



INTACH

TRADITIONAL THEATRE FORMS

JATRA



Jatra originated from the Sanskrit word Yatra which means procession or journey; is popular folk theatre of rural Bengal. As a composite art form or as a theatre of mixed means – song and dance, acting, and recitation –Jatra is known to be a combination of multiple performative forms of other Odia folk theatre and Bengali theatre arts that emerged in different times and has emerged as the most popular form of entertainment in rural Bengal and Odisha. The synthesis of syncretic popular religious practices and literature of the elite and non-elite classes, several dominant forms of Jatra emerged and eventually got shaped into a separate dramatic activity.

It is spread throughout most of Odia, Bengali speaking areas of the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh and Indian states of Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Tripura.

The traditional form of Jatra has undergone substantial amount of changes in its rise and development brought about by colonialism, modernism and altogether developing a tradition of its own. Jatra throughout ages has been capable of depicting a range of diverse and complex stories – mythology, secular themes, humor, valour of heroic characters and melodramatic events.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE JATRA TRADITION...

The origin of Jatra- intrinsically a musical theatre form, can be traced to the rise of Vaishnavism and the Bhakti Movement in the 16th century, pioneered by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The Krishna Jatra

has taken inspiration from the devotional singing and dancing of the followers of the Krishna Bhakti Movement- by Raslila and dramatic poetry like, Gita Govinda written by Jayadeva in the 12th century and Srikrishna Kirtan by Chandidas in the 15th century.



Depiction of Chaitnya Mahaprabhu dancing at the Rath Yatra

Religious Undertones...

The Vaishnava saint Chaitanya, who preached the equality of man and fraternity of higher and lower castes, went into religious ecstasy as he sang and danced in the streets with the followers. The first definite instance of Jatra theatrical spectacle comes from the episode when Chaitanya himself played Rukmini in the performance of Rukmini Haran ("The abduction of the Charming Rukmini") from Krishna's life story. The performance, which lasted through the night in 1507 AD has been described in *Chaitanya Bhagavata*, Chaitanya's hagiography by a disciple Vrindavana Dasa Thakura. Though the exact origin of Jatra form cannot be recited as it is till speculated but mostly it has been traced from the medieval centuries. Though there are evidences of existence of a form of singing called the 'Carya', which was popular between the 9th and the 12th centuries in Bengal, which existed in Orissa simultaneously as the popular 'Carya Padas' form.

Did You Know...?

Jatra performances resemble
The Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh
The Tamasha of Maharashtra
The Bhavai of Gujarat.



CHANGED ALITERATION...

Though Jatra's birthplace and origin lies in the religious milieu, replete with various Bhakti movements of Hinduism, by the end of the 19th century it was replaced by morally didactic content, and eventually became secular, when it gained entry into urban proscenium theatres during Bengal Renaissance. The survival of the form over such a vast period of rapidly changing social milieu, while catering to a heterogeneous audience, has been credited to its innate malleability and ways of adapting to changing social dynamics, and thus staying not just relevant and alive, but also thriving in the pro modern world.

Tributaries that flowed into the Jatra form and enhanced it:

Jhumur (duet songs with a bit of dance and dialogue), Panchali (a performance by a single actor-singer), Kathakata (one actor singing a religious story), Kirtan (devotional singing), and Kabigan (recitation).

Performances in Jatra...

Generally the Jatra is performed on a simple stage without any raised platform, or curtains and surrounded by spectators.

Their costumes are dazzling with their swords blazing in sequence and the words of songs boom with the use of cymbals providing musical undertones.

The actual Jatra performance is preceded by some preliminaries as in the case of other theatre forms.

The Jatra dramas generally follows the trend of beginning the performance with the climax scenes.

Use of Ragas: Syama Kalyana, Bihag, Purvi amongst others are the most commonly used.

Musical Instruments: Dholak, Mandira, Karatal and Khol.

Themes: 19th century saw the inclusion of historical romances, love themes erotic stories, mythological heroes, saints, legendary robbers and also social reformers and champions of justice and truth.

20th century, in the wake of growing nationalism saw patriotic undertones in their dramas. In mythological stories, the fight between Evil and Good actually symbolized the Indian masses and the British Empire.

Some of the famous theatrical performances:

- Samrat Zahandarshah ("The Emperor Zahandarshah")
- Bargi Elo Deshe ("The Maratha Invasion of Bengal")
- Neel Kuthi ("The Oppression of Indigo Planters")
- Ramabhishek ("King Rama's Coronation")

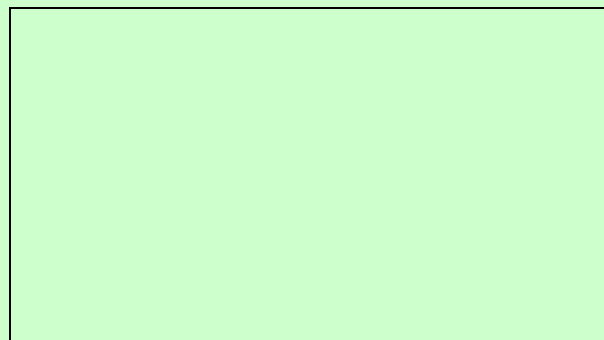


ACTIVITY TO DO...

1. Can you name some Jatra performances based on Indian Independence Movement?

2. Many such traditional theatrical forms are on the verge of extinction or are almost vanished. Name any three of them and mention ways to conserve and preserve them.

3. Draw a mythological Jatra performance as shown below and narrate the story in your family.



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