



Notes

## 18

## MAJOR FOLK THEATERS AND FOLK DANCES OF INDIA

India has one of the longest and richest traditions of theatre. Bharata's Natyashastra is the most ancient and detailed treatise written on drama. There has been diversity and multiplicity of folk theaters in our country which are closely linked to the ancient customs and seasonal festivals etc. of different regions. In this lesson we will discuss in detail the nature and various types of Indian folk dramas.



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, you-

- know the types of folk theatre;
- know the ancient and contemporary forms of folk dramas;
- know the main features of various folk dramas; and
- know the main characteristics of folk dramas of India.

### 18.1 NATURE AND TYPES OF FOLK DRAMAS

Folk dramas are related to folk life. For this reason, they are mainly staged during various festivals, occasions and auspicious functions. Their language is regional and simple. Folk dramas are prose but songs are also sung in between them. Some folk dramas are also lyrical. The dialogues in these are very short and are presented in a concise manner. Keeping in mind the regional audience, they lack long statements.

## Form and types of folk theatre



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The narratives of folk dramas are mainly based on historical, mythological, social or religious subjects like-

1. Jatra and Kirtan of Bengal based on religious narrative.
2. Amar Singh Rathore's historical song based on historical study in Rajasthan.
3. Yajna song of Kerala state based on mythological stories.
4. Ramlila and Raslila of Uttar Pradesh based on religious studies.
5. Nautanki, folk drama of Uttar Pradesh based on social narrative.

Initially, the roles of female characters in these folk dramas were also played by men. However, in contemporary folk dramas, the role of female characters has also started being played by women. The costumes and makeup of these characters are regional. Most of the folk plays are performed on open theatres. At some places they are staged on the temple platform or in the temple courtyard. Thus, folk dramas are simple and graceful in their form.

There is a way or a special aspect of presenting a drama. Acharya Bharat mentions two types of 'Dharmi'. A play presents the joys and sorrows of the world. Those which are very close to reality are 'Realistic (Lokdharmia)' and those which are not real but conventional are 'Natyadharmi (Traditional)'. Thus, Bharata has defined two types of practices (Dharmi)- Lokadharmi and Natyadharmi.

- Lokadharmi (Realistic): Which includes the presentation of human behavior and naturalistic presentation of objects on the stage.
- Natyadharmi (Traditional): Under this, a drama is presented through the use of stylistic methods and symbols. It is considered more artistic than realistic.



## INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.1

1. How many types of 'Dharmi' has been mentioned by Acharya Bharat?
2. What is Natyadharmi?
3. Who is called a Lokadharmi?
4. Whose composition is the Natyashastra texts?

**18.2 IMPORTANT THEATER FORMS OF INDIA**

Our country is a country of diverse cultures and traditions. Indian folk life and folk dramas of tribal communities are very simple and attractive. These folk plays are staged during any festival or public event related to folk life.

Different folk plays are staged for the life cycle and the annual cycle of seasons, in which folk dances also play an important role. In India, dance is a part of daily life and religious rituals. Due to changing lifestyles in contemporary times, the relevance of dances has reached beyond special occasions.

Below, a brief description is being given about the major folk theaters of different states of India.

**Swang: Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Malwa**

Swang folk drama is a folk-dance drama mainly around the Malwa region of Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. It involves appropriate theatrics and mimicry along with songs and dialogue. It is a dialogue-oriented folk drama. Religious stories and folk tales are played by a group in an open area. Its main subjects are—morals, folk tales, lives of inspirational persons, stories from Indian mythology and in recent times more current subjects like health and hygiene, literacy etc. Two important styles of mime are from Rohtak and Hathras. The style of Rohtak is Haryanvi (Bangru) and the language of Hathras is Brajbhasha.

**Bhavai: Gujarat and Rajasthan**

Bhavai is a traditional theater form of the northern region of Gujarat and southern region of Rajasthan. Bhavai is partly recreational and partly a ritual offering to Goddess Amba. Navratri festival is celebrated with Bhavai performance in the courtyard of Ambaji temple near Mount Abu. Amba is the presiding deity of Bhavai.

**Nautanki: Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab etc.**

Before the rise of Hindi and regional cinema, it was the most popular entertainment folk theater art throughout North India. Even today the most popular centers of this folk theater are Kanpur, Lucknow and Hathras. In contemporary times, street plays are more akin to nautanki. Typically, there is an intense melodic exchange between two or three performers; A chorus is also sometimes used. The story of traditional Nautanki ranges from mythological and folk tales to stories of contemporary heroes.

Form and types of folk theatre



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(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Ramaman: Uttarakhand**

Ramaman is a folk drama of Uttarakhand state. It is a multiform cultural event combining theatre, music, historical re-enactment and traditional oral and written narratives. It is celebrated every year in the month of Baisakh (April) in the courtyard of the Bhumiyaal Devta temple located in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. Especially the mask dance performed by the Bhandaris (Kshatriya caste) there. Ramaman has also been included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



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(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Bhand Pather: Jammu and Kashmir**

It is a traditional satirical theater form of Kashmir with a unique combination of dance, music and acting. Satire, wit and parody are the main characteristics of this form. Most of the artists of this folk drama are mainly from the farming community and hence the influence of their lifestyle, ideals and sensitivity can be seen in this folk drama.



(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Rasleela: Uttar Pradesh**

Rasleela is a famous theater form of Uttar Pradesh. Mainly it is based on the legends of Lord Krishna. It is believed that the earliest plays based on the life of Krishna were written by Nandadas. The dialogues in prose were beautifully combined with the songs and scenes from Krishna's pastimes.

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(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Macha: Madhya Pradesh**

It is a traditional and popular theater form of Madhya Pradesh. The word macha is also used for stage and drama. In this theatrical form, songs are given prominence amidst dialogues. In this form the word for dialogue is 'bol' and the rhyme in narration is called 'vanag'. The tunes of this theatrical form are known as Rangat.

**Jatra: Bengal**

Jatra is a type of musical theater performed in fairs in honor of deities or on the occasion of religious rituals and ceremonies. This dance-drama is a famous folk drama of Bengal state. Krishna Jatra became especially popular due to the influence of Chaitanya. With time, worldly love stories have also found a place in Jatra. In the past, Jatra was more musical. But later dialogues also started being given importance. In Jatra folk drama, the actors themselves describe the changes of the scene and the place etc.



(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

### **Bhaona: Assam**

Bhaona is a traditional and popular theatrical form of musical theater with religious messages. This is done in Assam. Written in the beginning of the 16th century, it is a unique creation of the great man Shankardev. The drama group composed by Shrimant Shankardev and Madhavdev was named 'Ankiya Naat'. And we can see a glimpse of the culture of Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Mathura and Brindavan in this dance drama. In this form, the narrator called Sutradhar begins the story. The actors are called Bhauria. The performance of Ankiya Naat is called 'Bhaona'. Bhaona is often staged in sessions. Bhaona is mostly written in Assamese and Brajvali languages.

### **Tamasha: Maharashtra**

Tamasha is a very famous traditional folk theater form of Maharashtra. It evolved from folk forms like Gondal, Jagran and Kirtan. Unlike other theater forms, in Tamasha the female actress is the principal exponent of the dance movements in the play. He is known as Murki. Classical music, lightning-fast footwork, and vivid gestures make it possible to portray all emotions through dance.

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(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Dashavatara: Goa and Konkan Region**

Dashavatara is a highly popular theater form of the Konkan and Goa regions. Ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu are depicted in it. In addition to stylized make-up, Dashavatara performers wear wooden and papier-mâché masks.



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(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Krishnattam: Kerala**

Krishnattam is a popular folk theater of Kerala. It initially came into existence in the 17th century under the patronage of Raja Manavada of Calicut. Krishnattam is a play consisting of eight plays performed for eight consecutive days in which the story of Lord Krishna is presented. The names of these numbers are - Avtaram, Kaliyamandana, Rasa Krida, Kamasavadha, Swayamvaram, Bana Yudham, Vividh Vadham and Swargarohana.

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**Mudiyettu: Kerala**

Mudiyettu is a ritual dance drama of Kerala. It is based on the mythological story of the war between Goddess Kali and demon Darika. It is a community ritual in which almost everyone in the village participates. It is performed in the temples of the Mother Goddess in Kerala between February and May after the harvest season. Make a huge image of Goddess Kali which is called Kalam. Mudiyattu is performed annually in 'Bhagavathi Kavas' in the temples of the goddess in various villages situated on the banks of Chalakkudi Puzha, Periyar and Moovattupuzha rivers. There is mutual cooperation and collective participation of all the people in the ritual. The seven characters of Mudiyettu are: Shiva, Narada, Darika, Danavendra, Bhadrakali, Kuli and Koimbidar (Nandikeshwar). The responsibility of promoting it lies with the elders and senior artists. During its performance the young generation is included as apprentices. Mudiyettu serves as an important cultural site for transmission of the community's traditional values, morals, ethical codes and aesthetic norms to the next generation. In 1010, Mudiyettu was included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This is the second art from Kerala after 'Koodiyattam' to be included in this list.



(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

**Theyyam: Kerala**

Theyyam is a traditional and very popular folk theater of Kerala. Being based on Acharya Bharat's book 'Natyasastra', it is a very traditional and popular theater form. The word 'Theyyam' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Daivam' which means God. That is why it is also called the dance of God. Theyyam is performed by people to appease and worship the spirits of their ancestors and folk heroes. Most of the themes

revolve around ancient mythological themes, with most of the exhibits being seen inside the temple complex; Two or more characters are on stage at the same time, with Chakkiyar providing the male actors and Nangiar performing the female roles. The latter plays cymbals and recites verses in Sanskrit, while Nambiar plays the mijavu, a large copper drum, in the background. These may take 6 to 20 days to perform. Those who are interested in witnessing this beautiful art form can visit the Koodalmanikyam Temple in Irinjalakuda and the Vadakkumnath Temple in Thrissur, where some of its most famous renditions can be seen even today.

### **Koodiyattam: Kerala**

Koodiyattam is based on Sanskrit theater traditions. It is one of the most traditional theater forms of Kerala. Chakkyar or actor, Nambiar, instrumentalist and Nangyar are the characters of this theater form. They play the roles of women. The narrator or narrator and the clown are the heroes. It is the clown who delivers the dialogues. Dancing on hand gestures and eye movements makes this theater unique. Included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

### **Yakshagana: Karnataka**

Yakshagana is a traditional theater form of Karnataka. It is based on mythology and Puranas. The most popular stories under this are Draupadi Swayamvara, Subhadra marriage, Abhimanyu killing, Karna-Arjun war in Mahabharata and Ram coronation, Luv-Kush war, Bali-Sugriva war and Panchavati Katha in Ramayana etc.

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**Therukuthu: Tamil Nadu**

Therukuthu literally means street play. This is the most popular theatrical experiment among all the folk dramas of Tamil Nadu. It is played to please Goddess Mariamman who is the rain goddess. It is mainly staged on the occasion of temple festivals. Therukuthu's extensive repertoire consists of a series of eight plays based on the life of Draupadi.





(source:www.indianculture.gov.in)

### Veethinataka: Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

In Telugu language 'Veethi' means 'road or open space'. It is the most popular folk theater form of Andhra Pradesh. Since these God-based plays were performed in an open place, they were called Veedhinataka. These plays were performed by devotees of the Lord, hence they were sometimes called Veethi Bhagavata.

### Harikatha: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

Harikatha is a famous folk drama of rural areas of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It is a narrative folk drama which includes prayers, solo drama, dance, songs, poems etc. Those who tell bad stories are called Budagjanglu. Its theme is based on Hindu mythological story. Presently, contemporary social problem-based stories are also being used in it. Harikatha played an effective role in giving the message and awakening the people during the Indian independence movement.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.2

1. What are the two important styles of swang?
2. Bhavai folk theater belongs to which state?
3. What is the basis of Nautanki stories?
4. Which folk theater of Uttarakhand is included in the UNESCO representative list?

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5. The artists of Bhand Pather folk dance mainly belong to which community?
6. Rasleela is the folk theater of which state?
7. What is the rhyme in Macha folk theater called?
8. Who describes the change of scene and place etc. in Jatra folk drama?
9. Bhaona is the folk theater of which state?
10. Tamasha is the folk theater of which state?
11. Comment about Yakshagana.
12. From which Sanskrit word is the word 'Theyyam' taken?

## 18.3 MAJOR INDIAN FOLK DRAMAS AND FOLK DANCES

The tradition of dancing on many occasions has been going on in India since ancient times. Here every state has its own folk dances and folk theatre. It is folk dance and folk theater which showcase the regional culture of different regions. There may be more than one folk dance of a region. Below are given the folk dramas and folk dances of different regions of India.

## Folk Dances/Folk dramas of India

**Andhra Pradesh-** Ghantamardala, Veethinataka, Harikatha, Kuchipudi, Ottam Thedal, Vedi Natakam.

**Assam-** Bihu, Maharas, Kaligopal, Bagurumba, Beechhua, Natpuja, Naga dance, Khel Gopal, Tabal Chongli, Kanoi, Jhumura Hobjanai.

**Bihar-** Bakkho-Bakhain, Jat-Jatin, Panwariya, Sama Chakwa, Bidesiya.

**Gujarat-** Dandiya Raas, Garba, Tippani Jurun, Bhavai.

**Haryana-** Phag, Daaf, Jhumar, Dhamaal, Loor, Khor, Gugga, Jagor.

**Himachal Pradesh-** Jhali, Jhora, Chharhi, Dhaman, Chapeli, Mahasu, Nati, Dangi.

**Jammu and Kashmir-** Heekat, Rauf, Kud Dandi Naach, Mandjat, Damali.

**Karnataka-** Huttari, Yakshagana, Harikatha, Suggi, Kunitha, Karaga, Lambi.

**Kerala-** Ottam Thullal, Kathakali (Classical), Mohiniyattam, Kaikottikali.

**Maharashtra-** Nakata, Lavani, Koli, Gafa, Legim, Dahikala Dasavatar or Bohada.

**Odisha-** Odissi (Classical), Sawaari, Ghumra, Panras Munari, Chhau.

**West Bengal-** Jatra, Gambhira, Baul, Kathi, Dhali, Marasia, Mahal, Kirtan.

**Punjab-** Gidda, Bhangra, Daff, Dhaman, Bhand, Nakula.

**Rajasthan-** Ghoomar, Chakri, Gangaur, Ramleela, Krishnaleela, Jhulan Leela, Jhuma, Suisini, Ghapal, Kalbeliya.

**Tamil Nadu-** Bharatnatyam, Kolattam, Kumi, Harikatha, Therukuthu, Kavadi.

**Uttar Pradesh-** Nautanki, Raasleela, Kajri, Jhora, Chappeli, Jaita.

**Uttarakhand-** Kummayuni, Garhwali, Kajri, Rasleela, Chappeli.

**Goa-** Tarangmel, Koli, Dekhani, Phugdi, Shigmo, Ghode, Modni, Samayi Nritya, Jagar, Ranmale, Gonf, Tunnaya Mel.

**Madhya Pradesh-** Jawara, Matki, Ada, Khada dance, Phulpati, Grida dance, Salelarki, Selabhadoni, Manch.

**Chhattisgarh-** Gaur Maria, Panthi, Raut Naach, Pandavani, Vedamati, Kapalik, Bharathari Charitra, Chandanani.

**Jharkhand-** Alkap, Karma Munda, Agni, Jhumar, Janani Jhumar, Mardana Jhumar, Paika, Fagua, Hunta dance, Mundari dance, Sarhul, Barao, Jhitka, Danga, Domchak, Ghora dance.

**Arunachal Pradesh-** Buiya, Chalo, Wancho, Pasi Kongki, Ponung, Popir, Bardo Chham.

**Manipur-** Dol Choram, Thang Ta, Lai Haraoba, Pung Cholom, Khamba Thai,bi, Nupa Dance, Rasleela, Khubak Isheli, Lohu Shah.

**Meghalaya-** Shad Suk Minseim, Nongrem, Laho.

**Mizoram-** Chhera dance, Khullam, Chaillam, Swalakin, Chwanglaijwan, Jangatalam, Par Lam, Saralamkai/Solakia, Langlam.

**Nagaland-** Rangama, Bamboo Dance, Geylang, Suirolians, Githinglim, Timangnetin, Hetlaiyuli.

**Tripura-** Hojagiri.

**Sikkim-** Chhu Phat Dance, Sikmari, Singhai Cham or Snow Lion Dance, Yak Cham, Denzong Nenha, Tashi Yangku Dance, Khukhuri Dance, Chutke Dance, Maruni Dance.



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**Lakshadweep-** Lava, Kolkai, Parichakali.

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT**

- Bharata has defined two types of practices (Dharmi) - Lokadharmi and Natyadharmi.
- Folk (Realistic): Which includes the presentation of human behavior and naturalistic presentation of objects on the stage.
- Natyadharmi (Traditional): Under this, a drama is presented through the use of stylistic methods and symbols. make it more than realistic
- Swang folk theater is a folk dance drama mainly around the Malwa region of Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. It involves appropriate theatrics and mimicry along with songs and dialogue.
- Bhavai is partly recreational and partly a ritual offering to Goddess Amba.
- Even today, the most popular centers of Nautanki folk theater are Kanpur, Lucknow and Hathras. In contemporary times, street plays are more akin to nautanki.
- Ramman is a folk drama of Uttarakhand state. It is a multiform cultural event combining theatre, music, historical re-enactment and traditional oral and written narratives.
- Bhand Pather is a traditional satirical theater form of Kashmir with a unique combination of dance, music and acting. Satire, wit and parody are the main characteristics of this form.
- Theyyam is a traditional and very popular folk theater of Kerala. Being based on Acharya Bharat's book 'Natyasastra', it is a very traditional and popular theater form. The word 'Theyyam' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Daivam' which means God. That is why it is also called the dance of God.
- Koodiyattam is based on Sanskrit theater traditions. It is one of the most traditional theater forms of Kerala. Chakyar or actor, Nambiar, instrumentalist and Nangyar are the characters of this theater form. They play the roles of women. The narrator or narrator and the clown are the heroes. It is the clown who delivers the dialogues. Dancing on hand gestures and eye movements makes this theater unique.



- Many types of dances are performed in India. Dance is also included in our folk dramas.



### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Write a note about Nautanki folk drama.
2. Explain the main characteristics of Bhand Pather folk theatre.
3. Write about the types of folk principles.
4. Describe in detail the different types of folk principles of India.
5. Make a list of major folk dances of any five states.



### ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

#### 18.1

1. Two types
2. A play is presented through the use of theatrical stylistic methods and symbols.
3. Folk (Realistic): Which includes the presentation of human behavior and naturalistic presentation of objects on the stage.
4. Acharya Bharat Muni's

#### 18.2

1. Rohtak and Hathras
2. Northern region of Gujarat and southern region of Rajasthan
3. The story of Nautanki ranges from mythological and folk tales to stories of contemporary heroes.
4. Ramman
5. Of the farming community
6. Uttar Pradesh

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7. Vanag
8. The actor himself
19. Assam
10. Maharashtra
11. It is based on mythology and Puranas. The most popular stories under this are Draupadi Swayamvar, Subhadra marriage, Abhimanyu killing, Karna-Arjun war in Mahabharata and Ram coronation, Luv-Kush war, Bali-Sugriva war and Panchavati Katha in Ramayana etc.
12. From Daivam