

A Study of Indian Thespian Folklore

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Abstract – Indian Theatre is a fusion craft form in India with a fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, religion and festival peasantry. The Folk theatre having roots in endemic culture is embedded in provincial identity and social values. Likewise providing mass entertainment, it helps Indian society as primitive tools of interpersonal, inter-group and inter-village communication for ages. Indian theatre has been used broadly in India to multiply critical social, political and cultural issues in the form of theatrical messages to create awareness among the people. As a primitive form it breaks all kinds of formal boundary of human conversation and appeals directly to the people. Realising the vital and powerfulness of the traditional medium, the First Five Year strategy projected that people in rural areas should be approached through traditional-folk forms of conversation in addition to electronic media. Different forms of Folk Theatre in India are traditional way of conversation and constitute a potential source for conveying messages for Social, Economic and Cultural Development which ultimately helps in overall National Development.

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INTRODUCTION

India, in the backdrop of its prosperous cultural context, has a longest tradition in theatre dating back to at least 5000 years. Plays in Indian Writing in English have adopted the influential trends and innovations of the European and British epic theatre adumbrated in the plays of Brecht and others. Plays in Indian Writing in English reveal a meaningful and enjoyable merger of the themes, strategies and stories of traditional Indian Drama with the modern trends in the plays of Brecht. A blend of tradition and modernity has enriched the literary content and mode of presentation. The audience relishes the innovation and gains insights into the present social values, themes and issues even as the external form and the story narrated may be in traditional clothing! Signs and symbols abound in such plays and the dialogues are crisp and reveal the inner thoughts and life of the characters vis-à-vis the society in which they live. Developing after unintelligible and Roman theatre, Sanskrit theatre, closely related to ancient rituals, is the earliest form of Indian Theatre. 'Natyashastra' in which Bharata Muni, the first and famous tragedian, codified the art of tragedian is the primal and most elaborate treatise on tragedian of the world. It gives the detailed account of Indian theatre's divine origin. Theatre in India started as a narrative form, with recitation, singing and dancing becoming its essential elements. This emphasis on narrative elements made our theatre essentially theatrical right from the inauguration. That is why the theatre in India has encompassed all the other forms of literature and fine arts into its substantial presentation: literature, mime, music, dance, 4 movement, painting, sculpture and architecture - all mixed into one and being called 'Natyashastra' or Theatre in English. Indian theatre has a solid

history of additionally two thousand years. Practically simultaneous with Aristotle's poetics, antiquated India created an comprehensive manual on theatre called Natyashastra attributed to Bharata, which turned into the premise Indian exhibitions classifications for a considerable length of time to come. This implies there as of now a rich tradition of execution practice some time before such a work showed up. The stylish hypothesis of rasa quickly yet fittingly elucidated in Natyashastra affected Indian tasteful hypothesis and practice for over a thousand years. This was the second period of the advancement of theatre in India, which depended on oral culture. This type of theatre was being performed from around 1000 AD onwards up to 1700 AD and proceeded with further till in pretty much all aspects of India. Development of this sort of theatre is connected with the switch of political set up in India just as the appearing of changed local dialects in all pieces of the nation. The established theatre depended on Natyashastra was significantly more refined in its structure and nature and absolutely urban situated. On the nation, the cultural theatre advanced out or roots and was progressively basic, quick and shut to the provincial milieu. It was amid 15-16th century that the society theatre developed commandingly in various districts. Indian people theatre can be comprehensively isolated into two general classifications religion and common offering ascend to Ritual Theatre and theatre of excitement individually. Frequently the society and tradition frames are for the most part account or vocal for example marking and recitation based Ramlila, Raslilla, Bhand and Nautanki with no muddled motion or development and components of move. India is likewise wealthy in anthem singing tradition, for example, Pubuji-ki-pukar of Rajasthan and

Nupipaalaa of Manipur. While a large portion of these showy styles have their own one of a kind structure reliant on their neighborhood traditions, they vary from each other in execution, arranging, outfits, make-up and acting style in spite of the fact that there is some expansive similitude. The south Indian structure accentuation on move structure like Kathakali and Krishnattam of Kerala and really qualify as move drama, while the north Indian structures accentuation on tunes like Khyal of Rajasthan, the Nacha of MP, the Nautanki of UP and Swang of Punjab, Jatra of Bengal, Tamasha of Maharashtra and Bhavai of Gujarat weight on discourse in their execution, the last two stress on parody and parody. After the breakdown of Sanskrit established tradition in North India in the tenth century, there was a reflowering of the of the execution tradition in South India. It was first showed in Kuttiyattam of Kerala, the main enduring performing tradition of Sanskrit drama. Kuttiyattam discovered spot in vast Vishnu sanctuaries performed in Temple Theatre called Kuttambalam. Rulers gave the support to the theatres. Afterward, in Kerala itself in the sixteenth century there created two profoundly developed structures Krishnattam, an eight-cycle play on the life of Krishna which discovered spot in expansive Krishna sanctuary of Guruvayur. Alongside this, Kathakali with its exceptionally classified execution components additionally created. Kathakali as well, discovered support from the rulers and the sanctuary. So also in Karnataka state there developed in the seventeenth century Yakshagana which performs stories from the two folklore.

The folklore of India compasses the folklore of the nation of India and the Indian subcontinent. India is an ethnically and religiously diverse country. Given this diversity, it is difficult to generalize widely about the folklore of India as a unit. Although India is a Hindu-majority country, with more than three-fourths of the population identifying themselves as Hindus, there is no single, unified, and all-pervading concept of identity present in it. It is because of the malleable nature of Hinduism which allows various heterogeneous traditions, various regional cultures and even different religions to grow and flourish. Folk religion in Hinduism may explain the rationale behind provincial religious practices, and contain provincial myths that explain the existence of provincial religious customs or the rituals. These sorts of provincial variation have a higher status in Hinduism than proportionate customs would have in religions such as Christianity or Islam. Nonetheless, folklore as currently understood goes beyond religious or supernatural beliefs and practices, and compasses the entire body of communal tradition whose chief vehicle of transmission is oral or outside institutional channels. Indian theatre is one of the most ancient forms of Asian theatre and it features a detailed textual, sculptural, and dramatic effects. Like in the areas of music and dance, the Indian theatre is also defined by the dramatic performance defined by the concept of Natya, which is a Sanskrit word for drama but encompasses dramatic narrative, virtuosic dance, and music. Indian theatre exerted influence beyond its

borders, reaching ancient China and other countries in the Far East.

The earliest form of classical theatre of India was the Sanskrit theatre which came into existence after the evolution of Greek and Roman theatres in the west. One theory characterizes this development as an offshoot of Alexander the Great's Indian conquest. The invading army staged Greek-style plays and Indians picked up the performance art. While some scholars argue that cultural Indian theatre predated it, there is recognition that classical Greek theatre has helped transformed it. With the Islamic conquests that began in the 10th and 11th centuries, theatre was discouraged or forbidden entirely. Later, in an attempt to re-assert indigenous values and ideas, village theatre was encouraged across the subcontinent, developing in a huge number of regional languages from the 15th to the 19th centuries. Modern Indian theatre developed during the period of emigrant rule under the British Empire, from the mid-19th century until the mid-20th. From the last half of the 19th century, theatres in India experienced a boost in numbers and practice. After Indian independence in 1947, theatres spread throughout India as one of the means of entertainment. As a diverse, multi-cultural nation, the theatre of India cannot be reduced to a single, homogenous trend.

In present-day India, the major competition with its theatre is that represented by growing television industry and the spread of films produced in the Indian film industry based in Mumbai known as "Bollywood". Lack of finance is another major obstacle. India has a long, rich and distinguished history of folk theatre. In ancient times, Sanskrit dramas were staged at seasonal festivals or to celebrate special events. Between the 15th and the 19th centuries, actors and dancers were given special places of distinction in the courts of several Indian kings.

Some known traditional folk theatre forms of India:-

- Koodiyattam
- Yakshagana
- Swang
- BhandPather
- AnkiyaNaatBhaona
- Tamasha
- Therukoothu
- Jatra
- Bhavai

- Karyala
- Ramman

For instance, in the 18th century, the tamasha folk theatre was patronized by the powerful Peshwas of the Maratha kingdom. The Maharajas of Travancore and Mysore also competed with each other to establish the superior talent of their drama troupes. In the absence of urban theatre in most Indian cities (with the exception of metros like Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru), folk theatre has kept the rural audiences entertained for centuries. It has also played an important part in the growth of modern theatres in different languages. Bhartendu Harishchandra, the 19th-century drama writer who is also known as the father of Hindi theatre, used to combine folk conventions with Western theatrical forms that were popular at that time. Rabindranath Tagore's plays reflect the influence of baul singers and folk theatre too.

Today, folk theatre is considered an art form that keeps the basic elements of a drama intact, while taking on the stories and flavours of the region it stems from. This very aspect makes folk theater a vibrant and vital aspect of India's intangible cultural heritage.

- One of the earliest traditional theatre forms of India, Koodiyattam follows the performative principles of the ancient tradition of Sanskrit theatre. However, it has its own distinctive characteristics that are firmly rooted in the culture of Kerala. This theatre was traditionally a part of temple rituals performed in sacred theaters, called Koothambalams. In 2001, Koodiyattam was officially recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.
- Yakshagana is a popular folk theatre form of Karnataka with a long history of nearly four hundred years. It is a unique harmony of musical tradition, eye-catching costumes, and authentic styles of dance, improvised gestures and acting, with its extemporaneous dialogue holding a wide appeal. The themes are generally derived from the mythological stories and epics. Traditionally presented from dusk to dawn, this folk theatre is predominantly seen in the coastal districts of Karnataka.
- A popular folk theatre form in Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, Swang is centered around music. In this folk theatre, religious stories and folk tales are enacted and sung by a group of a dozen or so artistes. Characterized by loud rendering of dialogues and songs (a legacy of its open air performances in the past), Swang has two important styles – one that belong to Rohtak (performed in the Bangru language) and the

other that belongs to Haathras (performed in the Brajbhasha language).

- The centuries old traditional theatre form of Kashmir, BhandPather is a unique combination of dance, music and acting. Satire, wit and parody are commonly used in this folk drama that incorporates local mythological legends and contemporary social commentary. Traditionally, the performances begin in the evening with a ritualistic dance called chhok. The play unfolds gradually after this and ends in the early hours of the morning. Interestingly, the performers or bhandas dance to the tune of specific instruments like the mukam, swarnai, dhol and nagara.
- Bhaona is a presentation of the AnkiyaNaat, a one-act play that has its roots in rural Assam. A creation of Srimanta Sankardeva (an Assamese saint-scholar), these plays were written in Brajavali, a unique Assamese-Maithili mixed language, and are primarily centered on Hindu deity, Krishna. The dialogues, costumes, ornaments, entry and foot movements of bhaona are unique and set this theatre form apart from others in India.
- A traditional folk theatre form of Maharashtra, Tamasha flourished in the courts of Maratha rulers of the 18th and 19th centuries and attained its artistic peak during the reign of Bajirao II. It has evolved from the folk forms such as gondhal, jagran and kirtan. Unlike other theatre forms, in tamasha, the female actress is the lead performer and the chief exponent of dance in the play. Classical music, the lightning fast footwork of the lavani dance, and vivid gestures of the performers gives this folk theatre a distinctive character.
- A unique form of rural entertainment in Tamil Nadu, The rukoothu literally means street theatre. Some influence of classical Sanskrit drama on it is apparent. Performed in the open, mostly during temple festivals in villages, this theatre primarily draws from mythological stories and epics. The performance includes lively dances and songs sung in a high pitch by the male actors (even the female roles are played by males) who wear wide colorful costumes, sparkling shoulder plates, elaborate head-dresses and thick bright make-up.
- The Jatra, also popular in Orissa and eastern Bihar, originated in Bengal in the 15th century as a result of the Bhakti movement – it was initially known as Krishna jatra due to Chaitanya's (spiritual founder of Gaudiya Vaishnavism) influence. Over the years, the

jatra repertoire swelled with love stories and socio-political themes. While initially this theatre was primarily musical, today, jatra performances consists mainly of action-packed dialogues with few songs.

- Bhavai is the traditional theatre form of the Kutch and Katiawar region of Gujarat. Subtle social criticism laced with humour is the speciality of this theatre that also uses instruments like the bhungal, pakhaawaj, rabaab, sarangi and manjeera. This folk theatre is as much a dramatic form of entertainment as it is a kind of ritual offering made to the Hindu goddess, Amba. The genesis of bhavai is traced back to a 14th century Brahmin priest, AsaitaThakar, who is believed to have written as many as 360 bhavai performances out of which only 60 survive today.
- A traditional folk theatre form of Himachal Pradesh, Karyala is normally performed around the Dussehra festival, i.e. in October-November. With local variants all over Himachal Pradesh (banthada in Mandi, budechhu in Sirmaur and bhagtu in Kangra), karyala generally derives its theme from the daily life and concerns of the villagers. The open-air performance is prefaced by virtuoso drumming, uses minimal props and often incorporates dance and comic acts.
- Rammanis a ritual theatre that is a part of a religious festival in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. Every year in late April, the twin villages of Saloor-Dungra in the state of Uttarakhand (northern India) celebrate a religious festival in honour of the village deity, BhumiyalDevta. An eponymous art form unique to these villages (it is neither replicated nor performed anywhere else in the country), ramman is made up of highly complex rituals that involve the recitation of a version of the epic Ramayana and various legends. This is also accompanied by the performance of local songs and masked dances.

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