
UNIT 2 DALIT FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To familiarise the students with the varied folklores and cultural features of Dalits.
- To see the liberative potential in their cultural expressions.
- To foster a development that is humanistic and viable, using Dalit rituals and cultures.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, beliefs, fairy tales and customs that are the traditions of that culture, subculture, or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The study of folklore is sometimes called folkloristics. Folklorist states that folklore has many cultural aspects, such as allowing for escape from societal consequences. In addition, folklore can also serve to validate a culture, as well as transmit a culture's morals and values. Folklore can also be the root of many cultural types of music. Folklore can also be used to assert social pressures, or relieve them, for example in the case of humour music, dance and other art forms. In this unit we study some important feature of Dalit folklore and culture and see their special features.

2.2 A CULTURAL APPROACH

The history of India, nay the whole world, is a history of conflict between two cultures: The culture of the invading people and the original inhabitance of this

place. Taking into account the historical roots and common cultural patronage we treat the culture of so called Low caste and the tribals as Dalit (Matriarchal / Lunar) Culture (Dalit Culture) and that of the Non-Dalits (Patriarchal/Solar) Culture (Non-Dalit Culture), following Dr J.J. Pallath (2001). When two cultures of opposing value system co-exist, the technologically dominant one subsumes the other. The history of the whole world is a history of conflict between invading cultures and the original cultures. The technique used almost universally by the dominant cultures to marginalize the original inhabitance is by labelling them disparagingly as, “Cultureless”, “uncouched”, “rough” etc. But in reality it is observed that the marginalized are the most cultured people in terms of their humane value system and behaviour patterns.

The so called Hindu mainstream (non-Dalit) cultures itself vis-a-vis modern culture suffers from an inhibition in India similar to the Dalit cultures. Thus the mainstream culture of India is being swallowed by the dominant one dimensional consumer culture which denies bio-cultural and technological diversities through the imposition of mono-technology. The problem, thus, in summary is, the very same Indian main-stream (non-Dalit) culture which ruthlessly absorbs its Dalit cultures is being swallowed by the modern consumer culture. The quick look we have had at the uniqueness as well as the unique problems of dalits and non-dalit only shows that the problems of the state need to be viewed from a different angle. Disturbed by the dehumanizing trend in our social scientists, social activists, political leaders society and religious gurus have had made various attempts from the point of view their respective disciplines to explain the reason for the development of communities. But something grossly absent is a cultural approach to the problem (Pallath 2001).

Culture, in very general terms, the way of life of a people, hence a way of thinking, of viewing things, of comforting one’s self, common to a society: the special mode of being human of a people. The concerns of a cultural analysis will be to detect the ruling cultural values and the particular world view that the value constitute which moves the people to perceptible patterns of thought and behaviour. Cultural analysis ask the why questions (the sociologists do in the plane of institutions and religious analysts do in their limited religious plane) probing into the internal make-up of people, into their collective psyche as bearers of a particular culture. This we do to find out those values, norms and customs of people that would promote humanization of the society as well as to detect those that would have dehumanizing effect of the life of the people.

2.3 ANALYSIS OF DALIT AND NON-DALIT CULTURES

The basic elements of cultural expressions are thought to be concepts (myth), acts (rituals) places and objects (symbols). Both sacred and secular myths, rituals, and symbols of a culture is said to be the Symbol System of that culture. Myth, ritual and symbols are integrally inter-related; there is a myth behind every ritual as well as symbol. The models and messages generated by the symbol system defines the personality trait of a culture which in turn determines the behaviour pattern of persons of a culture. Myth is a way of perceiving the reality, it is the specific emotional horizon within which one interprets the perceived objects. Humans are basically a story telling being, in fact, it is only in the story form humans can express themselves. Myth is a story which is capable of producing any one or all the shades of emotions. Heart is the realm of myth and the capability to create myth is the distinguishing mark of humans. The Dalit cultures are rich with myths

and the people are gifted with richness of imaginations. (Pallath, *Symbol and Myth Analysis*, 2001).

The Pulaya tribe of North Kerala, who were considered to be the lowest among the untouchables has a rich collections of myths. Their *potten theyyam* myth is representative of discriminating shouts of the learned Brahmins: “When you are wounded what gushes out is blood, When we are wounded what oozes out is blood, Why do you then speak of caste difference.” The prevalent sense of equality among the Pulayas as well as their protest against the caste discrimination is clear from the Pulaya’s retorting. The non-Dalit cultures fossilized their myth through written traditions and through an analytical approach drained them off their emotional content; their myth, therefore, are reduced to the level of mere stories. They are used to domesticate the minds of simple people to be exploited by the high caste who created the story. The myths of the non-Dalit cultures generally contain myths with oppressive values.

Following is a comparative map of the Dalit and non-Dalit myths which functions as capsules of values (Pallath 2001):

FEATURES OF DALIT MYTHS NON-DALIT MYTHS

DALIT MYTHS	NON-DALIT MYTHS
Females is superior to male	Male is superior to female
Sex is permissive	Sex is restricted
Women are born to be free	Women are born to be controlled
Politics, on the basis of democratic principles	Politics, on the basis of authoritarian principles
Life is innovative	Life is traditional
Spontaneity and display is human	Secretiveness and fear of spontaneity
Equality between man and woman gives joy to life	No equality between man and women in life
Motherhood is worshipable	Fatherhood is worshipable
Life is not order	Life is order
Life is passive and relaxed	Life is aggressively approached to achieve the goal
Appearance is unimportant	Appearance is important
Relaxed moral code	Strict moral norms

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What is cultural analysis?

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2) Distinguish between the features of Dalit and non-Dalit myths?

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A symbol is that which points to something other than itself and participate in the represented reality and which opens up layers of meaning in the represented reality. Symbol is evocative of emotions in a sensitive person releasing some form of energy for action. Sign, like symbol, points to something other than itself but it is not evocative of emotions. A sign that is capable of generating emotion in the participating person is a symbol. There is an integral relation between myth and symbol. A symbol is always an expression of a myth in the wider sense. The national flag of India is symbol and the explanation of the signs on the flag which form the myth of the symbol - National Flag.

The symbols of Dalit cultures are rich with animal and plant symbols taken directly from nature with little or no stylization. Plants and animals are generally considered as manifestations of divine power. Among the animals the Dalit cultures give more prominence to earth bound creatures such as serpent, tiger, rat etc. that live in abodes, inside the earth and the saped trees such as *pipal*, *neem*, *kadamba*, *bilva*, *chembakam* and *kanjiram*. The symbols of non-Dalit cultures also use plant and animal symbols, but it uses predominantly birds. Dove, eagle, pelican, peacock are often used along with other animals such as horse, lion, wolf etc. sky-directed tree symbolism such as oak, palm, pigtree etc. dominate. In the Dalit culture the symbols are mostly inward looking whereas in the non-Dalit cultures the eyes are outward-directed.

The Dalit culture symbols are vibrant with emotions through distortions and exaggerations whereas the non-Dalit cultural symbols are stylized the proportionate expressing mainly one emotion, peace. The colour that dominate Dalit cultural symbols are red and yellow, the colour of earth, whereas the non-Dalit cultures are white and blue, the colour of sky (Pallath 2001).

The characteristics of the Dalit and non-Dalit cultural symbols are lucidly expressed by Pallath (2001) in the following chart:

DALIT CULTURAL SYMBOLS	NON-DALIT CULTURAL SYMBOLS
Earth (Immanence)	Sky (transcendence)
Moon	Sun
Mandals (centre)(<i>Yoni</i>)	Mountain (Vertical)(<i>Lingam</i>)
Cave-dwelling animals	Winged creature
Serpent	Serpent
Spiral	Spiral
Pot (<i>Garbha</i>)	Pillar (<i>Linga</i>)
Pipal tree (Horizontal)	Cedars (Vertical)
Dancing	Sitting or standing
Eye (<i>darsan</i>)	Hand (service)
<i>Stanam</i> (Place)	<i>Kalam</i> (time)
<i>Bhagavati</i> (mother-goddess)	Father (God)
Feminine	Masculine

It is obvious from the chart that the Dalit cultural symbols are closer to earth and spiral in design and feminine whereas the non-Dalit symbols are sky-directed, linear in design and predominantly masculine.

2.5 ANALYSIS OF DALIT RITUALS

Rituals are “culturally defined sets of behaviour” Rituals in its widest sense used here means any human symbolic behaviour which can evoke any or all emotions in the performer as well as in the participants (Pallath, 1989). Frozen rituals which has reduced to the level of more repetitive action and are not evocative of emotions are called cult. Most of the static religious performance can be included in the category of cult. While real rituals are dynamic in the sense of embodying the agonies and aspirations of the performing society, cult is static, representing the hope of the society which has given birth to it. There is an integral relation between myth, symbol and ritual. As there is a myth behind every symbol, there is a myth behind every ritual, ritual, thus in short is symbolic action of a myth.

(i) Ritual Inversion Vs. Ritual Affirmation

According to Victor Turner ritual performance of Dalit cultures can be classified into two: Life crisis ritual and calendrical rituals. Calendrical rituals, usually of a collective kind, in which, at certain culturally defined points in the seasonal cycle, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in their turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation. Such rituals are described as rituals of status reversal. They are often accompanied by robust verbal and non-verbal behaviour, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors (Pallath, 1989).

The ritual status reversal supplies the Pulayas with two character traits, (I) that they practice among themselves a democratic, egalitarian type of life (ii) they develop an unconscious rebellion within themselves for the unjust social set-up. This may be one reason that the people who practice ritual status reversal rallied behind the Marxist party in Kerala for their socio - cultural and economic liberation. As against the ritual status reversal of the Dalit cultural, rituals the non-Dalit cultural rituals affirm the status of its members. For example, the calendrical celebration of the *savarna* temple feast affirms the status of the priestly class. A strict separation of the pujaris and the devotees is ensured during the ritual celebration. It is also an occasion for the people to get legitimized their position in the secular society. The dress, the mode of transport are all used to affirm one's position in the secular society.

(ii) Liminal of Dalit Culture ritual Vs. Permanency of Non-Dalit Culture rituals

Liminal means, a situation of license during which anything can take place, because all norms of day to day life are relaxed. Dalit ritual celebrations in general are liminal. Particularly in the *theyyam* celebrations several devices are used to relax the social norms and to give the whole celebration an air of enchantment to shed all inhibitions and controls. In the *potten theyyam*, *potten*, literally means, “idiot”, “deaf and dumb”, or “loafer”. This entitles the *theyyam* to speak out whatever comes to his mind, and in utter abusive language. The liminal situation is totally absent in the Non-Dalit Culture ritual celebrations. Normlessness which is the determining element of the liminal state during which anything can take the place is absent in the celebration of Non-Dalit Culture rituals. The celebration of Eucharist of the Christians, for example, is highly regimental leaving no space for normless situation.

(iii) Ludic of Dalit Culture ritual Vs. Rigidity of Non-Dalit Culture rituals

The ludic (playful) nature is integral to liminal stage. The *potten theyyam* is a perfect synthesis of playfulness and seriousness. Though the playful utterances of the *theyyam* evokes laughter in the devotees, he is heeded seriously. The ruling mood of the Non-Dalit Culture celebrations is one of rigidity. A spiritual person in Non-Dalit Culture is a rigid person. The more unemotional one is the more socially acceptable he becomes. During the Id celebrations for example of Muslims, no playfulness is tolerated. The movement and gestures of the main functionary are designed to communicate rigidity.

(iv) Dalit Culture Ritual Reflecting Social Process Vs. Non-Dalit Culture Ritual Enacting Individual

Dalit cultural rituals reflects the social process. The change in the social organization reflects in the ritual celebrations. For example, the *theyyam* celebrations were affected by the abolition of landlordism in the post independent era. The manner of celebration and material used in make-up and decoration are affected by the rapid social change that took place along with the freedom struggle. There is nothing unusual about it, because Dalit cultural rituals are so much one with the day to day life of the people. Whereas the non-Dalit cultural rituals are not so much affected by the corresponding social change. They do not embody the social process of the people who perform them. Though, shaped as part of a social process it got solidified and fixated at one point of time; from then on it is an endless repetition unaffected by the social happening. Christian Eucharist celebrations, or the republic day celebrations of our country are some of the examples.

(V) Social Catharsis Of Dalit Culture Rituals Vs. Individual Fulfillment Of Non-Dalit Culture Rituals

Dalit cultural rituals are designed in such a way as to create a catharsis effect in the performer as well as the participants. The Dalit Culture rituals are generally organized to spend a full sleepless night. The shortest celebration takes twenty four hours. Sleepless night spend in rhythmic movements such as drumming, dancing, and singing leads the participants to a crowd catharsis. For example the *theyyam* - the rhythmic dance, the characteristic features of the painted face of the deities, and torsos, the elaborate headgears, the personification of the qualities of gods, the ritual offering of birds and animals, the trance of the *theyyam*, all induce in the entire crowd into a participatory trance. The rising crescendo of chanting, the sound of jingling anklets, the rhythmic and deafening musical accompaniments comprising drums punctuated by shouting and yelling of the *theyyam*, the spirited expressions of the trance from head to foot make the entire crowd erupt in frenzy of rhythmic fervour, the whole spectacle of sound, movements, colour leaves a lasting effect on the participants (J.J. Pallath).

The non-Dalit rituals are repetitive short celebrations mostly lasting an hour or so. People have no time to spend on long celebrations nor are they physically prepared to spend a sleepless night in celebration. Even in a crowd, individuals remain isolated and what they look for is individual fulfillment. The secular rituals such as university convocation, swearing in ceremony of public offices, the Mass and Friday Prayer of Christians and Muslims respectively are also illustrations. The people, therefore, take to artificial means to undergo the personal catharsis which is very much a need of any human organism.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Give some characteristics of Dalit and non-Dalit cultural symbols.

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- 2) How is luminal situation related to normlessness?

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2.6 VALUES OF DALIT FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

The following table gives a rough idea of the values of Dalit life, folklore and cultural expressions (Pallath 2001)

Values Of Dalit (Lunar) Culture	Values Of Nondalit (Solar) Culture
Socio-Economic Values	
-Person is of prime importance. The relation between person and society is complementary. The other is a friend.	-Individual well-being, private interest, private property, denial of social dimension, the other becomes a rival.
-Co-operation: Instead of competition co-operation . Every Persons' good is in the development of each and each ones good is in the well-being of all, love takes the place of aggression.	-Competition: the one who asserts aggressively survives, as a result aggression, physical, moral psychological becomes socially respectable value.
-Freedom is realized in and through every person, not by the elimination of some members.	-Freedom is the possibility to pursue one's individual end. In reality it is the freedom of the high caste to exploit the Dalit.
-Equality and justice are the basis of the social order. Talented persons are recognized; after his/her death the surviving members do not enjoy prestige on his behalf.	-Equality is taken as the opportunity two physically and culturally unequal competitors to fight. Distinction is made under birth, race, place, religion and language; and are permanent.

-Goods are treated as the gift for the well-being of the society and rated according to the humanizing quality of it. Quality is important than quantity. How useful to the society is more important than how beautiful.	-Goods are meant for individual consumption and consumption is everything in life. The value of a person is equated with the goods he/she possess. You can have whatever you want with money, thus money is the universal value.
-Needs are spontaneous, according to the rhythm of nature.	-Artificially created needs. Needs are created among the unwilling mass making use of the support of sex, family, religion and even God.

Religious Values

-Feminine qualities dominate.	-Dominating quality is masculine.
-Dominating Deity, Bhagavathi (Goddess).	-Father (God) dominated.
-Importance to Earth and Earth deities.	-Importance to Sky and Sky-gods.
-Movements during religious function, predominantly spiral in the form of dancing.	-Linear in the form of standing and sitting.
-Long celebrations, at the end of which the entire congregation goes through a catharsis	-Short celebrations at the end of which congregation becomes unconsciously tense which leads to aggressive nature.
There is blend of Iudic and ascetic in the cultic celebrations.	-Only ascetic with an exaggerated emphasis to fallen state of humanity which leads to unnecessary guilt feeling.
-Rituals show openness towards absorption and integration of new things and a general tolerance towards unfamiliar.	-Rituals are rigid repetition of the familiar and a general suspicion of and intolerance towards the unfamiliar.
-Ritual celebrations are an extension of nature.	- Ritual celebrations have little to do with nature and realities of life.
-Ritual expresses social protest and helps resolution of it.	-Social tensions are created through discrimination in ritual celebration.
-The Dalit Culture is said to be more Unitive, imaginative, Cosmic, Mythic and Intuitive.	- The complex culture is said to be more Dualistic, Reason-oriented, Personal, Historic and Discursive.

2.7 FEATURES OF DALIT FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

As indicated by Samy (2006) Dalit history reveals that the Dalit community had a rich folklore and culture of its own. Here, Dalits who are the children of the soil found ways of expressing their identity through folk arts and classic arts in oral and written forms. But these rich cultural treasures were stolen from them by oppressors. Their cultural heritage was desecrated and destroyed and a foreign culture was imposed upon them. The upper caste oppressors saw to it that the Dalits would never produce a culture of their own. The others ingeniously used the art form and the various traits of their culture to oppress and dehumanize the Dalits. Thus culture which is supposed to give a meaning system and value system to a society was made into an instrument of oppression and domination. This manipulation of culture to dehumanize the Dalits has continued down unabated through the centuries even till today.. The Dalits have neither the money power nor the political clout to make their voices heard. It is the upper caste that determines what the Dalits should think and how he should act and how he should see his status in the society. By the use of electronic media and the print media, the upper caste society has successfully preserved its dominance and has tried to convince the world that the so-called low caste people are indeed low people. What is even more outrageous is the attempts to make the Dalits themselves believe and accept that they are low and worthless only to be despised and cast out to become the outcasts. Important characteristics and functions of all the traditional folklore that has been transmitted for centuries together in the forms of oral narratives, songs, music, tales, proverbs myths, legends, ballad, lullabies, Field songs, performing arts are as follows (Samy 2006).

- a) Explaining the agony and the sorrow of their life styles.
- b) Trying to communicate to their community members in a subtle way
- c) Seeking consolation for the sufferings.
- d) Expecting a change that will liberate them.
- e) Directly or indirectly call for the unity among them.

In the state of Tamilnadu there were local Dalit heroes among the Dalit communities. These individuals either man or women would have tried to counter the dominance of upper caste people and got killed in doing so. These individuals become a hero and in due course the Dalits make them as their gods. There are many ballads sung in praise of these heroes. These ballads will express their anger and in the same time induce the new generation to take up the role of the deliverer. The ballads will begin with the details of birth and family details .Good qualities of the hero will be brought out and the cause of his death will be mentioned and sadness will prevail at the end with highlighting the loss of the hero.

As landless labourers the Dalit women will sing in the paddy fields while transplanting the seedlings. Every day life situations will be represented in their songs. Mocking the landlord satirically can be noticed in their songs. Those mocking elements may not be easily understandable for an outsider whereas it is communicated for enjoyment among the labourers. Fear prevents them from making direct mockery. The lullabies sung by the Dalit women express the state of their livelihood to their infants. Mostly all forms of traditional cultural expressions are derived out of their day to day living conditions. Whether it is ritual or non

ritual they recorded the ordeal of Dalits and longed for the attention of their own communities as well as others (Samy 2006).

An individual or a community's identity, attitude and patterns of behaviour are formed and expressed in the forms of arts and aesthetics is not merely by the environment, in which one is part of, but importantly developed through the attitudes of significant others. It is this significant others that play a crucial role in the formation of one's identity. In other words an individual's self understanding and estimation would not develop in vacuum. It rather develops in mutuality of interaction and essentially depends on others treatment. With this understanding we can look in to the pride and dignity of the Dalit artists. For many educated Dalit youths believe that practicing of Dalit art forms bring shame and insult to their identity. The art folk drumming in pan Indian scale is connected mainly to Dalits and tribal communities. Since the folk drums are made out cow skins this art form was considered as something low and impure by the upper caste people.

Drumming –A tool for liberation:

The emergence of Dalit liberation movements and other Dalit political parties and NGOs working for the upliftment of Dalits have given a new impetus for the art of drumming. Drumming for a social change is the new way of expressing their art form in various festivals held in India. No more it is considered as funeral music but music of liberation. The vibrations that it brings help them to arouse their feelings of agitation and recording their expression through their cultural resource. This folk drumming has the tremendous effect of crowd pulling at public meetings and gatherings. Their singing, drumming, strumming and dancing are re-defining their perspective. On the other hand alternative communication like third theatre, street theatre, puppet show, etc., is also widely spreading. Dalit's search for alternative media is in fact the search for a counter-culture that will stand as a paradigm to protect human existence; re-write history and evolve a new culture of love and caring. Let this be a historical milestone from where we reiterate our march towards equality and justice, self-respect and harmony. Below we mention briefly two Dalit Art forms from Tamilnadu (Samy 2006).

Paraiyattam OR Thappaattam The most striking and vibrant art form is the folk dance known as *paraiyattam* or *thappaattam* in Tamilnadu. The *Parai* acquired the name *Thappu* based on the action of beating on the instrument *Parai*. *Thappu* is always associated with beats and its dance. The uniqueness of *Thappaattam* is that both the player and the dancer are same. The beats of the Drum and the movements of the body meet in unison so as to become an expressive dance-form.

Karagaattam *Karagam* is a folk dance with musical accompaniment, performed balancing a pot on the head. Traditionally, this dance was performed by the villagers in praise of the rain goddess Mari Amman and river goddess, Gangai Amman, performed with water pots balanced on their heads (Samy 2006).

2.8 THE DANCE OF DEFIANCE

The unique music of the Dalits has long been viewed by high-caste elites as a degenerate culture born of an essentially 'impure people'. Their presence and cultural practices are viewed as polluting by people of high status. Many intellectuals dismisses all music not made by people of high caste. Many elite still hold on to the following sentiments: 'There is folk music and classical music. Carnatic music is scientifically organized, folk music is not so ... people who are not properly

trained just sing out of emotion, enthusiasm. Folk music can be sung by any child. Quacks. Carnatic is not like this, you need a talent.” ‘ (Silvermanm 2001)

Despite the prejudice of people of high caste, those at the lower level of the Hindu hierarchy are reclaiming their music. It is becoming a source of powerful resistance, the basis of new and revolutionary identities. As Dalit women come together to share and find solutions to their problems at meetings of self-help groups in villages throughout India, they learn that they are not to blame for their individual problems. They become ‘conscientized’—in the term coined by Paolo Freire, the Brazilian revolutionary educator—to the fact that their problems are rooted in an oppressive social structure.

Sagamarie is a vital woman with a ready laugh. This energetic Dalit leader describes how she mobilized Dalit voters through staging a procession led by Pariyar drummers. Gathering crowds as they travelled through dusty streets and laneways, the procession united Hindu, Muslim and Christian Dalit villagers on the way to the voting booth. As the procession passed by the well-built or ‘pukka’ houses of the rich, upper-caste families of the more salubrious quarters of the village, the musicians, men and boys threw themselves into wild, spontaneous dances in front of the ever-growing crowds. The frenetic dance of defiance was a display of Dalit identity, pride and strength. Excitedly she recounts the triumphal march: ‘A big procession ... house to house to collect the votes, then vote time. I have a feeling inside me that I will win.’ (Silvermanm 2001)

The challenges are great and opposition to Dalit culture and rights means that Dalit activists have a long struggle. They are fighting back. Born into marginal existences they increasingly assert their human rights. They are by far the largest group amongst the fifth of India’s population who live in extreme poverty and destitution. Condemned to labouring in the fields of high-caste families in return for a subsistence diet, millions are undernourished and exploited by landowners, officials and moneylenders.

2.9 LIBERATIVE DALIT CULTURE

Over the last two decades, the South Asian landscape has experienced a resurgence of untouchable voices challenging the dominant social, economic, political, cultural, and epistemological structures, and questioning the traditional mechanisms of oppression. Even though Indian society and its traditional institutional structures have been critically interrogated throughout its history, the perspectives from the most oppressed sections of the society, like the Dalits, did not form a part of mainstream intellectual discourses and analyses (Mangalam 2011).

The contemporary upsurge of Dalits in Indian cultural and political mainstream, therefore, not only challenges the existing historical and sociopolitical scholarship on South Asia, but also tries to provide new epistemological alternatives by bringing the ideas and articulations from the margins to the core in the rewriting of history, culture, and politics. Dalit articulations provide new ways of understanding and interrogating the notions of caste, colonialism, nationalism, democracy, equality, and freedom. The uniqueness of Dalit literature perhaps lies in its ability to give meaning to and capture the anger, oppression, and exploitation embodied in poignant and yet powerful literary and cultural expression.

Further, Dalit art forms have always been a counter-hegemonic discourse and it’s only the academicians and the middle class intelligentsia, who have failed to understand it as such. Social organisations who are working for a change are

beginning to explore the possibilities of using both traditional and contemporary Dalit art forms in educating the masses. Especially the use of street theatre has gained momentum in the last two decades for creating awareness among the people about the atrocities committed against Dalits.

In order to develop an integrated development pattern, it is necessary to recognize the importance of Dalit wisdom and technology (and culture) and incorporate them as the basis of all development. Dalit Wisdom is wisdom and technology which a people develop for their living in accordance with their habitat ensuring its balanced use. The modern development styles compel people to follow a life-style that is destructive of natural resources through over exploitation and that this alienates people from their respective environment. The Dalit wisdom and technology which ensures optimum use of the natural resources and so eco-friendly leads us to a development that is sustainable (Pallath 2001).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Name four important characteristics and functions of traditional folklore.

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2) What is the uniqueness of Dalit literature?

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2.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have seen the rich traditions of Dalit folklore and culture and their specific communitarian roles. We have indicated the liberative function they serve in humanising Dalit and non-Dalit communities.

2.11 KEY WORDS

FOLKLORE : folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales and customs that are the traditions of that culture, subculture, or group. it is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared.

CULTURAL ANALYSIS : culture, in very general terms, the way of life of a people, hence a way of thinking, of viewing things, of comforting one's self, common to a society: the special mode of being human of a people.

: Liminal means, a situation of license during which anything can take place, because all norms of day to day life are relaxed. Ludic or playful nature is part of luminal sphere.

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