



Revisiting Indian Folk Theatres: Cultural Heritage, Tradition and Curriculum Integration

Dr. Suryakant N. Parkale

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Changu Kana Thakur Arts Commerce and Science College
New Panvel, (Empowered Autonomous), Dist Raigad-4102026, Email: cktsuryakantparkale@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Folk Theatres preserve the cultural heritage and history of India. It has promotes the human values and foster Indian philosophical perspectives. Historically, multiple theatres have been originated based on ancient traditions and also played multifaceted role to promote Indian value system. Nowadays, due to the technological advancements in India, this traditionally rich heritage has not been much studied as part of curricula. The present research paper revisits the ancient theatrical traditions and reasserts their significance in preserving Indian culture, traditions and heritage. It also advocates the inclusion of *Folk Theatre* studies in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. So that, learner will become acquainted with the existing knowledge domain to understand the pivotal role of theatres. This paper studies representative folk theatre traditions of India as an amalgamation of diverse fabric of India.

1. Theatres of Northern India

- **Bhand Pather:**

A Kashmiri theatre from which integrates music, dance, and acting supported by instruments like Surnai, Nagara and Dhol. This theatre exposes the life patterns of Rishis (Sufi sages) and illustrates its secular character and innovative nature. It has setting mainly of village spaces in the open air and aimed to preserve

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the culture and unity of Kashmiri community. It is also used as tool of social awareness through entertainment.

- **Swang or Sang:**

An enchanting folk dance theatre form, from Rajasthan, Haryana, U.P. and the Malwa Region of M.P. It is one of India's oldest folk theatre traditions, combining the diverse cultural fabric of these regions. It has two distinctive styles: Rohtak, Hathras. It also goes beyond the regional aspects. Both Nautanki and Tamasha have drawn inspiration from its roots.

- **Nautanki**

Related to the cultural tapestry of U.P., it flourishes as a traditional theatre form. It shows vibrant expressions of prominent centres like Kanpur, Lucknow and Hathras. The verses of Nautanki are crafted in metres such as: Doha, Choubola and Behar-e-Tabeel. Nautanki has evolved with the active participation of women. Gulab Bai of Kanpur was a major contributor here.

- **Ras Leela:**

An exclusive theatrical tradition of U.P. revolving around the timeless legends of Lord Krishna. The plays include prose dialogues with melodious songs and vivid scenes portraying the playfulness of Lord Krishna.

- **Maach:**

A traditional theatre form in Madhya Pradesh. This theatre has enhanced the theatrical tradition of India.

- **Ram Leela:**

It is a type of theatre in U.P., performed during Dussehra. This theatre celebrated the victory of Lord Rama over of Ravana, whose life stands for evil forces of the society. Dance, Music, Abhinaya and Poetry are inseparable parts of this theatrical form. Religious beliefs and idealized life patterns of Lord Rama have been chief concerns of Ram Leela, a theatrical form.

- **Kariyala:**

In Himachal Pradesh, this theatre got developed particularly popular in Shimla, Solan and Sirmour districts. It's an open-air folk theatre known as a tool of entertainment and satire. It also addresses social issues and evils. This theatre is distinctive so far as folk theatre tradition is concerned.



- **Ankianat**

One-act play developed in Assam state which includes musical instruments, singers, dance forms and costumes.

- **Oja-Pali:**

In theatre originated in Assam, evolved from Kathakata tradition. It is a traditional folk dance drama originated from performing groups includes four or five actors (Palis) who contribute to the performance.

- **Jatra:**

This type of theatrical form combines musical play, performed in villages at fairs in honour of Gods, religious rituals and ceremonies. It took root and flourished in Bengal. Jatra gained popularity as it included love stories.

- **Bidesia:**

The folk theatre of Bihar, it communicates the story of a man leaving his village and family in search of employment. This folk theatre was founded by B. Thakur. Initially, this theatre included Bhojpuri folk songs. Significantly, this theatre has presented the reality of rural life.

- **Prahlad Natak:**

Originated in Ganjam district of Orissa. It is a type of folk theatre focused on different myths and Lord Vishnu's Avatars.

- **Suanga:**

A musical folk theatre prevalent in coastal Orissa, showcasing the rich cultural heritage.

2. Theatres of Southern India

- **Dashavatar:**

A theatrical expression in the Konkan and Goa regions. In this art form, performers embody the Ten Avatars of Lord Vishnu.

- **Krishnattam**



A folk theatre of Kerala connected with the episodes of Lord Krishna. It includes the chronicles of Lord Krishna's birth, childhood and victories against evil.

- **Mudiyettu**

A traditional theatre form of Kerala. This type of theatre is performed as an offering to Goddess Bhadrakali.

- **Theyyam**

A popular folk theatre from Kerala. This theatre is known for its colourful costumes.

- **Koodiyattam**

One of the oldest traditional theatre forms of Kerala. It emphasizes gestures and eye movements.

- **Yakshagana**

One of the important folk theatres of Karnataka. It draws inspiration from mythological stories and the Puranas. In addition to that, this theatre uses episodes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

- **Theru Koothu:**

Means Street Play. It is Tamil Nadu's most popular form of folk drama. This play is performed during annual temple festivals to ensure a rich harvest.

- **Hari Katha:**

This type of theatre includes a storytelling technique in the villages of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It involves one performer and two co-performers. It includes: Prayers, Solo, drama, Dance, Songs, Poems, Jokes covering topics from Hindu mythological stories.

- **Veedhi Natakam:**

One of the street plays and Andhra Pradesh's most popular theatrical folk form performed in open spaces and enacted by Bhagatas.

3. Theatrical Traditions of Western India.

- **Bhavai:**

A traditional theatre from Gujarat embedded in the regions of Kachchh and Kathiawar.



- **Tamasha**

A traditional folk theatre form that originated in Maharashtra. It has undergone an evolutionary journey from folk traditions like Gondhal, Jagran and Kirtan. Tamasha places the female actress, known as Murali. It also includes classical music and vivid gestures. Tamasha provides a dynamic canvas for portraying a spectrum of emotions through dance.

These theatrical forms have been nurturing the traditional value system, deeply rooted in community as well as village life. Higher Education and NEP 2020 policy give emphasis on Indian Knowledge System and its instrumental role in preserving the cultural heritage, rich oral traditions and social values. On this line, this paper asserts the pivotal role of folk theatres for offering the solid foundation to the later theatrical development and also providing living repository to intellectuals, researchers and scholars in academia. It is true that due to urbanization, growing industrialization, different tools of digital entertainment folk theatres has not been much studied and even audiences outlook got changed due to modern media influences.

Conclusion;

The present paper advocates the study of these theatrical forms and their integration of in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate curricula under IKS. So that, learners will understand different forms of theaters practiced since ancient era in the different states of India. The integration of these forms can boost their moral reasoning, problem solving abilities, communication skills, and empathy and unfold different research avenues and above all that connects them to Indian philosophy and knowledge systems.

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