

Performing Arts, Music, Dances, Drama, Puppetry

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The performing arts is an umbrella term encompassing various artistic disciplines, including music, dance, and drama, all performed to an audience. **Music**, a universal art, is often integral to other forms and reflects diverse contexts - sacred, classical, or popular. **Dance**, a complex yet ordered expression, usually conveys sentiments or illustrates specific events. Traditional **theatre**, combining acting, singing, dance, and music, transcends mere performance, playing crucial societal and cultural roles.

These art forms have not only entertained and captivated audiences but have also served as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural values, stories, and traditions across generations.

Historical Patronage of Performing Arts in India

As civilizations developed, rulers and religious centres provided sustenance to the performing arts. They hosted and employed performers, invited artists from other regions, and facilitated a meaningful cross-cultural exchange. This support encouraged artists to learn, teach, and experiment with their chosen art forms.

- **Vedic Period:** The Rigveda contains hymns that were likely sung during religious rituals. This period also saw the development of Gandharva Veda, an ancient treatise on music.

- **The Golden Age of the Guptas:** The Gupta dynasty witnessed a flourishing of the arts, with the royal court emerging as a major patron.
- The **Pallava, Chola, Vijayanagara** and other medieval dynasties continued this tradition, endowing temple complexes and dedicating spaces for cultivating and performing various art forms.
- **Mughal era:** The Mughal era witnessed a unique synthesis of Persian and Indian performing arts, with **Akbar's patronage of Tansen** and the flourishing of Hindustani classical music and Kathak dance under royal support, leading to the development of various *gharanas*.
- **The colonial period**, though disruptive in many ways, also led to the **codification** and revival of several classical traditions through the efforts of scholar-practitioners.
- **Post-Independence era:** The Indian state has played a pivotal role in the preservation, promotion, and dissemination of the country's rich performing arts heritage through institutions, festivals, awards, and policies.

Concept of Performing Arts

The concept of Performing Arts in Indian culture is deeply intertwined with expressing human emotions, or '**Rasas**'. These Rasas are a key element in various art forms, including music, dance, and drama, which are collectively known as the performing arts.

- **Art as expression:** Art is a manifestation of the human mind's aesthetic qualities, reflecting a spectrum of emotions.
- **Rasas:** The term 'Rasa' in Sanskrit symbolises the essence of emotions, akin to a sweet juice providing satisfaction or '*aanand*'. There are traditionally nine Rasas, known as '**Navras**', each representing a different emotional state:
 - **Hasya** (laughter), **Shringara** (love/beauty), **Karuna** (sorrow), **Raudra** (anger), **Veera** (heroism/courage), **Bhayanaka** (terror/fear), **Bibhatsa** (disgust), **Adbutha** (surprise/wonder), **Shantha** (peace or tranquillity).
- **Art Forms:** Human emotions are spontaneously expressed through various art forms, such as singing, dancing, drawing, painting, acting, and sculpture.
- **Visual vs. Performing Arts:** Visual arts include sketching, painting, and sculpture while performing arts encompass singing, dancing, and acting.
- **Music:** In India, music has been a predominant art form since ancient times, with roots traceable to the Sama Veda.
- **Historical texts:**
 - **Natyashastra:** Authored by **Bharata Muni** is dated around the 2nd century BCE, it's a seminal text on performing arts with significant emphasis on music.
 - **Brihaddesi:** Matanga's work from the 8th-9th century AD, where ragas were first systematically named and described.
 - **Sangeet Ratnakara:** A 13th-century text by **Sarangdeva**, listing 264 ragas.
 - **Instruments:** Over time, a variety of string and wind instruments have been developed, with ancient texts mentioning flutes, drums, veena, and cymbals.



Music

Music in Indian culture dates back to the Vedic era, with **Narada Muni** introducing music to Earth and the concept of **Nada Brahma** (the sound pervading the universe).

- Ancient instruments like the seven-holed flute from the **Indus Valley Civilization** and the **Ravanahatha** from Sri Lanka's **Hela Civilization** highlight India's rich musical history.
- The **Aitareya Aranyaka** mentions components of the **Veena**, a revered musical instrument, and the **Jaiminiya Brahmana** discusses dance and music collectively.
- The sacred syllable "**Om**" is believed by musicologists to be the source of all ragas and musical notes.

Classical Music



Indian music history evolved from Vedic times to Sangita Ratnakara, then divided into Hindustani and Carnatic systems around the 14th century, enriching Raga, Tala, and musical forms. **Haripala** introduced Hindustani and Carnatic music terms around the same period.

- **Carnatic Music:** Originating in the southern regions of India, Carnatic music is known for its intricate melodic and rhythmic patterns and its emphasis on vocal music.
 - It follows a **highly structured system** of ragas and talas, with compositions often based on religious texts and themes.
 - Prominent instruments include the **veena, mridangam, and nadaswaram.**
- **Hindustani Music:** Rooted in the Vedic traditions, Hindustani classical music evolved over centuries, incorporating influences from various cultures and dynasties.
 - Its complex melodic structures (**ragas**) and rhythmic cycles (**talas**) characterise it.
 - Notable genres include **Dhrupad, Khayal, Thumri, and Ghazal.**
 - Prominent instruments include the **sitar, sarod, sarangi, and tabla.**
- **Folk Music:** It is an expression of the emotions and experiences of everyday people, celebrating life events and serving as oral histories.
 - Each state has its unique musical traditions, and while classical music adheres to strict rules laid out in texts like the *Natyashastra*, folk music is more fluid and spontaneous such as the **Mand of Rajasthan** and the **Bhatiali of Bengal.**
 - **Examples:** Baul music (Bengal), Rabindra Sangeet (Bengal), Bhangra (Punjab), Lavani (Maharashtra), Garba (Gujarat), and Bihu (Assam), among many others.

Dances of India



Dance is a rhythmic, ordered bodily movement, often set to music, expressing sentiments, illustrating events, or daily activities like hunting, warfare, or religious rituals. The art of dance in India has deep historical roots.

- **Origins and early references:** India has ancient roots, with mentions in the **Rig Veda** of **dance (nrti)** and **danseuse (nrtu)**.
 - The **Brahmanas**, including **Jaiminiya** and **Kausitaki**, mention dance and music together, and the Epics like **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata** are filled with references to dances on earth and in heaven.
- **Development of classical tradition:** Like music, Indian dance has developed a rich classical tradition, with a powerful capacity for expression and storytelling.

- Ancient statues from **Harappa** and **Mohenjodaro** reveal glimpses of dance. A male dancer's **torso** and a **dancing girl's figure** hint at its presence in the Indus Valley Civilization.
- The **Natyashastra** of **Bharata** is a primary source of information for the analytical study of this art form.
 - Bharata discussed dance and its various **angas** (limbs) in detail, categorising them under **nritta** (pada sanchalan), **nritya** (anga sanchalan), and **natya** (abhinay).
- **Religious and cultural significance: In traditional Indian culture, dance served to symbolically express religious ideas.**
- The figure of Lord Shiva as **Nataraja**, representing the creation and destruction of the cosmic cycle, is a testament to the importance of dance in Indian culture.
- **Classical Dance Forms:** Originating in temple rituals, these dance styles symbolically express religious ideas and mythological narratives.
 - The **Sangeet Natak Akademi** recognises **8** dance forms as classical: **Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Odissi, Manipuri, Kathak, and Sattriya.**
- **Folk Dances:** These dances evolved from the lives and celebrations of common people. These dance forms celebrate various aspects of life, from harvests and festivals to martial traditions and social customs.
 - These dances, often performed in unison, include **the Bihu of Assam, Garba of Gujarat, Bhangra and Gidda of Punjab, Bamboo dance of Mizoram, Koli of Maharashtra, Dhumal of Kashmir, and Chhau of Bengal**, among many others.

Drama and Theatre



Indian drama traces its origins to the **Vedic period**, where ritual performances and recitations of epic narratives laid the groundwork. The **Natyashastra** provides principles and techniques for ancient Indian theatre.

- **Classical Sanskrit drama:** Flourished from the **1st century CE to the 12th century CE:**

- Playwrights like **Kalidasa**, **Bhasa**, **Sudraka**, and **Harsha** crafted intricate dramas blending poetry, music, and dance.
- Themes ranged from **love** and **heroism** to exploration of the human condition.
- Sanskrit theatre thrived through **royal patronage** and **temple performances**.
- Stylised acting, rich language, and incorporation of music and dance characterised these plays.
- **Emergence of Regional Theatre:** As Sanskrit drama waned, regional theatre traditions emerged. These forms were rooted in local languages, folk narratives, and religious or social customs. Notable examples:
 - **Tamasha (Maharashtra):** Semi-improvised folk theatre with music, dance, and satire.
 - **Nautanki (Uttar Pradesh):** Folk opera enacting epics and legends.
 - **Tamilu (Tamil Nadu):** Street theatre exploring social and political themes.
 - **Jatra (West Bengal):** Devotional and mythological narratives.
 - **Bhand Pather (Jammu and Kashmir):** Comic theatre using masks and satire.

Martial Arts



India, with its rich cultural heritage known for a diverse array of martial arts. Originally used for combat, these disciplines now serve as demonstrations, rituals, fitness routines, and self-defence methods. These martial arts not only showcase India's rich warrior heritage but also serve as a means of physical, mental, and spiritual development for practitioners.

- **Kalaripayattu (Kerala):** One of the oldest surviving martial arts, it emphasises fluid, acrobatic movements and the use of various weapons.
- **Silambam (Tamil Nadu):** A stick-fighting art is known for its intricate footwork and lightning-fast strikes.
- **Gatka (Punjab):** A traditional Sikh martial art that involves the skilled handling of swords, shields, and other weapons.
- **Thang-Ta (Manipur):** It combines the use of sword (thang) and spear (ta) with fluid, graceful movements.

- **Mallakhamb (Maharashtra & other states):** A unique sport that involves complex gymnastic feats performed on a vertical wooden pole or rope.

Puppetry



Puppetry is an ancient form of storytelling and entertainment, with diverse regional variations and traditional techniques. These puppet traditions not only entertain but also serve as a medium for the transmission of cultural heritage, social commentary, and spiritual narratives. These include:

- **Kathputli (Rajasthan):** Colourful, string-operated puppets that depict characters from epics, folklore, and daily life.
- **Tholu Bommalata (Andhra Pradesh):** Shadow puppetry using intricately crafted leather puppets, often used to enact mythological stories.
- **Putumaikkal (Tamil Nadu):** Glove puppets made of cloth, leather, and wood, used to perform folk tales and social satires.
- **Pavakkathakal (Kerala):** Rod puppets with intricate costumes and makeup, portraying characters from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- **Chhou (West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha):** Mask-based puppet theatre that combines elements of dance, drama, and martial arts.

Performing Arts UPSC PYQs

Question 1: With reference to the cultural history of India consider the following statements (**UPSC Prelims 2018**)

1. Most of the Tyagaraja Kritis are devotional songs in praise of Lord Krishna
2. Tyagaraja created several new ragas
3. Annamacharya and Tyagaraja are contemporaries

4. Annamacharya kirtanas are devotional songs in praise of Lord Venkateshwara

Which of the statements given above are correct?

1. 1 and 3 only
2. 2 and 4 only
3. 1, 2 and 3
4. 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b)

Question 2: Consider the following pairs: **(UPSC Prelims 2018)**

Tradition — State

1. Chapchar Kut festival – Mizoram
2. Khongjom Parba ballad – Manipur
3. Thang -Ta dance – Sikkim

Which of the pairs given above is/are correct?

1. 1 only
2. 1 and 2
3. 3 only
4. 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

Question 3: With reference to Manipuri Sankirtana, consider the following statements: **(UPSC Prelims 2017)**

1. It is a song and dance performance
2. Cymbals are the only musical instruments used in the performance
3. It is performed to narrate the life and deeds of Lord Krishna

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. 1, 2 and 3
2. 1 and 3 only
3. 2 and 3 only
4. 1 only

Answer: (a)

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