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Distance Learning Programme (DLP)

ART & CULTURE

(UPSC PRELIMS)



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ART & CULTURE

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The tradition of theatre in India goes back to more than 5000 years ago. Bharat Muni's Natya Shastra is the world's first and earliest book on drama. It covers almost every aspect of a drama such as production, stage design, makeup, music, dance, etc. According to Natya Shastra, Indian theatre has a divine origin and is attributed to the Natyaveda, the holy book created by Lord Brahma.

Indian theatres reflect realities of the society as well as illustrate the divine aspects of life. Theatre in India started as a narrative form, with recitation, singing, and dancing becoming inalienable part of it. The emphasis on narrative elements made Indian theatre essentially theatrical right from the beginning. As a result, the theatre in India encompasses all the other form of literature and fine arts such as dance, music, drama, literature etc.

Classical/Sanskrit Theatre

It was the earliest form of the theatre of India. It started around the 2nd century BCE and flourished between the 1st and the 10th century CE, which was a period of relative peace in the Indian history. Hundreds of plays were performed during this phase. The most commonly performed Sanskrit plays were based on the drama composed by Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa and others. The Sanskrit dramas were full of poetic, literary, myths, and historical elements.

In ancient India, the plays were generally of two types-Lokadharmi and Natyadharmi. Lokadharmi were realistic depictions of daily life while Natyadharmi had stylized narration and symbolism.

Sanskrit Playwright and their Compositions

Ashvaghosha

- **Sariputta Prakarana:** It is one of the earliest examples of classical Sanskrit theatre.
- **Buddhacharita:** This is an epic poem on the life of Gautama Buddha.
- **Saundarananda:** It is a poem with the theme of conversion of Nanda, Buddha's half-brother.

Kalidasa

- **Abhijnanasakuntalam:** It is a beautiful tale of love and romance.
- **Malavikagnimitram:** The plot of the play revolves around the King's love interest who is a maid in the royal palace.
- **Vikramorvasiyam:** It tells the tale of a king Vikramaditya who is in love with a heavenly damsel, Urvashi.

Bhasa

Some of his famous plays are Swapanavasavadatta Madhyamavyayogam, Urubhangam, and Karnabharam among others.

Shudraka

He has composed three Sanskrit plays-Mrichchhakatika (The Little Clay Cart), Vinavasavadatta, and short one-act monologue Padmaprabhritaka.

Bhavabhuti

His famous works are Mahaviracharita, Malatimadhava and Uttararamacharita.

Harsha

He is widely believed to be the author of three Sanskrit plays-Ratnavali, Nagananda and Priyadarsika.

Vishakhadatta

Two plays, the Mudrarakshasa (narrates the story of Chandragupta Maurya's ascent to the throne) and the Devichandraguptam are composed by him.

BOOSTER**Nukkad Natak**

Street theatre or Nukkad Natak is a form of theatrical performance performed in outdoor public spaces such as shopping centres, car parks, street corners, etc. Nukkad Natak as a means to spread social awareness is very deep in Indian society.

Folk Theatre

Traditional theatre forms emerged out of the creativity of the common folk of India. These theatre forms are not based on classical or grammatical rules. There are religious festivals, fairs, gatherings, rituals, etc., almost throughout the year in different regions of India. Traditional theatre forms are presented during these occasions. They reflect the common man's social attitudes and perceptions. In this social portrayal, there is also the individual's role which is given due importance. Artists, dancers and singers produce plays based on local heroes, their popularity and traditional love stories. Folk theatre forms are found in different parts of India and some of them are given below.

Kerala**Koodiyattam**

- It is considered to be older than 2000 years and is known to be the oldest theatre form of India and the world.
- It was traditionally a part of temple rituals.
- It originated in Kerala and is based on Sanskrit theatre traditions.
- In Koodiyaattam, the Chakyars are the actors, the Nangiars recite shlokas and play female characters and Vidooshaka is a Royal clown who humorously narrates the theme of the text.



Fig: Koodiyattam

Mudiyettu

- It is celebrated in the month of Vrischikam (November-December).
- It is usually performed only in the Kali temples of Kerala.



- It depicts the triumph of goddess Bhadrakali over the asura Darika.
- It was included in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010.

Krishnattam

- It came into existence in the 17th century under the patronage of King Manavada of Calicut.
- It is a cycle of eight plays performed for eight consecutive days, depicting the story of Lord Krishna.

Theyyam

- It involves dance, mime and music.
- It exalts the beliefs of the ancient tribals and it is characterized by the colourful costume and awe-inspiring headgear.

Chakyar Koothu

- It is a kind of highly refined monologue.
- The performer in this theatre form narrates episodes from the Hindu epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata) and stories from the Puranas.

Andhara Pradesh/Telangana

Veedhi Natakam

- It is known by the name of 'Bayalata' in the Rayalseema area and 'Veedhi Bhagavatham' throughout Andhra.
- It had its origin in the 16th century and the 17th century.
- It was an improvement upon the earlier performing forms-the Yakshaganam and the Kalapam. Better theatre quality was demanded when narrative-dramatic Yakshaganam went into open out of the precincts of temples.

Burrakatha/Harikatha

- Harikatha is a storytelling play performed in villages of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- The word, 'Burra' means tambura (a musical string instrument) and 'Katha' means story.
- It includes prayers, solo drama, dance, songs, poems and jokes.

Pagati Veshalu

- It is a popular theatre form in Telangana and the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.
- It has evolved over the years as a deviation from the mainstream folk theatrical performance.
- In this theatre form, artists enact different characters by donning a costume and assuming another's role.

Karnataka

Yakshagana

- It is mainly found in Tulunadu and some parts of Malenadu regions of Karnataka and Kerala.

- It is based on mythological stories and Puranas. The most popular episodes are from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.
- It combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and unique stage techniques.

Bayalata

- It is a form of Yakshagana found in Karnataka.
- It features stories from Indian epics and the Puranas rendered as dance and drama. It also marks the end of harvest season.



Fig: Yakshagana

Tala-Maddale (Karnataka and Kerala)

- It is an ancient form of dance practiced in Southern India in the coastal Karnataka and Kerala.
- The art form is popular in Uttara Kannada, Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Shimoga districts of Karnataka and Kasaragod district of Kerala. It is a derived form of Yakshagana, a classical dance or musical form.

Buta Kola

- Buta kola is an annual ritual performance where local spirits or deities are impersonated and worshipped.
- It is similar to Theyyam of Kerala.
- It is practiced by the Tulu speaking community in the Dakshina Kannada districts in Karnataka and in Kasargod taluk of Kerala, collectively referred to as Tulu Nadu.

Krishna Parijatha

- Immensely popular in Karnataka, this folk drama narrates the story of Lord Krishna, Rukmini and Satyabhama.
- It is considered that Krishna Parijatha is a blend of the themes of the dance dramas-Yakshagana and Bayalatta.



Fig: Krishna Parijatha

Veeragase

- It is a popular theatre form prevalent in the state of Karnataka.
- It is a vigorous dance based on Hindu mythology and involves very intense energy-sapping dance movements.
- It is one of the dances demonstrated in the Dasara procession held in Mysore. It is performed mainly in the Hindu months of Shravana and Karthika during festivals.

Tamil Nadu

Therukoothu

- 'Therukoothu' is derived from the two Tamil words 'Theru' which means Street and 'koothu' that means theatre.

- It is actually a dance-theatre form performed on the streets, in front of the holy places.
- It mainly focuses on the character of Draupadi of the epic Mahabharata and the plays are performed on the stories of Ramayana at Mariamman festivals.

Jammu and Kashmir

Bhand Pather

- Prevalent in Kashmir, it is a unique combination of dance, music and acting.
- It is based on mythological stories, but it also includes contemporary social satires.
- Satire, wit and parody are used for inducing laughter and music is provided with surnai, nagaara and dhol.
- The actors of Bhand Pather mainly belong to farming community and thus the impact of their way of living and ideals are discernible in this theatre form.



Fig: Therukoothu



Fig: Bhand Pather

Bhand Jashan

- It is considered as a Kashmir folk theatre style having a combination of play and dance in a satirical way.
- It is performed by a group of 10 to 15 artists in their traditional style.

Gujarat

Bhavai (Gujarat and Rajasthan)

- This theatre form of Gujarat is also practiced in southern Rajasthan.
- The centres of this form are Kutch and Kathiawar.
- It is performed during Navratri and it is performed only by males.
- The women are only spectators.

Rajasthan

Khayal

- It is performed by the Bhawai tribe of Rajasthan.
- It is a folk play, which involves dance and dramas depicting humorous and comic characters.
- It is influenced by Parsi theatre.

Madhya Pradesh

Maach

- It is a traditional theatre form of Madhya Pradesh.
- In this theatre form songs are given prominence in between the dialogues.

Chhattisgarh

Pandavani

- This folk theatre form is popular in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh and in the neighbouring areas of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.
- It generally has a lead singer/narrator and two accompanying musicians.
- Bhīma, the second of the Pandava in the epic Mahabharata, is the hero of the story in this style.

Maharashtra

Tamasha

- This traditional folk theatre form of Maharashtra flourished in the courts of Maratha rulers of the 18th and 19th centuries.
- It evolved from the folk forms such as Gondhal, Jagran and Kirtan.
- The female actress is the chief exponent of dance movements in Tamasha and is known as Murki.

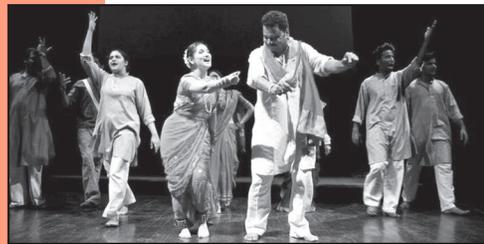


Fig: Tamasha

Powada

- Popular in Maharashtra, Powadas have their roots in the Tamasha and are ballads about Maratha historical icons, especially Chhatrapati Shivaji.
- The narratives are generally a blend of music and dance to celebrate the valour of historical figures.

Goa and Konkan Coast

Dashavatar

- It is a theatre form of the Konkan and Goa regions.
- In this theatre form, the performers personify the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu.
- Dashavatar performers wear masks of wood and papier mache.

Himachal Pradesh

Kariyila

- This is a popular folk theatre form of Himachal Pradesh, particularly in the districts of Shimla, Solan and Sirmour.
- It is an open-air theatre and is generally staged during village fairs and on some festive occasions.
- It is based mostly on social satire.

Uttarakhand

Ramman

- Ramman is a folk theatre of Garhwal region in Uttarakhand.

- It has the elements of theatre, music, historical reconstructions, and traditional oral and written tales.
- It is celebrated annually in the Baisakh month (April) in the courtyard of the Bhumiyal Devta temple, situated in Chamoli district of Garhwal, Uttarakhan.
- Ramman has been also included in the UNESCO Representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



Fig: Ramman

North India

Swang (Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Malwa region)

- It evolved in the 18th century and includes theatrics and mimicry (or nakal) accompanied by song and dialogue.
- It is dialogue-oriented rather than movement-oriented performance.
- The two important styles of Swang are from Rohtak and Haathras.
- The language used in Rohtak is Haryanvi while in Haathras it is Brajbhasha.

Nautanki (Most of the Northern India)

- It is usually associated with Uttar Pradesh.
- It was the most popular form of entertainment prevalent in these areas before the advent of cinema in India.
- The most popular centres of this traditional theatre form are Kanpur, Lucknow and Haathras.

Raasleela

- It is based exclusively on Lord Krishna's pranks and legends.
- It is a popular form of folk theatre in the regions of Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, especially during the festivals of Krishna Janmashtami and Holi.

Alha

It is popular as a song-story style form and is based on the Alha Khand poem. This is widely performed in Bundelkhand region.

Eastern India

Jatra (Assam, West Bengal and Odisha)

- Popular in Orissa and eastern Bihar, it originated in Bengal in the 15th century as a result of the Bhakti movement.
- Krishna Jatra became popular due to Bhakti saint Chaitanya's influence.
- Jatras are travelling theatre groups which perform under the open sky.
- Fairs in honour of gods, or religious rituals and ceremonies have within their framework musical plays are known as Jatra.