

# Folk Dances of Gujarat, Name List, History, Cultural Importance

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Folk Dances of Gujarat reflect its religious beliefs, community life, occupational practices, tribal diversity and regional history. They demonstrate how performing arts are closely connected with festivals, livelihoods, community identity and local cultural traditions.

## List of Major Folk Dances of Gujarat

The major folk dances and related performing traditions of Gujarat include Garba, Dandiya Raas, Tippani, Siddi Dhamal, Padhar Nritya, Dangi Nritya and Mer Raas. Bhavai represents the State's important folk theatre tradition.

### Garba

Garba is Gujarat's most prominent folk dance and is closely **associated with Navratri and the worship of Shakti.**

- The dance is traditionally performed in a circle around a perforated earthen pot containing a lamp, known as the **garbha-deep**, or around an image of the **goddess Amba**.
- The circular movement symbolises continuity and the cyclical nature of life.
- It is performed through rhythmic movements, clapping and singing and has become a major form of community participation during Navratri.
- Garba of Gujarat was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2023. It became India's 15th element on the Representative List at the time of its inscription.
- UNESCO recognised Garba as a living tradition that promotes community participation, inclusiveness and social cohesion.

## Dandiya Raas

Dandiya Raas is a group dance performed with short wooden sticks called **dandiyas**.

- Dancers strike the sticks rhythmically while moving in coordinated formations.
- It is particularly associated with **Navratri celebrations**.
- It is traditionally linked to the **Raas tradition** associated with Lord Krishna.

## Bhavai

Bhavai is a traditional folk theatre form of Gujarat, rather than a pure dance form. It combines acting, music, movement, dance, satire and social commentary.

- It is traditionally associated with the worship of Amba.
- Performances are generally held in open spaces, traditionally known as Chachar.
- The Bhungal, a long brass wind instrument, is an important musical instrument associated with Bhavai.
- The Nayak traditionally leads the troupe.
- Ranglo, the comic character, provides humour and is also used for social commentary.

## Tippani Nritya

Tippani Nritya is a traditional folk dance of Gujarat, particularly associated with the Saurashtra region. It has its roots in the everyday labour practices of rural communities.

- The dance is traditionally performed by women, who use long wooden implements called tippani.
- These implements were originally used for pressing and levelling the lime or mud flooring of houses.
- During the dance, the tippani are moved and struck rhythmically, creating a coordinated performance accompanied by folk songs and music.

## Padhar Nritya

Padhar Nritya is a traditional folk dance associated with the Padhar community, which mainly lives around Nal Sarovar in the Bhal region of Gujarat.

- The Padhar community has a close association with fishing and the wetland environment of Nal Sarovar, which have traditionally been important to its livelihood.
- The community has a rich tradition of singing and dancing, including Garba and Dandtaras.
- The Padhar folk dance tradition has also been presented at national cultural events, including Republic Day folk-dance festivals.
- The Halesa dance is another traditional dance associated with the Padhar tribe and is performed by both men and women during festivals such as Navratri and Janmashtami.

## Siddi Dhamal

Siddi Dhamal is a traditional folk dance of the Siddi community of Gujarat, particularly associated with the Saurashtra-Gir region.

- The Siddi community is of African origin and has developed a distinct cultural identity in Gujarat.
- Dhamal is performed exclusively by men and is accompanied by percussion instruments.
- The dance is performed during religious and community occasions and is also showcased at cultural festivals.
- It represents the unique Afro-Gujarati cultural heritage of the **Siddi community**.

## Dangi Nritya

Dangi Nritya is a traditional folk dance associated with the Dangi tribal communities of the Dang region in southern Gujarat.

- It is performed as part of the community's traditional cultural and festive celebrations.
- The dance reflects the collective cultural identity and tribal heritage of the Dangs, a predominantly tribal and forested region of Gujarat.
- Dangi dance has also been showcased at national cultural programmes as part of Gujarat's folk traditions.

## Mer Raas

Mer Raas is a traditional folk dance associated with the Mer community of the Saurashtra region, particularly the Porbandar area of Gujarat.

- It has a distinctive martial character, with energetic movements reflecting the community's warrior traditions.
- The dance preserves elements of martial culture, physical strength and community identity through folk performance.
- It is an example of how Gujarat's folk traditions are shaped not only by religious festivals but also by the historical and social traditions of particular communities.

## Hudo Dance

Hudo is a traditional folk dance of Gujarat associated with the Bharwad pastoral community.

- The dance is traditionally believed to have been inspired by fights between sheep, reflecting the close relationship between pastoral communities and their livestock.

- Its movements imitate two sheep butting heads, while dancers clap their hands rhythmically.
- The performance is accompanied by traditional instruments such as the dhol, dholak, flute and manjira.
- It is performed by both men and women and forms part of the community's social and cultural traditions.
- Traditionally, the dance also provided an opportunity for young men and women to meet and choose a life partner.

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