

Folk Dances and Folk Theatre of Rajasthan

Folk Dance

Rajasthan has been a colourful land of various arts including dances, hence the sobriquet Rangeela Rajasthan. The uncomplicated movement of the body in harmony with the rhythm of some tune or a song is called folk dance.

Unlike classical dance, folk dance does not follow strict rhythm or beat. These folk dances of the common folk are the artistic expression of their lives. The tradition of folk dance has continued for centuries which is in tune with colorful costumes and area-specific traditions on occasions of folk festivals, fairs, local rituals etc.

The folk dances are influenced by geographical locations, social customs etc. The famous connoisseur of art and the founder of Lok Kala Mandal of Udaipur, Devi Lal Samar, has divided the folk dances of Rajasthan in three types on the basis of the geographical features of the regions of their prevalence – hilly, Rajasthani, and dances of eastern plains (purvi maidani).

Some folk dances have become the identity of specific regions of Rajasthan. These have been discussed below :

Gair Dance

Gair is the famous folk dance of Mewar and Barmer region. Men with wooden sticks in their hands dance in circles on the occasion of Holi. As this dance is performed in circles, it is called “gair” and the dancers are called ‘gairiye’. The basic structure of gair dance of Mewar and Barmer is same. The difference is in the movement and the process of the formation of groups. The main instruments used are dhol, bankiya and thali.

Gindar Dance

This famous dance of Shekhawati region continues for a week during days of

Holi. Men dance to the beats of the nagada and with every beat of nagada, the men strike their sticks. This dance is purely for men. The instruments used in this dance are dhol, tambourine, and chang. Songs related to Holi are also sung. Some men dress as women and participate in this dance and are called gangaur. The men wear a variety of disguises like saint, hunter, seth-sethani, bride groom, sardar, pathan, priest, magician, etc.

Kachhi Ghodi Dance

This is the commercial folk dance of the regions of Shekhawati and Kuchaman, Parbatsar, Deedwana etc. This dance is performed on the occasion of marriages. The instruments used are dhol or drum and thali. The dancer dresses up like a warrior and dances with a sword in his hand, mounted on a horse made of wood and cloth.

Chang Dance

This dance is performed by men during the festival of Holi in Shekhawati region. In this dance, every man dances in a circle playing chang. Then they gather in the middle of the circle and sing songs of merriment and Holi.

Dandiya Dance

This is the famous dance of Marwar which is performed after Holi. A group of 20-25 men dance in a circle with dandiya in their hands. The singers and the nagada and shehnai players sit in the middle square of the field. Men sing lok-khayal and Holi songs in laya or rhythm. These songs are primarily in praise of Bhaironji of Badhali. The dresses worn by the dancers are of kings, saints, Shiv, Ramchandra, Krishna, queens, Sita etc. The guise of the king resembles that of the ancient rulers of Marwar.

Agni Dance

The famous Agni dance of Jasanathi cult originated in Katriyasar village of Bikaner. The disciples of the dancers of Jasanathi sect are the people of Jat siddh tribe. Only men take part in this dance. The pile of embers is called 'Dhuna'. The dancers dance in front of their gurus and while chanting 'fatefate' they step onto the 'Dhuna'. The dancers use the embers and present everyday actions such as ploughing the field, cracking water melon etc. artistically. The blend of fire with raag and faag (songs sung during Holi) is rare and unique feature of this dance.

Ghudla

Ghudla is the famous folk dance of Jodhpur. This dance is performed only by women. In this dance, women carry perforated pots on their heads with burning lamps inside. This pot is called ghudla.

Dhol Dance

Dhol dance is a famous folk dance of Jalore. This dance is performed by the men of Dholi and Bhil castes on the occasion of weddings. Former Chief Minister Mr. Jayanarayan Vyas helped these professional dancers to earn recognition and acclaim. In this dance 4-5 drums are played simultaneously. The drummer starts playing the dhol in 'thaakna' style. Once 'thaakna' stops, the men, some with swords in their mouth, some with sticks in their hands, some with handkerchiefs around their arms start dancing to a rhythm.

Bum Dance

This is a famous folk dance of Bharatpur and Alwar region. This dance is performed by men to celebrate coming of the new harvest in the month of Fagun. In this dance, a big nagada called bum is played while standing with two thick sticks. Along with nagada, the other instruments like thali, chimta, dholak, etc are used.

Ghoomar

Famous as the dance of the Rajasthan state, Ghoomar is a popular dance performed by women on auspicious occasions, festivals etc. The circumference of the lehenga which spreads in a circular form is called 'ghumm'. The instruments used are dhol, nagada, clarinet, etc. The repeated spin in this dance along with flexible hand movements make the dance impressive.

Garba

Gujarat and Rajasthan's cultural fusion can be seen in Garba. This dance is very popular in Dungarpur and Banswara. This is performed during Navratri in worship of goddess Durga. This dance is performed in three styles. The first style is worship of power. Women place a perforated earthen pot with a lamp burning in side, on their head and dance moving in circles. The second form of Garba takes the form of presentation of the love of Radha-Krishna, Gopas and Gopis. In the third form, themes depicting the beauty of the folk life are presented, such as women fetching water, the emotions of a newlywed bride, women busy with household chores, etc.

Valar Dance

This dance performed by men and women is a famous dance of Garasiya tribe of the Sirohi region. No instrument is used in this slow-paced dance. This dance is performed in semi circles. It has two semi circles with women form the inner while the men form the outer circle. The dance starts by a man holding an umbrella or a sword in his hand.

Bhawai Dance

Among the commercial folk dances of Rajasthan, 'Bhawai' is very famous for its extraordinary lithe body movements, exceptional body balance and variations of rhythm. Some of its specialities are creating a lotus flower by flashing colourful turbans in the air, dance with 7-8 earthen pots on the head, picking up a handkerchief lying on the floor with lips, dancing on the edges of glass and plates, and dancing on the edges of swords and pieces of glass. In Udaipur region, this dance is performed in many names and themes – Shankarya, Surdas, Boti, Dhokri, Bikaji and Dhola-Maru. The famous artistes of this dance form are Roop Singh Shekhawat, Dayaram and Tara Sharma. Only trained dancers can perform this dance.

Terah Taali Dance

Kamad caste sing the glory of Baba Ramdev ji through this Tera taali dance. Kamad women present this song in festivals and fairs. The men play tanpura, cymbals and chautara. This dance is performed with 13 cymbals (manjira) tied on various parts of the body – nine cymbals on the right leg, one on each arm above the elbow, and one held in each hand. A beautiful sound is created by hitting the cymbals on the various parts of the body with the cymbals in the hands. Mangi bai and Lakshman Das are the prominent dancers of this dance form.

Do you Know?

In 2010, UNESCO included Kalbeliya dance form in its intangible heritage list. The famous dancer of this dance type, Gulabo, brought fame to this dance in India and abroad.

Among other dances Neja , Ramani, War dance, Hathimana, Ghoomra, etc. are the dances of the Bheel tribes. Ghoomar, Gaur, Jawara, Moriya, Loor, Kood, Mandal, etc. are the dances performed by the Garasiya tribe. Indoni, Panihari, Bagadiya, Shankariya, Chakri, etc. are the dances of the Kalbeliyas. Chari and Jhoomar dances are performed by the Gurjars and the fish dance is performed by the Banjaras. Chakri, Dhakad etc. are the dances of the Kanjars. Hunting dance is the folk dance of the Sehariya tribe. Mavliya is Kathaudi tribe's dance.

Folk Theatre

The tradition of the folk theatre is very old. The themes for the theatre are picked from the stories, dialogues, and songs already popular among the people and are in tune with their concerns. These dramas are performed for the entertainment of the common man by the common man. In present times, apart from picking up themes from historical, mythological, and other subjects of the folklore, the folk

theatre also makes political, administrative, economic and other current issues of concerned public its subject.

The folk dramas of Rajasthan are kaleidoscopic and have taken varied forms. In the hilly regions of the Aravali, one gets to see a glimpse of the vibrant culture of Bheels, Meenas, Banjaras, Sehariyas, and Garasiyas. Their natural environment, their belief in gods and goddesses and their zest for life fill their dances, dramas, and colourful attires with fulness and colour.

In the desert regions of Rajasthan, the hard-working people are entertained by professional castes like Nat, Mirasi and Bhat. Their conversations primarily are satirical and humorous.

In the folk dramas of Alwar and Bharatpur region, one can witness the blending of folk cultures of Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. On the folk theatre of Dholpur and Sawai Madhopur, influence of the Braj culture is clearly visible. Folk dramas prevalent in Rajasthan are as follows :

Khyal

Khyal has been counted among the folk dramas of Rajasthan right from the beginning of 18th century. The themes of the khyals are generally related to mythologies and sagas of valour which contain some historical elements too. Due to geographical variations, these khyals adopted different forms. Some of the important khyal forms are as follows-

(1) Kuchamani Khyal

Kuchamani khyal was started by the famous folk dramatist Lachhi Ram. He fused his style into the tradition of khyals. Chand Nilgiri, Rao Ridamal and Meera Mangal are the main khyals created by Lachhi Ram. Ugam Raj is also one of the main artistes of the Kuchamani khyal. The features of this style are as follows :

- (a) Its form is like an opera.
- (b) Predominance of folk songs.
- (c) Performed in an open theatre.
- (d) The female characters are played by men
- (e) In this khyal, players of dhol, sarangi, clarinet, and dholak are the main accompanists.
- (f) The language is very simple and the subjects are based on social humour.

(2) Shekhawati khyal

The most prominent artiste of this style is Nanu Ram of Chirawa. The main khyals among his self-composed khyals are Heer Ranjha, Harichand, Bhartrihari, Jaydev Kalali, Dhola Marwan and Alha Dev. The main features of this folk drama style are-

- (a) Impressive foot-movement.
- (b) Simple language and simple postures.
- (c) Primarily harmonium, sarangi, clarinet, flute, nakkara, and dholak are the accompanying instruments.

Khyals of Duliya Rana, a disciple of Nanu Ram are very famous. Lyrical dialogues make his khyals literary and suitable for theatre. Only the family members of Duliya Rana have been bearing the expenses incurred in maintaining these khyals.

(3) Jaipuri Khyal

The artistes of Gunijankhana take part in Jaipuri khyal. There are certain features of this khyal which make it different from other khyals. These are :

- (a) The role of female characters is played by women
- (b) This khyal is not rigid, that is why there is a lot of scope of for experimentation.
- (c) This khyal is a beautiful fusion of contemporary news, poetry, music, songs and dance.
- (d) Some popular khyals of this style are Jogi-Jogan, Kan-Goojri, Miyan-Biboo, Pathan, Raseeli Tambolan etc.

(4) Hela Khyal

Hela khyal is a folk theatre of Dausa, Lalsot and Sawai Madhopur regions. The key motivator of this khyal was a poet called Hela. Bum (badaa nagaadaa) is used to mark the beginning of this khyal. Kettledrum (naubat) is another instrument that is played. One of the special features of this khyal is the artistes giving out a long and loud cry (Hela Dena).

(5) Kanhaiya Khyal

Kanhaiya khyal is the famous folk drama of Karauli, Sawai Madhopur, Dhaulpur, Bharatpur, and Dausa regions. The main story told in this khyal is called 'Kahan' and the main character is called 'Mediya.'

(6) Turra Kalangi Khyal

Mewar saints Shah Ali and Tukangir founded the Turra Kalangi Khyal 400 years ago. Turra is a symbol for Shiv and Kalangi of Parvati. Tukangeer represented the Turra party whereas Shah Ali represented the Kalangi party. Their poetry compositions, which were known as 'Dangal', were the vehicle to communicate their ideas of Shiva-Shakti to the people. Their dialogues are called 'Bol' and they are poetic. The very first khyal which was played with in this style (Turra Kalangi) was called 'The Khyal of Turra Kalangi'. It is non-commercial. In it, 20 feet high theatre is built and its decoration is done completely in Rajasthani style. In this folk theatre there is always a chance for the audience to participate in the performance. Chang is also played in this drama.

The main centres of this khyal are Ghosoonda, Chittor, Nimbaheda and Nimach (Madhya Pradesh). Prominent artistes of this Khyal are Soni Jaydayal, Chetram, Hameed Beg, Tarachand, and Thakur Onkar Singh.

Gavri

'Gavri' of Bhils of Mewar is unique in its instrumental music, dialogues and presentation of the folk-culture of Mewar. There are dance dramas based on the mythological stories, folklores and folk life. Gavri is a religious folk drama based on the story of Shiv-Bhasmasur.

On the second day of the festival of Raksha Bandhan, on Bhadva Krishna Pratipada (sixth month of the Hindu calendar), Bhopa takes the permission of Kheda Devi to present Gavri. After this, the dresses of the characters are made. Characters bow down in the temples and invoke lakhs of gods and goddesses, 64 Yoginis and 52 Bherus. Gavri is played for 45 days. During this period alcohol, mea, and green vegetables are prohibited. The village from where Gavri starts, bears its expenses.

The chief character of Gavri, Boodia and prayers are sung in his respect. 'Raiyan' in the form of a female is the symbol of Parvati and Vishnu. Jhamatya recites the poem in the local dialect. Kutkadiya acts as a facilitator by repeating it. 'Budiya' complements Kutkadiya in his dialogues. The other characters are called 'Khela'. In Gavri there are only male characters. The 'acts' played are Ganpati, Bhamariya, Bheawad, Meena, Kaan-Goojari, Jogi, Khadliya Bhoot, Lakha Banjara, Natadi and Maata and Sher.

Rammat

On the occasion of Holi, Rammat has a special place among the various kinds of popular folk-entertainment of Rajasthan. The main centres, where Rammat is organised are Jaisalmer, Phalodi and Bikaner. The poetic works composed on the

famous folk heroes and great personalities of Rajasthan are enacted on the stage. Maniram Vyas, Tulsiram, Phagu Maharaj, Sua Maharaj, Tej Kavi (Jaisalmer) are the prominent writers of Rammat. Tej Kavi Jaisalmeri started the coliseum of Rammat under the banner of Sri Krishna Company. In 1943, he wrote 'swatantra bavani' and presented it to Gandhiji.

One of the notable features of Rammat is its literary quality. In these times of professionalism Rammat still remains a popular form of folk drama. The stage for Rammat is set in an open colony or mandi (a courtyard of the market). A throne is made with a canopy on big wooden planks for king and queen to sit.

The spectators sit around the main stage and on the stage, in a corner, sit the players of the nagada, tabla, jhanjh, pair of tongs, tandoora, dholak and harmonium. The characters exhibit their talent by dancing to the lyrics of 'teriye'.

The more famous Rammats of Bikaner are – Rammat of Amar Singh Rathore of Acharyon ki Chowk, Bisson ke Chauk ke Chaubel Nautanki ki Rammat, Kikani Vyason ke Chowk ki Rammat.

Tamasha

Tamasha is the famous folk theatre of Jaipur. It started during the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh. Bhatt family traditionally does public staging of Tamasha even today. Phool Ji Bhatt, Gopi Kishan Bhatt and Vasudev Bhatt have kept alive this tradition of Tamasha. Gopichand and Heer Raanjha are the main Tamashas. Tamasha is played on an open stage, which is called 'akhada'. Music, dance and song predominate in a Tamasha performance.

Swaang

Swaang means to dress up and do makeup to present oneself like a particular historical, mythological or famous character or like a goddess or a god. Swaang is more popular in villages. Its artist is called 'behrupiya'(impersonator). The most famous artiste of this almost extinct art is Parshuram of Kelwa. One famous artiste Janki Lal Bhand (Bhilwara) has represented Rajasthan in the Bharat Utsavs.

Do you know?

The Swaang, which is played as an imitation of bride and groom by the females of the groom's side, when the groom's procession leaves for the bride's house, is called tuntiya, tuntki or khodya. In this swaang, one woman plays the groom and the other the bride and a sham marriage ceremony is performed. The only objective behind performing this act is to keep both bride and groom safe from mental and physical suffering.

Leela Natya

Leela Natya holds an important place among the Rajasthani folk theatres. Apart from Ramleela and Raslila, there are other forms of lilas which are prevalent, such as Ravlon ki Ramat, Samaya, Gavri, Lila of Sankadikas, Gor lilas of Garasiyas. The childhood and adolescence acts of lord Krishna are presented in Raslilas. There are many troupes of raslila in Phulera, Jaipur, Asalpur, Hardauna, Gunda etc. The primary purpose of Ramlila is the live depiction of the tale of Lord Ram's life. In its presentation, Bharatpur, Patuda and Bisau have their own separate identity. The main objective of the Ramlila is to present various episodes of Ram's life. Dance, songs and various instruments are used in this style.

Gor organised by Garasiyas on the fourteenth day of Vaishakh (the second month of the Hindu Calender) shukl paksha (moon lit half of the month) is known as bhakhyor ki gangaur. On this occasion, the Garasiya women dance with the wooden images of Gor and Hansar on their heads. In the middle of them, the male displays swordplay with a mask.

Lilas of the Sankadikas are very popular in Rajasthan. The main areas of these lilas are Ghosunda and Bassi. In Ghosunda, the lila of Radha-Krishan and other raslilas are organized. The faces of incarnations are covered with various types of masks. In Bassi, the tableaux of Brahma, Ganesh, Kalika, Hiranyakashyap and Nrisingh Avatar are also put on a show.

Nautanki

Nautanki is popular in Dholpur, Karauli, Alwar, Gangapur, Bharatpur and Sawai Madhopur. The important plays of nautanki are - Roop Basant, Nakabposh, Satyavadi Harishchandra, Raja Bhartrahari etc. These are mostly organised on the occasion of marriage, social functions, fairs, and public festivities (lokotsavas).

Chaar Baint

This is a famous folk drama of Tonk. This is played in the form of music-contest (sangit dangal). This was started by Karim Khan Nihang during the reign of Nawab Faizulla Khan of Tonk. In this, the singer, while standing on his knees plays his tambourine and conveys his talk through singing.

Exercise

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Gindar dance is associated with which region ?
(a) Mewar (b) Marwar
(c) Shekhawati (d) Barmer
2. With which occasion is the Kacchi Ghodi dance associated ?
(a) Holi (b) Vivah
(c) Teej (d) Navratra
3. Dhol dance is associated with which district?
(a) Jalore (b) Sikar
(c) Jaipur (d) Pratapgarh
4. Lacchiram is related to which folk drama ?
(a) Shekhawati khayal (b) Kuchamani khayal
(c) Jaipuri khayal (d) Hela khayal
5. Chaar Baint is the famous folk drama of-
(a) Dausa (b) Tonk
(c) Jaisalmer (d) Kota

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. What do you understand by 'Swaang'?
2. During whose reign folk drama 'tamasha' started?
3. Who presented a copy of swatantra baavni to Gandhiji?
4. Hela khayal is the famous folk drama of which region?
5. Who is the folk deity worshipped in Terahtaali dance?
6. Which musical instruments are used in Gair dance?
7. Agni dance belongs to which cult?
8. Name the important artists of Bhawai dance.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. Write a note on Ghoomar dance.
2. Describe different physical moves manifested during Bhawai dance.
3. Write a short note on folk drama Chaar Baint.
4. Nautanki/gimmick is popular in which region of Rajasthan? It is organised on which occasion?

Essay Type Questions

1. Write a detailed note on various folk dances of Rajasthan.
2. While describing khayal natya, explain its main features.
3. Describe characteristics of Lila natya/dramas.

Project Work :

1. Prepare a chart showing a table of various dances and the places and occasions associated with them.

Imagine :

1. You are an artist of the swaang folk drama, prepare a list of the swangs you will put on.