CHAPTER THREE
CLASSIFICATION OF FOLK LITERATURE (Lok-Sahitya)
CHAPTER- III
CLASSIFICATION OF FOLK LITERATURE

Classification of Lok-Sahitya :

3.00 What is Lok-sahitya :

Folk literature is the mirror of the mass life. It is the expression of the heart of the people whatever is realised by the common people and is experienced through their instincts are given expression to in their language. Folk literature therefore, has direct connections with the mental make up of the people. The simple undisorted, natural expression of the mind of the masses in its original form is the folk literature. In it all hopes and fears, instincts and emotions, love and hatred, laughter and weeping etc. are mixed up together. The subject-matter of folk literature consists of all the instincts and emotions of the people. Naturalness, liberty and simplicity are the basic qualities of this literature. In practice it is a poetry "by the people, of the people and for the people." Here in it the culture of the time of blooming humanity has been preserved. It reflects the human culture in its true form. It flows eternally through the heart and soul of the common people. It is not the creation of any single individual but of a big multitude of the people at large. It is rather self-created and natural born. According Dr. Dhirendra Verma : 
In other words, we can say that folk literature is one where there is the expression of impersonal emotions in common language which is basically traditional and verbal. In it there is the mixing up of local ideas with the emotions of human heart. In practice the ideas of common masses reflect the ideas of all humanity. When a child learns something while in the lap of its mother through own instincts and emotions, its expression become the basis of folk literature. As Dr. Kesari Narayan Shula remarks:


3.1 Folk literature and its implications:

Different scholars use the term 'folk literature' in different denotations. Dr. Basudev Sharan Agrawaljee calls it 'Lok-varta' (i.e., voice of the people). On the other hand

1. Hindi Lok Sahitya Kosh, Dr. D. Verma, p. 682
2. Rusi Lok Sahitya, Dr. K.N. Shah, p. 44
3. Rajsthani Kahawate, Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, p. 11
Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee described it as 'Lok-yan'\(^4\) (i.e., way of the people). But Dr. Bholanath Tiwari placed the term of 'Lok-yan'\(^5\), which he found to be more suitable. But Dr. Krishna Dev Upadhyay thinks that the term folk-culture (Lok-Sanskriti) is more suitable and just for folk literature than any other term.\(^6\) Dr. Ram Naresh Tripathy used the term 'Gratu-Geet' for folk-songs. Some other writers use the term 'Gram-Sahitya' for folk literature; while others find Jana-Sahitya more suitable. Dr. Moti Chandra is one of the supporters' of the latter view.

Let us first consider the term 'Lok-Varta' for folk literature. Practically speaking there is a vast difference between these two -- Lok-Varta and folk-literature (Lok Sahitya). The Lok-Varta is a living literature and its scope is as wide as that of the life of the people. It includes all the people, the country they live in and their material life and above all their culture in it. It reflects all the above qualities. So if the lok-varta is the personification of knowledge, folk literature is a literature and if the former is a literature the latter is a poetry or a poetical work.

Dr. S.K. Chatterjee used the term 'Lok-yan' for folk literature. He took up the term 'yan' from the Buddhistic

---

4. Rajasthani Kahawate, Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, p. 11
5. Sammelan Patrika (Chaitra-Asad), Dr. B.N. Tiwari
terms like Hinyan, Mahayan etc. According to Dr. Krishnadev Upadhyaya,

"Usse Jansadharan Ke Dharm Ke to Bodh Ho Sakta Hai, Parantu Uske Rahansahan, Riti-Riwaj, Andha Viswas, Parampara tatha Prathyon Ka Bodh Nahin Ho Sakta." ⁷

Therefore, due to above defects we cannot accept the term 'Lokyan' for Lok-Sahitya. In the same manner we cannot accept the term 'Lokyan' also. Here in this term 'ayan' which means 'gait' or 'act of going' has been used. So the term 'Lokyan' which incorporates 'ayan' would mean 'Lok Ki Goti' (i.e., motion of the people). But the term also fails to mean the all-pervading nature of folk-literature. Moreover the term itself is not known in the Hindi world.

Dr. K.D. Upadhyaya used 'Lok-sanskriti' (folk culture) for Lok-Sahitya. But this term Lok-Sanskriti refers to the expression of the ancients. It includes everything like philosophy, religion, scientific knowledge, social organisations and their practice, literature and language etc. ⁸ So folk literature is nothing but a part of folk-culture, but all blind faith, customs and conventions and usages donot come under its scope. Moreover folk-culture is inherited in the entire mass-people.

Now it is evident that no other term than Lok-Sahitya

---

⁷ ibid, p. 11
⁸ Handbook of Folklore, Dr. K.D. Upadhyaya, p. 4
(Folk literature) is quite expressive. This term is capable of expressing all the necessary virtues required for the purpose. Excepting the uncultured aspect all the conventional wisdom like faith customs and conventions, folk tales, folk songs and culture of the mass people are combined together under it. In other words folk culture is the accumulation of people instincts and emotions and the wisdom for the good of the people. This wisdom of the mass people are available in the shape of stories, riddles and songs. In practice "folklore is the science which embraces all that relates to ancient observances and customs to the notion tradition, superstitions and prejudices of the people. Although folk literature is expressed through local literature yet it is not quite local one but it takes the universal shape and gives expression to the natural and artificial tradition of the mass people, which is absent in other literature. The technique of folk literature is definitely the very same technique of the Puranas and Upanishads coming down traditionally. The things are related in such a manner that the whereabouts of the speaker is not revealed; and the question about the identity of the speaker is left to the reader. Whenever and wherever a story is completed no introductory lines are added to continue the next one. But they use their own technique very skilfully.

10. Lokragini, Introduction, Dr. Satyavrata Awasthi.
3.2 Tradition of the Folk literature:

The tradition of folk literature is quite old in India. The beginning and development of folk literature in Sanskrit is quite fascinating. It is very much amazing to know how folk literature bloomed and developed in the past through several centuries and still kept its existence in tact. One can find the germ of folk song in our holy scriptures the Rikveda. The ballads (Gathas) which are referred to in our old literature are the representative of the folk literature. The term 'Gatha' has been found in use in the Rikvedic literature in the sense of a poetry.\(^{11}\) In the same manner the term 'Gathin' in the sense of a singer has also been found in the Rig-veda.\(^{12}\) It has been found in a special meaning i.e., in the sense of special literature which has been differentiated from the 'Raimee' and the 'Narashansi'.\(^{13}\) There is a reference to this term 'Gatha' in the Brahmana and the Aranya. In the Aitareya Brahmana there has been shown a difference between the 'Rik' and the 'Gatha'.\(^{14}\) The tradition of a historical gatha has been found in its original form during the Mahabharat times. In its sixth chapter an elaborate discussion has been made on Lokgathas. During the 3rd century of the Vikram era, when people used Prakrit language, there was a development of 'Lokgeet' to

\(^{11}\) Rig-veda, 8:71:14
\(^{12}\) ibid, 1:7:2
\(^{13}\) ibid, 10:25:6
\(^{14}\) Aitareya Brahmana
a great extent. The Gatha Saptashati, which was edited by Hala or Shalibahana, describes how people composed and sang folk songs during this period. Hala selected only seven hundred gathas out of one crores of them and saved them from extinction. These Gathas can be regarded as the best example of lyrical ballads. Examples may be cited of the women who wanted to light fire for the preparation of food but failed:

— "Aandhan Kammani Uniya Mang Jurasu
Rattapadal Suyan dhama
Muha maruyang Piyanto Dhuma Sihi Na
Pajjalaye.

Again the picture of a heroine who is separated from her sweetheart is vividly and beautifully presented in this Gagha.15

" Ajjang Gayoti, Ajjang Gayoti, Ajjang
Gayoti Ganiriya,
Padam cchiya Diyahadde Kudo Rohahi
Chittalio."

In this manner there are enough examples in the Ramayana that the womenfolk sang the beautiful songs while Ram was born and in the Shrimadbhagawat when Krishna was born. The 'Adi Kavi' Kalidas also referred to the singing by the Gandharvas and dancing by the Apsaras when Ram was born.16 The Mahakavi also narrated how at the birth of Aja, there

15. Gatha Saptashati, Amruk, 33/8
16. Ramayan, Valmiki, Valkand, 18/16
was the performance of songs and dances and blowing of the Mangalvadyas by the 'Vaishyas' in the inner chamber of king Dilip.\(^{17}\)

The tradition of Lokgatha in folk literature is not less olden. Such stories are found in the Vedas as well as in the Upanishadas. They can be regarded as the germs of 'Lok Katha'. The conversation between Surama and Pani in the Rik Veda and the story of Nachiketa in the Kathopani-shada can be regarded as the forrunner of Lok Katha. In Sanskrit there is a vast sea of Lok Kathas. In reality the 'Kathasarit Sagar' of Somdeva is nothing but a collection of Lok Katha. So also the Panchatantra by Vishnu Sharma has occupied a unique position in the history of folk literature. The Hitopadesh of Narayan Pandit is a collection of stories with advice only. The custom of using idioms, proverbs and sayings is very old one. There are examples of using proverbs in the Rik Veda e.g., "Na Rite Sharantasya Sakhyaya Devah." In Sanskrit literature also there are ample use of proverbs and idioms. The sage who wrote "Kosmoi Devaya Habisha Vidhema," in the Vedas was the first man to use riddles amply in their 'Kavyas'.

Now it is clear from the above discussion that folk literature has been in existence since very old days and it will go on for all times to come. Its flow is quite undisrupted and will go on for ever.

---

17. Raghuvansh, Kalidas, 3/19
3.3 Classification of folk literature:

In different seasons and in sacramental rites generally the mass people sing songs of joy. In these songs they generally relate certain stories also. They also use ornamental languages with proverbs and idioms which express their heart. There are certain elements which are based on the feeling and experience of the mass people and which are not available in other places. Considering these factors we can classify folk literature into the following five categories:

i) Lokgeet (folk songs);
ii) Lokgatha (Ballads);
iii) Lok katha (folk tales);
iv) Lok Natya (folk drama); and
v) Lok Subhashita (folk sayings).

Let us have a brief discussion on the above categories one by one.

3.3.1 Lokgeet (Folk songs):

The Lokgeet has a major place in folk literature. The abundance and pervasiveness of mass life make the Lokgeets naturally the top ones. Of all the different categories more than fifty per cent belongs to this category. These songs are sung in different ceremonies and seasons. The Lokgeet can further be sub-divided from the following view points:
1) Sacramental Rites;
ii) Expression of sentiment;
iii) Change of season and performances of austerity;
iv) Caste and creed; and
v) Relating to labour.

1) From the point of sacramental Rites:

Religion plays the major or prime role in Indian life. It is not overstatement even when we say that religion is the soul for Indian people. It is needless to explain to what extent religion is associated to our life. From before of our birth till death our life is bound by certain sacramental rites. Our Shastras prescribe sixteen rites of which the Garbhadhana, the Pungswan, the Putra Janm, the Mundan, the Yajnopavit, the Vivah, the Gawana and the Mritu are the principal ones. Of these rites the first two are not in use now while the remaining six are still in use. During these ceremonies womenfolk sings delightful songs. The songs sung at the death are quite heart-rendering and sorrowful when some dear ones like husbands, sons, wives or daughters are dead, songs are sung in praise of the departed ones weeping and with heavy heart. But these songs are quite few in number and are not indispensable ones.

18. Lok Sahitya Ki Bhumika, Dr. K.D. Upadhyaya, p. 61
11) **Expression of sentiment:**

In the Lokgeets there are the expression of different sentiments. The flow of these sentiments or 'Rasa' are quite everflowing. Although different types of 'Rasa' are given expression in lokgeets yet the following five 'Rasas' are found in abundance:

a) **Shringaar Rasa** (Sentiment of Love);
b) **Karun Rasa** (Sentiment of Compassion);
c) **Vir Rasa** (Sentiment of Bravery);
d) **Hasya Rasa** (Sentiment of Humour); and
e) **Shanta Rasa** (Sentiment of Serenity).

a) **The Shringaar Rasa:**

The geets of the Shringaar Rasa are generally sung at the time of marriages, 'Sohar' and 'Janeo'. In the Sohar geets, there is a beautiful description of the different organs and limbs of a woman in the advance stage. When a woman conceives her body grows pale, breasts grow larger and other limbs grow thinner and there are descriptions of them in the geets. During this period if someone's husband is abroad and not at home, their sorrow knows no bound. For them a moment seems to be an 'Yuga'. Hence their troubles and difficulties of delivery becomes hundred time more due to absence of their husband.

19. ibid, p. 62
(b) **The Karun Rasa**:

The Karun Rasa is available in the songs like the Guwana, the Jatansar Nirguna, the Purbi, the Ropani and the Sohni. In these songs there is a tinge of pity and compassion and in the case of the Gawana, there is an overflood of 'Karun Rasa' which swept away all other Rasas like a floating river. Really the songs which are sung during the time of separation of girls (i.e., at marriages) from their parents are quite heart-rendering. Hence there is a sea of Karun Rasa where any reader (or an audience) plunge deeply into it.

(c) **The Vir Rasa**:

The songs in which the Vir Rasa is found, are known as the 'Lokgathas'. The Alha, the Vijoymol, the Lorki, the Sordi, the Nayakawa, the Banjara, the Gopichandra, the Morthoi and the Tholabharu songs come under this Rasa'. In the Punjab the songs of Raja Rasalu are quite popular. The Alha can be regarded as a Mahakavya (an epic) of Vir Rasa where each and every line speaks of bravery and heroism. The Sordi is full of fiction and romance and their description is quite lucid. In the Vijoymol there is a narration of one hero 'Konwar' through Vir Rasa. Similar 'Vir Rasik' description is also found in the Raja Rasalu.
(d) **The Hasya Rasa**:  
In folk songs generally Hasya Rasa is found to be comparatively less than other Rasas. The songs which are sung in the marriages, contain elements of joy and laughter. These songs are known as the Jhumar, the name of which comes from the style of singing -- "Jhum Jhum Kar Gaya Jata". In these songs jokes are sometimes cut at the lover and sometimes at the brother-in-law (Dewar) and so on.

(e) **The Shanta Rasa**:  
The Shanta Rasa is found in the songs like the Bhajan, the Nirguna, the Tulsimata and the Ganga Maiya. The womenfolk sings a Bhajan in the evening and the later part of the night which are known as the Sanjha and the Parati respectively. These songs contain prayer to the Lord. In the dawn when the womenfolk goes in a group for bathing in the Ganga they sing devotional songs. In these songs there is a prayer to the Almighty to remove all worldly difficulties in life. These songs give birth to the idea of devotion and 'Bhakti' in the mind of the audience.

(iii) **Change of season and performance of Vratas**:  
Considering the nature of the folk songs it is found that the majority of these songs are related to some season or ceremonies. With the coming of seasons like the Varsha (the summer), the Basant (the Spring) etc. there is a joy
and delight in the mind of mass people, the reflection of which are found in the folk songs. During the 'Varsha' particularly in the month of 'Asad', the farmers sing 'Alha' and express their delight. It is the month of Falgun, the people sing joyous songs of the 'Holi' while they express the heart-load joy in the 'Chaita' in the month of Chaitra.

Songs are also presented in the performance of various religious 'Vratas'. In the 'Shukla Panchami' of the month of Shrawan, which is known as the Nag Panchami, the songs praying the 'Naga' or the Serpent God are presented. The Bachura Vrata is observed during the Krishna Chaturthi of Bhadra and the Godhan is celebrated during the Shukla Dwitiya of Kartick. In these ceremonies the womenfolk sings the praise of the deities and prays for their desired boons. In the same manner songs are sung during all festivals and ceremonies.

(iv) Songs of different castes and creeds:

There are certain songs which are sung only by certain particular castes. The best example of such a song is the Virha songs. This song may be regarded as the national song of the 'Ahiras'. The song is presented by the Ahiras in such a beautiful and delightful manner that no other people can sing it so well. Moreover an Ahira is regarded as fit and respectable according to his capacity to sing
the Virha. Even the fitness of a bridegroom is considered on his capacity of singing the Virha.

The Pochra songs are sung generally by the people of the Duhsadha caste. When somebody is ill, the old people sings this Pochra song to please the goddess. It is believed that when the goddess is satisfied she removes the illness of the patient.

With the coming of the Summer season, the people of Nata caste take their drums and sing the Alha song. They also beg alms by singing this song. Some sadhus wearing a 'Gerua' dress which are also known as 'Sainyasees', sing the Gopichand and the Bharthari songs. They earn their livelihood by singing these songs whereby they get their alms. So also the 'Malis' sing the songs of the Shitala Mata i.e., the goddess Shitala.

(v) Relating to Labour:

There are certain songs which are sung during the time of performance of certain works for example the songs for planting rice sappling. These songs are known as the 'Ropani songs'. In the same manner the Nirwahi or the Sohani songs are sung during the time of collecting the food grains. There are another types of songs known as the 'Jatsars' which are sung during the time of grinding food grains. The Teli people, while extracting oil, sing the 'Kolpo'
songs. As all these songs are presented at the time of performance of some work or labour, they may easily be termed as the songs of toil or labour. While singing these songs, the exertion and boredom of labour is forgotten and freshness comes to the mind of the workers.

3.3.2 The Lok Gatha:

In our previous chapter folk literature has been classified into Lokgeet (folk songs) and Lok Gatha (folk ballads). In the Lokgeet the subject-matter is generally limited and short. But the fitness for singing is its main feature. On the other hand in folk ballads there is the primacy of the subject-matter and the fitness for singing is rather secondary there. There is another difference between them in case of their volume; the folk songs are short while the ballads are quite long ones. Under such circumstances, the former may be named as the 'Geeti kavya' and the latter the Pravandhak kavya. So the Kajli, the Holi, the Chaita, the Sohar, the Jatsar, the Bhajan and the Parati etc. may be placed under the class of 'Geeti kavya' while the Alka the Vijoymala, the Lomki, the Heer-Ranjha, the Dola maru, the Raja Rasalu etc. under the Pravandhak kavyas. In English the Lokgeet may be termed as the folk song and the Lok Gathas as folk ballads. Therefore it is seen that there is a difference between the Lokgeet and the Lok Gatha so far as their subject-matter and forms are considered. In
the Lokgeets there are the 'Shringaar' and the 'Karun Rasas while on the other hand in Lokgathas the main 'Rasa' is the Vir Rasa of course the Dholamaru is an exception. The definition of a ballad which is given by the Western Scholars shows that there is the mixture of tale (subject-matter) and the lyrical qualities in them. So also in the Lokgathas both of them are found and therefore, the Lokgathas are those Gathas (tales) which are told in lyrics.

Arguments in support of the term "Ballad" for 'Gatha' :

Suryya Karan Parik tries to show the distinction between a Gram-Geet (Rural song) and a Lokgeet (folk song) and he used the term 'Git Katha' for a 'Ballad'. But the present writer finds it more appropriate to use the term 'Ballad' for a 'Lokgatha'. In Sanskrit, the term 'Gatha' has been used in the sense of a lyrical poem right from the ancient days, for example the Saptashati, a gatha is a compilation of seven hundred 'Aryos' and is full of the 'Shringaar Rasa'. In Pali also the word 'Gatha' has been used in the sense. The Sloka, which has been appended to the 'Sinha Charm Jatak' in the Jatakmala can be taken as an example of a 'Gatha'. It reads:

"Netang Sihasya Naditong Vyagdhassa Na Deepino. 
Paruto Sihchammen Jammo Nadati Gadrabho. 
Chirangpi Khotong Khodeyya Gadrabho Haritong Yavang. 
Paruto Sihchammena Khamano Cha Esayee."

---

21. Pali Jatakawali
In the Vedic literature also the word Gathin was used to refer to some old fables or tales. Now one can easily infer the meaning of this term 'Gatha'. The term 'Lokgatha' therefore means some 'tale'. Here we donot discuss about this term Lokgatha more as a separate chapter has been added in this regard.

3.3.3 The Lok Katha:

The Lok Katha has a distinctive place in a folk literature. It is due to its pleasing and popular nature. Generally the mothers make their children delighted by telling them pleasant stories and fables. The children gradually fall asleep when they hear these fables. So also, for the good and happiness of their brothers, the girls observe the 'Chidiya Vrata' which is celebrated for a period of one month from the celebration of the Bhatri Dwitiya in the month of Kartik to the Shukla Dwitiya of the month of Agrahayan. During this 'Vrata', they have to hear stories about birds at night and without this they cannot take water in the morning. From time to time stories about gods are also related. Now-a-days the Satyanarayan Katha began to be related in place of the Trilokinath Katha.

During the cold days the old people generally used to tell pleasant fables and stories near fire side to the

22. The Rig-Veda, 1-7-1.
children. The people who surrounded the fire to warm them up are very much delighted to hear the stories related to them by the old men. Again when the cowherds gather together under the trees during holidays, they generally tell these stories to delight themselves. We refer to these things only to show that mass people generally use these Lokgathas to delight themselves on different occasions.

3.3.4 The Lok Natya:

A Lok natya is a combination of songs, dance and music in one. Music along with songs gives us pleasure, and if dance is also added to it, pleasure knows no bound. It is well-said by Kalidas that a drama is the means of mass delight.23 Rural people are delighted so much when they witness dramas that no other thing can give such pleasure to them. In the Bhojpuri region, the Videsiya written by Bhikhari Thakur is a very popular folddrama. It contains the story of a husband going abroad for livelihood. His wife suffered a lot of difficulties in his absence and then wrote to him a letter describing them. On receiving her letter the husband who was in 'Pardesh' came back to her. Bhikhari at first took part in the performances of his play, which attracted hundreds of people and even they rushed from ten to fifteen miles away to witness the play.

23. Kalidas, "Natyang Bhinnaruche Janasya Bahudhapyekang Samaradhanam."
— 'Videshiya'. Sometimes local authorities had to take the help of the police force to control the people. Now some of his followers have organised different units and the tradition of the Videshiya play has been maintained, and the play is still popular. In the same manner, the 'Gabo' in Gujerat and the 'Manch' in Malawa are popular folk plays.

3.3.5 The Lok Subhashita:

The rural people generally use several idioms and phrases, proverbs, sayings, 'Sutkalis' and 'Subhashitas' in their day-to-day conversations. In these proverbs and sayings there are collected wisdom of the people. One can easily find a true picture of the social and religious customs in their analysis. Some such 'Suktiyas' are found which may easily be regarded as principles of ethics. In some sayings of Dhadh and Bhadri one can find precious elements regarding the science of the seasons (Ritu Vigyan). The saying of Dhadh regarding agriculture which are very famous, contain certain regional expression. Dhadh also recognised the qualities of animals. He showed the way to distinguish bad animals from the good and his ideas are quite practical. The cradle songs and songs of sports can also be placed in this category. Mothers sing certain cradle songs and the babies fall asleep while they hear these songs. So also young children sing while they play.
Besides, the rural people also use abusive speeches very frequently. Therefore it is necessary that these abusive languages are to be also discussed while discussing verbal literature. These abusive languages however reflect many customs of the society.

**Conclusion**:

Vaishali, the area under consideration is rich in her folk literature. The tradition of folk literature has been incessantly flowing since the Vedic days and yet it does not lose its importance even at the present time. Folk literature is evident in the Vedic literature, the Puranas, the Pali and the Prakrit languages and in the religious literature of Vaishali.

The folk literature takes different forms in Vaishali like the Lokgeet, the Lok Gatha, the Lok Katha, the Lok natya and the Lok Subhashitahi. All these different forms of folk literature contain the wisdom of the mass people. They are the beautiful and rich store of literature, which forms the very basis of literature itself.