UNIT-3 : TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- define traditional folk media
- discuss the advantages of traditional folk media
- explain how folk media reflects social changes
- discuss the role of traditional folk media as development media

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, we have discussed about mass media and the development of media. You have also familiarized with its the latest trends along you with various aspects of this development.

Now one form of media which is gaining a lot of importance for the past few years in reaching out to the people, particularly the rural masses, is the traditional folk media. In this unit we will study about the various aspects of traditional folk media.

So, let us begin with a discussion on what is traditional folk media.

3.3 TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA

Traditional folk media is a term used to denote 'people's performances'. This term refers to the performing arts which can be described as the cultural symbols of the people. Folk dance, rural drama and musical variety of the village people, all come under traditional media. Traditional folk media is not just confined to dance and music, but also includes art and crafts. Tradi-tional folk media originated as a consequence of people's need to express themselves. These performing arts pulsate with life and slowly change through the flux of time. In India folk performance is a composite art. It is a total art created by the fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. It absorbs ceremonials, rituals, beliefs and of course the social system.

According to veteran folk media scholar Balwant Garhgi "Folk media represents the people in their natural habitat, with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. It contains a rich store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs, and legends. In order to understand the colourful diversity and unity of India, it is important to see the folk theatre in its natural settings."

Rural India is a treasure trove of folk art, theatre, music, dance, art and craft. The folk art forms satisfy our innate need for self expression. The traditional forms preserve and disseminate the tradition and culture of our forefathers infusing life into them. Every region has its own folk art from that is immensely popular and relevant in that area and Assam is no exception.

Some of the most popular traditional folk media of Assam include Ojapali, Mobile theatre, Bhaona, Sattriya dance, Loka Geet, Bor Geet, Bon Geet, Bihu. Puppetry and street theatre are also quite popular. Again there are several types of variations of a

single art from. Bhaona for instance is a classical form which is performed within strict norms in the naamghars. On the other hand in parts of lower Assam, there are Dhuliya Bhaona and Khuliya Bhaona which are free from the rigidity of the classical Bhaona and are very flexible. Similarly the Bihu is performed with slight variations by the Assamese, the Misings, the Bodos, the Karbis etc.

Being ancient forms of art, the folk media is very close to the hearts of the people. Traditional media holds universal appeal. Its understanding is direct and at the personal level. Traditional folk performances are uniformly popular, irrespective of the educational, social and financial standing of any community. Various researchers have established the importance of traditional folk media in development communication. Traditionally, folk media were primarily used for entertainment, social communication and persuasive communication. Now, there are efforts to involve folk media for conveying development messages. In the past few decades traditional folk media have been increasingly recognized as viable tools to impart development messages, both as live performances and also in a form integrated with electronic mass media.

Here are some of the characteristics of traditional folk media :

1. They have sustained the onslaught of time
2. They have sustained by changing with the changing times
3. Any person is always a participant in the performance, never an audience.
4. It is spontaneous.
5. It is flexible.
6. It is cost effective and therefore has enhanced repeatability.
7. It is has immediate feedback and increased attentiveness.
8. It is performed in a common language promoting intelligibility.
9. It is direct and personal.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-A

1. Define the term traditional folk media.

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2. Traditional folk media is not just confined to dance and music, but also includes _____.
3. Why is folk performance a composite art in India?

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4. Name some popular traditional folk media of Assam.

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5. What are the characteristics of traditional folk media?

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3.4 ADVANTAGES OF TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA

Now let us glance over the advantages of these forms of media over the conventional mass media.

Intimacy with the masses: We know that every community or ethnic group of society has its own folk and traditional media which are close to their hearts. This is because it is in their person or simply speaking it runs in their blood. Hence, whenever it is performed or enacted by anyone in a society or place most of the masses feel like joining it and closely enjoy it to the maximum.

It is physically very close to the people: You must have seen that most of the folk and traditional media are performed in close proximity of the public gathering. Those of you from Assam and others who live here will know that *bihu* dances are performed in close proximity with the peoples' gathering. Thus its effects on the masses are much greater than that of mass media.

These are personal media: While reading about the characteristics of communication as well as mass communication you must have found that the latter is a highly 'impersonal' medium. This is because the communicator is communicating with the masses through a mechanical device or medium. That is why the effects of the personal warmth which is found in folk and traditional media are lacking in mass media. This is true for TV, radio, newspaper or a magazine etc. That personal charisma which can move the masses is absent in mass media.

Scope for repeat performances: In these two types of media there is ample scope for repeating a performance if the masses watching it like it. And the audiences can also take part in it by becoming themselves a part of the performing team. This scope is not there in mass media where programmes are broadcast only once and simultaneously. In other words it means that in folk and traditional media programmes and events can be repeatedly performed if people liked them. But in case of mass media this is not possible as programmes are broadcast at the same time for a wide variety of people across a huge area.

Regional / local level variations are important: We can see that folk and traditional media performances can be carried out with adequate scope for some amount of regional or local variations in different places of the country. For example, *bihu* performances in some areas of Sivasagar district will be somewhat different from the performances in maybe Dibrugarh or Golaghat or Jorhat districts. Same is the case with other forms of folk and traditional media also. However, in case of mass media the same kind of performance has to be watched or listened to by the people everywhere with hardly any scope for regional or local variations at all.

Scope for using body language or non verbal language is adequately available in folk and traditional media: You must have realized the importance of non verbal language in the field of communication. In folk and traditional media non verbal or body language plays a vitally-important role in enhancing the meaning of the messages being exchanged among the participants. So, the scope for using voice modulations, facial gestures, overall body movement etc. all these aspects make these two types of media much more effective than mass media where this scope is far less. Of course, you can say that TV, films and documentaries do have this scope in a good measure. But this can't be equal to that of a live performance by any person in regard to effectiveness. Besides, you can realize on your own that compared to this aspect, print media is a

highly stale one in case of sending across the meanings of its information and messages. That is, even though exclamation signs are used in written languages, yet it does not carry the same kind of emotional strength and effect which one can get in case of radio and TV due to voice modulation.

Use of local language, costumes etc: Every type of folk and traditional media has to be essentially based upon the local ethos, culture and other aspects. Thus the costumes, language used and the settings and background etc. must invariably bear the stamp of that locality and general culture of the area. Otherwise it will not be able to carry the same effects and meanings for the masses.

It is performance oriented: Another important point to be noted in this regard is that most of the folk and traditional media are basically performance-oriented. In simple words it signifies that majority of these two media are a finely-balanced combinations of performance of music and dances. This aspect provides much more effectiveness over its target audiences.

However, let me point out to one major drawback in folk and traditional media. That is, its reach is very limited at one time. That means a folk and traditional media performance usually is done for a group of a hundred or at the most few hundreds or thousands of people. So, to reach lakhs or millions of people their utility or capacity is not at all adequate. It is at best a localized medium. We can address the problems, issues or other aspects of a certain area in the locality's own language, culture, ethos etc.

Now, due to all these factors folk and traditional media enjoy a far more effectiveness and influence over the masses of whom they are a part of.

LET US KNOW

Difference between Folk Media and Electronic Media

Component	Folk media	Electronic media
Investment (Finance)	Negligible	Very high
Power	Not Essential	Essential
Receiver sets	Not required	Essential
Maintenance	None	Essential

Technical problems	None	Often
Interpreter	Not Essential	Preferable
Familiarity	Familiar	Familiar
Personal contact	Always	None
Language problems	None	Possible
Credibility factor	Very high	Lower
Audience participation	Very high	Seldom
Flexibility	Very high	Very high
Adult education	More effective	Less so
Repeatability	Easy	Difficult
Reactions	Can be gauged on the spot	Cannot be
Reach	Very wide	Restricted
Attentiveness	On the theme	Can be clouded by novelty
Intelligibility	Very high	Not comparable
Understanding	Universal	Isolated
Acceptance	Universal	Universal
Overall effectiveness	Very high	Not comparable
Programme designing	Easier	More difficult

(Source: Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media – CS Sreekumar)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-B

1. Mention five advantages of traditional folk media over conventional media.

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2. What is the major disadvantage of traditional folk media?

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3.5 FOLK MEDIA REFLECTS SOCIAL CHANGES

As we have already mentioned earlier, one major advantage and characteristic of folk and traditional media is that it is dynamic. That means it changes with the times embracing new elements from time to time. This is why its contents change in different eras of time.

Similarly, its dynamic nature is also reflected in the fact that most of the folk and traditional media are responsive to the major events and happenings in the society. For example, if you will look at Bihu songs over the years you will find that they also contain or address popular and major issues of the different periods of time. Such as – some of the songs depict stories about our freedom struggle against the colonial rulers, some of them depict things about the famous anti-foreigners' agitation of the 1980s, floods and many other socio-economic problems.

Again, maybe all of you are familiar with the folk culture of Ojapali of Assam. Interestingly, this form of folk culture is basically aimed at creating awareness among the masses through a judiciously-combined dance and scriptures sequences. It is active even today and is carrying on its duties properly for creating awareness about various social issues among the masses in the respective areas where they are performed.
In some parts of lower Assam, there is a folk tradition called 'mohoho' festival or the mosquito-repelling festival as *moh* in Assamese means mosquito. In this folk culture, people of the village form a group and visit all the families of the village for the purpose of alerting the family members about the need for mosquito-repelling. However, this activity also doubles up as a visit of the families for delivering the blessings of the villages elders to the families and reliving the touch of the residents of the villages amongst themselves.

Thus we can see that most of the forms of folk and traditional culture in our society can be transformed into carriers of our developmental communication messages aimed at the masses at grassroots level in each and every nook and corner of the country. This will ensure a much higher scale of success to our efforts in this particular field of communication aimed at the rural underprivileged and illiterate masses.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-C

1. What are some of the social issues depicted in some Bihu songs?

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2. Which folk performing art is basically aimed at creating awareness among the masses through a judiciously-combined dance and scriptures sequences.

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3. What is the purpose of the Mohoho folk tradition?

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3.6 TRADITIONAL FOLK MEDIA AS DEVELOPMENT MEDIA

The first significant international recognition of role of traditional media in the development in the developing countries came in 1972 when the **International Planned Parenthood Federation** and **UNESCO** organized a series of meetings on the integrated use of the folk and the mass media in family planning communication programmers in London.

Instances of use of Traditional folk media for development communication in our country have been numerous though not consistent and regularly used phenomena like the other conventional media like newspaper, radio or TV.

Traditional media has been used in our country ever since the time of the Independence Movement. “AHLA”, the popular ballad of Uttar Pradesh and its counter parts like “LAAVANI” of Maharashtra, “GEE-GEE” of Karnataka, “VILLUPAATTU” of Tamil Nadu and “KAVIGAN” of Bengal were effective in arousing the conscience of the people

against the colonial rule of the British. Many of the social and political campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi used traditional folk media. Similarly eminent Tamil poet Subramanya Bharti used folk music to invoke patriotism in the people. Folk tunes succeeded in popularizing songs glorifying the charkha or spinning wheel and boycott British made goods.

Even after Independence there have been many instances of the Government using traditional performances for development in rural areas. In the 1940's, Indian People Theatre Association (IPTA), used some of the popular regional theatre forms like "Jaatra" of Bengal, "Bhavai" of Gujrat, "Tamasha" of Maharashtra and "Burkatha" of Andhra Pradesh to increase social awareness and political education.

In 1977, a voluntary non-governmental organization in Kerala called Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) organized Science Jatha, a Science Procession in to spread the message of people's involvement in the development process. From 1980, the Jathas began to use different folk art forms for conveying the themes which were mainly on education, health, environment and social inequality. The repertoire consisted of songs, street dramas and other several forms of folk arts. Soon the Jathas began to be known as Kala Jathas and they became so popular that they began to be used extensively not only in Kerala but in some other parts of India also where the local organizations and people have received inspiration from KSSP and have started delivering messages through folk arts.

Well-known Theatre personality Ravi Varma of Vikas Lok Manch has been creatively interpreting social realities by interweaving them into the fabric of folk dances, choral singing etc. with the help of slum children. He deals with issues like alcoholism, pollution, religion, inequalities of caste and class, communalism and so forth. One of the group's most famous street plays is Hame Jawab Chahiya (1985) on the Bhopal gas tragedy. The play reminds the audience who are mostly children that the Bhopal incident is not a dead issue and that its aftermath still haunts the lives of many.

Folk songs have played a very important in the **Chipko and Apiko movements.** Folk Singers of the region composed songs in folk tunes and sang them in the street. The rural children picked them up immediately and sang them all the time. Thus, they played the role of communicators. In a similar instance, environmentalists used folk arts in

South India in the Save the Western Ghats (1985) campaign which was headed by Seva Sangh and supported by a number of other activist groups.

Rajasthan Adult Education Association (RAEA) had conducted an experiment in a village Devakishanapura where they sponsored Ravi Chaturvedi, an alumnus of National School of Drama for formulating development messages through the use of theatre based on stories from the epics. He identified three main issues -- Untouchability, Health hazards and Internal feuds which was rampant in the village. He selected some episodes from the epic Ramayana which had dramatic elements and action and reinterpreted them in the context of the problems prevailing in the village. He enacted it with the help of the village youth with great success.

Chaturvedi conducted another experiment in the village Garudavasi of Jaipur district which was devastated due to floods. There Chaturvedi conducted a folk theatre workshop as a therapy for rehabilitation of the villagers. In the workshop some scientific causes of the flood were explained. The enactment was done through songs sung in folk tunes narrating their problems. The audience participation turned out to be overwhelming.

In fact now there are many organizations all over the country which use traditional folk media for generating awareness for change. They use popular folk form of dance, music and theatre. This underlines the fact that change is impossible if the masses at the grassroots are not involved. And for that the best medium by far is the folk media. Even political parties use this medium to impress upon the people.

The development of rural India depends a lot on the communication that we are providing to the people. And for that nothing can be more functional and spontaneous than folk art. The Indian society is a melting pot of castes, classes, creeds and tribes. Rural India is faced by high rate of illiteracy and the inadequacies of mass media to reach almost 80% of people who resides in village. Moreover, for them the mass media too glamorous impersonal and unbelievable.

The traditional media, however, are close to the hearts and minds of the people. They are more personal and intimate. Different folk media can be used to cater to different regions. Every village has its relevant music, dance or theatre. These traditional media can be used to reach these people in the process of change and development of the country. Traditional media uses a subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms. This cannot be equalled by any other means of communication. So, if we want to inject the message of development among the rural masses we have to use the folk forms of this country in a more planned manner.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-D

1. What was the first significant international recognition of role of traditional media in development in the developing countries?

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2. Name some of the traditional folk forms which played an important role in arousing the conscience of the people against the British rule in India.

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3. Which eminent Tamil poet started used folk music to invoke patriotism in the people?

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4. What were the popular regional theatre forms used by the Indian People Theatre Association (IPTA) in the 1940's to increase social awareness and political education?

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5. The street play is Hame Jawab Chahiya was based on the _____.
6. Name some environmental movements which used folk media.

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   _____

ACTIVITY

Closely observe and watch the electronic mass media to which you have easy access to. Then try to find out how these media are promoting or encouraging folk and traditional media. Also observe under what circumstances this is being done and with what result.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

- Traditional folk media is a term used to denote 'people's performances'. Folk dance, rural drama and musical variety of the village people, all come under traditional media.
- In India folk performance is a composite art. It is a total art created by the fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. It absorbs ceremonials, rituals, beliefs and of course the social system.
- Rural India is a treasure trove of folk art, theatre, music, dance, art and craft. Every region has its own folk art from that is immensely popular and relevant in that area and Assam is no exception.
- Some of the most popular traditional folk media of Assam include Ojapali, Mobile theatre, Bhaona, Sattriya dance, Loka Geet, Bor Geet, Bon Geet, Bihu. Puppetry and street theatre are also quite popular.
- Traditional folk media have some special characteristics. They are:
  - They have sustained the onslaught of time
  - They have sustained by changing with the changing times

- Any person is always a participant in the performance, never an audience.
- It is spontaneous.
- It is flexible.
- It is cost effective and therefore has enhanced repeatability.
- It is has immediate feedback and increased attentiveness.
- It is performed in a common language promoting intelligibility.
- It is direct and personal.

- Traditional folk media have several advantages over conventional mass media. They are:
  - It has more intimacy with the masses.
  - It is physically very close to the people.
  - It is personal media.
  - There is more scope for repeat performances
  - Regional / local level variations make it closer to the people.
  - There is scope for using body language or non verbal language is adequately available in folk and traditional media
  - There is use of local language, costumes etc
  - It is performance oriented
- The first significant international recognition of role of traditional media in the development in the developing countries came in 1972 when the International Planned Parenthood Federation and UNESCO organized a series of meetings on the integrated use of the folk and the mass media in family planning communication programmes in London.
- Traditional media has been used in our country ever since the time of the Independence Movement. Even after Independence there have been many instances of the Government using traditional performances for development in rural areas.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS

- **A strategy for environment education: vital for sustainable development. Proceedings of national conference on Dimensions of Environmental Stress in India** *–Uma Joshi, (Geology Dept., MS University, Baroda, 1997).*
- **Media policy and nation building – select issues and themes** *–Gupta and Aggarwal (Concept Publishers, New Delhi, 1996).*

3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A) 1. Traditional folk media is a term used to denote 'people's performances'. This term refers to the performing arts which can be described as the cultural symbols of the people.

2. Art and crafts.
3. In India folk performance is a composite art because it is a total art created by the fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. It absorbs ceremonials, rituals, beliefs and even the social system.
4. Some of the popular traditional folk media of Assam are — Ojapali, Mobile theatre, Bhaona, Sattriya dance, Loka Geet, Bor Geet, Bon Geet, Bihu, Mobile theatre, Puppetry etc.
5. Some of the characteristics of traditional folk media are:
    a. They have sustained the onslaught of time
    b. They have sustained by changing with the changing times
    c. Any person is always a participant in the performance, never an audience.
    d. It is spontaneous.
    e. It is flexible.
    f. It is cost effective and therefore has enhanced repeatability.
    g. It is has immediate feedback and increased attentiveness.
    h. It is performed in a common language promoting intelligibility.
    i. It is direct and personal.

B) 1. Five advantages of traditional folk media are:
    a. Intimacy with the masses.
    b. It is physically very close to the people.
    c. Scope for repeat performances.

d. Scope for using body language or non verbal language is adequately available in folk and traditional media.

e. Use of local language, costumes etc.

2. The major disadvantage of traditional folk media is that its reach is very limited at one time. That means a folk and traditional media performance usually is done for a group of a hundred or at the most few hundreds or thousands of people. So, to reach lakhs or millions of people their utility or capacity is not at all adequate.

C) 1. Some social issues depicted in some Bihu songs include stories about our freedom struggle against the colonial rulers, some of them depict things about the famous anti-foreigners' agitation of the 1980s, floods and many other socio-economic problems.

2. Ojapali

3. 'Mohoho' festival is a mosquito-repelling festival. In this folk culture, people of the village form a group and visit all the families of the village for the purpose of alerting the family members about the need for mosquito-repelling. However, this activity also doubles up as a visit of the families for delivering the blessings of the villages elders to the families and reliving the touch of the residents of the villages amongst themselves.

D) 1. The first significant international recognition of role of traditional media in the development in the developing countries came in 1972 when the **International Planned Parenthood Federation** and **UNESCO** organized a series of meetings on the integrated use of the folk and the mass media in family planning communication programmers in London.

2. Some of the traditional folk forms which played an important role in arousing the conscience of the people against the British rule in India are Ahla, the popular ballad of Uttar Pradesh, Laavani of Maharashtra, Gee-Gee of Karnataka, Villupaattu of Tamil Nadu and Kavigan of Bengal.

3. Subramanya Bharti.

4. The popular regional theatre forms used by the Indian People Theatre Association (IPTA) in the 1940's to increase social awareness and political education are "Jaatra" of Bengal, "Bhavai" of Gujrat, "Tamasha" of Maharashtra and "Burkatha" of Andhra Pradesh.

5. Bhopal gas tragedy.

6. Chipko Andolan, Appiko Andolan, Save the Western Ghats.

3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1) How can folk and traditional media facilitate dissemination of development communication messages and information to the masses ? Cite examples.
2) “Development of modern mass media is the main cause of negligence of folk and traditional media”. Do you agree with this statement. Give explanations in support of your answer.
3) Prepare a plan for informing the masses in the rural areas of Assam about the need for regularly giving their children pulse polio doses using only folk and traditional media.
4) What do you think are the major causes behind the low popularity of our folk and traditional media compared to modern mass media ? Can you suggest any means for reviving them ?