performances during a break in their daily routine. These contemporary Nautankis have been performed extensively in India and America and met with resounding popularity. (<http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/nautanki>)

Nautanki has also been a document of the composite culture of India as performers from different religions and castes lived through their experience of nautanki-performances oblivious of caste and religious boundaries that prevailed in society. Thus the nautanki, in its true essence, is an embodiment of the appropriation of folk in performance because folk is all about inclusivity and nautanki is rooted in aesthetic inclusivity.

### 1.2.5 Pala

Pala is a popular folk theatre tradition of Odisha and is related with a composite culture of the community of Satyapir. Pala originates in the Mughal period when

the “Satyanarayan” of Hindus intermingled with the “Pir” of Muslims. This amalgam resulted in the formation of Satyapir. This is one of the numerous stories of composite culture and peaceful coexistence of diversities that are present galore in the Indian subcontinent. The Muslim fakir had Hindu disciples who worshipped him like a Hindu deity and Muslim disciples too believed in him like a religious leader. The devotional singing and dancing performed in honour of Satyapir is referred as to as pala. Fakir is considered to be an incarnation of Satyapir. He is greatly revered by Muslims as well as Hindus. This deity is prayed and worshipped so as to maintain the well-being of all the people. Another reference to the word pala is that, “it originated from the Skanda Purana in the form of 16 Palas (narration of the 16 stages of life of lord Vishnu)” (<http://scraps.oriyaonline.com/blog/pala-a-dying-dance-form-of-orissa/>).

The legend of Satyapir goes like this:

A story with regard to the origin of Satyapir is recorded in the ‘Pala’ of “Krishna Haridas”. According to this interesting story, king Maidanb’s virgin daughter Sandhyabati while taking a dip in the river, saw a flower floating and by smelling it she became pregnant. When her parents were aware of the fact, they took it a serious offence and drove her away. Under orders from Satyapir still in the womb, Hanila built a palace for Sandhyabati where she gave birth to a ball of bloody flesh. She threw it away into the river. A she-tortoise swallowed it up, gave birth to Satyapir and went to heaven after death. Kusaleswar, the ‘Purohit’ of Maidanab brought him up with care. One day while taking a walk on the bank of the river Nur, Satyapir found a manuscript of Koran. The Brahmin asked him to keep that book in its former place, as a sacred Brahmin should not touch it. The boy argued and concluded that there was no difference between a Purana and Koran. Hinduism and Islam are not hostile to each other.

(<http://www.indiantravelportal.com/orissa/dances/pala-dance.html>)

The cult of Satyapir is a famous and innate part of the Odishan cultural discourse. Mythological documents like the *Puranas* and folklore are replete with the stories of Satyapir’s supernatural prowess.

A pala performance begins with an invocation to Satyapir. This is followed by a musical rendition of stories from *Puranas*, the epics or folklore, along with the devotional compositions of various poets. The pala songs are rendered at various junctures in a performance. In keeping with folk ethos, the pala is a long performance of the narrative with the elaborations offered by a *gayak* (main singer) who is accompanied by four or five singers and musicians. One performer plays the *mridangam* and others play *taala* and cymbals. Firstly the *gayak* narrates the mythological episode and the co-performers join the *gayak* in accordance with the sequential moments in a chorus similar to dialogue. In a pala, the *gayak* is the core to the whole performance as he strikes a rapport with the audience, leads the musical rendition of the narrative and improvises to entertain and enthral the devotional attention of the audience. Through his spirited singing he has to create a make belief for power along with softness in the performance. The *gayak* is a multitalented artist who undergoes intense training to learn Sanskrit texts and master singing and dancing.

The performance appeals as a melodious treat because the local dialects are chosen for the energetic singing. The dance is generally overshadowed by singing in pala since the dance is only an expression of rhythmic movement of the performance. The whole ethos of pala is ritualistic. On the basis of the mode of performing, palacan be of three varieties: baithaki (sitting), thia (standing), and badipala in which the two groups of pala playfully compete to excel in the performance (oriyaonline.com). Pala is equally popular in rural as well as urban settings. Beautiful Oriya and Sanskrit poetry, skilful playing of mridanga, humorous episodes interspersed in the narrative, colourful traditional attire of the performers and simple aesthetics of the composite culture make pala a rooted folk theatre.

Pala is not only an example of the religious compositeness but it also appropriates in its aesthetics the sacred and the profane duality that has always existed in the Sanskritised and vernacular literary traditions. This evident in the way mythology is intermingled with the folklore of Satyapir in pala. With the ravages of time pala is losing its ground since the onslaught of technology-supported entertainments prove too much for a theatre that needs love for simplicity and inclusivity among the audience. Pala needs a nurturing in the times when the social ethos stands the testimony of fanatic and extremist forces.

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### 1.3 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have seen how the folk is both a static and a dynamic entity. Folk theatre is shown to be continuously evolving, yet retaining a part of its originary features. Folk, in essence, deals with the choices and tastes of the masses, and also with the demands of the time, space and the audience that it responds to. Therefore, the constructs of the folk evolve over the time in order to appeal to and include most of the people. This is what is in evidence in the select folk forms that we have discussed here.

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## 1.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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1. Why do folk theatre traditions start developing in India around the 14<sup>th</sup> century?

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2. What are some of the defining features of folk theatre traditions in India?

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3. What are the distinctive features of the jatra?

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4. How does Jatra become a site of appropriation of folk?

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5. What are the elements of folk in kathakali?

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6. Highlight the historical background of the tamasha performance tradition.

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7. What makes nautanki an embodiment of fusion of folklore and theatre practice?

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8. What is the story of Satyapir?

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9. What are different elements fused in pala which make it an example of appropriation of the folk?

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(As a University policy, portions of this unit have been borrowed (purely for educational purposes) from MEG-16, designed by Nandini Sahu, with approval of the School Board of SOITS, Agenda Item: SB. 29.4.1, Dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021. MAFCS Programme and SOITS duly acknowledge the academic contribution of the MEG-16 course writers.)



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