

Music and Theatre

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Theatrical Categories

India

Pakistan

Bangladesh

Afghanistan

Bhutan

Nepal

Sri Lanka

Theatre in South Asia is a complex phenomenon, for throughout the region the concept of performance, and hence the notion of theatre, has been shaped by many different forces. To understand the resulting diverse theatrical developments, many quite unlike what developed in the West, one needs to refer not to the Greek philosopher Aristotle and his poetics but to Bharata and his Sanskrit treatise on music and drama, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as well as to the enormous diversity of peoples and cultures of South Asia. These inhabitants include Mongoloid, Mediterranean, Negrito, and Proto-Austroloid peoples. Their languages fall into four distinct linguistic families - Indo-Iranian, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Sino-Tibetan - and their respective societies have developed in distinctive modes, such as the intricate web of the caste system, which operates irrespective of religion, race, or language. Among their religious practices, both major and minor world religions are represented, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Judaism.

Due to constraints imposed by religious beliefs, theatre often appears in disguise or indirectly. For example, puppet drama, narrative storytelling, religious epic presentations, and comic improvisations on festive occasions are all forms of theatre in South Asia. In addition, the South Asian sensibility seems to be intrinsically composite, thus challenging efforts to classify performances as musical theatre. An abundance of genres adds to the difficulty, for many of these remain undocumented to this day. By a rough estimate, there are more than one thousand forms currently in circulation throughout the region.

THEATRICAL CATEGORIES

Theatrical performances in South Asia can for the most part be grouped into five categories: primitive, folk, ritual /religious /ceremonial, popular /commercial /professional, and art /experimental /amateur. There are of course conceptual variations, differences in historical placement, and infinite overlaps in reference to particular genres. And yet, the five categories underscore theatrical features and dynamics of the region the in some instances contrast with generally prevailing academic perspectives on South Asian theatre.

It is essential to note that these categories are structural and experiential, and are not defined by the producer. The term structural refers to an arrangement of theatrical components and deployment of forces related to specific presentations. The term experiential points to the ultimate intended and emerging experience that the concerned presentations aim to provide. Thus an urban production depending for its effectiveness on body actions, harsh timbres, nonlinguistic sounds, and unclassifiable emotions would be classified as primitive, whereas a tribal ritualistic presentation in which kingship is symbolized with towering headgear would be described as art/experimental. Each category is a legitimate expression and enables a valid theatrical experience.

Primitive theatre

This category of musical theatre relies on nonlinguistic communicating agents such as movements, gestures, property items, and sounds. Jugglers, animal tamers, acrobats, magicians, and shamans are typical main agents for such theatrical performances. These artists present mostly combinations of dance, drama, and music—although, in this context, of course, dance is understood as any deviation from a steady bodily state, drama as any deviation from everyday, mundane behavior, and music as any arrangement of sounds, even those generally thought of as nonmusical.

From a psychological perspective, primitive theatre does not purposely aim to create, develop, or elaborate any classifiable feeling or emotion. Its goal is to generate a mental state that is charged with emotion rather than to enlighten the mind with intellectual stimulation. Unaccountable fear and a feeling of awe and admiration are perhaps the ever-present responses to primitive theatre.

To a great extent, the audience for such performances is not passive. Auditors are participants, and varying responsibilities are assigned to them according to predefined cultural norms.

Primitive theatre is highly symbolic, ritualistic, and inspired, influenced as well as permeated by a mythic spirit. Mythology is therefore a primary constituent of such performances. Animals and even supernatural phenomena are considered potential active agents in structuring theatrical presentations. Performance is at the center of this theatrical category, and no textual, linguistic, or scholarly activity can replace the primitive theatre.

Folk theatre

The folk category is narrower than the primitive but enjoys a greater focusing of theatrical forces. Folk theatre, better termed folk drama, is the presentation of a story enacted by characters according to the accepted conventions of a particular cultural group.

Even though presentations continue to be composite, individual components are more easily identifiable, have specific qualities, and make particular, noticeable contributions. There is a greater sense of arrangement or composition in the folk category than in the primitive. Language and literary sensibility are allowed more scope.

A significant feature of folk theatre is that it responds to three of the great cycles of human life—birth and death, day and night, and the seasons. Folk theatre, like folk music, is pervaded by a spirit of nostalgia for the fast-disappearing or long-alienated rural ethos. Much of South Asia is mainly agricultural, with most of the land located in the monsoon belt, a fact easily discerned in the array of genres, song themes, associated functions, and rituals accompanying or framing the presentations.

The folk category recognizes both cultural conventions and family customs as forces shaping performances. Through such forces a performance acquires a framework of its own as a reference. Consequently a comparison between two or more performances and performers is both conceivable and possible, a minimal precondition for movement toward artistic acts as normally understood. Instead of the fundamental but rather undifferentiated psychological state at which primitive theatre aims, folk theatre is unambiguously didactic and recreational. It prefers to refer to morality rather than to ethics. It has a close relationship with particular religions, cults, creeds, and philosophies. Needless to say, myths and not mythology guide the proceedings.

Unlike primitive theatre, in which listeners are generally participants, folk theatre attracts a genuine audience, and performers receive individual recognition for their special skills and achievements. Hence both the formation and continuation of

performing castes and their place in the patronage hierarchy are ensured. This is of great significance, for such individual recognition leads to family traditions of acting.

Features of the folk-theatre performance tradition are verbalized; some are even written down, and although they may not be accessible to the general public, they could in the future be the basis of a scholarly tradition.

Folk theatricals often use, highlight, and develop plots instead of mere stories or themes. This element of craftsmanship leads to the origin and evolution of institutions known as composers, writers/playwrights, directors (or gurus), and actors.

The category of folk theatre is specifically associated with the geographical, historical, religious, and cultural backgrounds of specific cultural groups. To this extent it becomes directly identifiable as a voice of a particular people; both presentation formats and the wide appeal the presentations enjoy reflect this cultural tie.

Religious theatre

Religion in South Asia enjoys a preeminent position in society. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, and animism (typically mixed with other religions) all have long traditions in the area and are widely distributed. All the major religions are also divided into many sects and cults. A mind-boggling variety of religious centers and places of worship dot the landscape. Religion being a life-enveloping concept in South Asia, theatrical genres are influenced by it both directly and indirectly. Many aspects of theatre reflect this fact—subjects, themes, symbolism, textual sources, and stylistic abundance.

Fairs and festivals organized in connection with various deities, saints, or major devotees are celebrated occasions for performances of religious theatre, though related performances can take place in other contexts. Productions are overtly religious, though they often voice the secular or earthly/mundane cravings, desires, and demands of the common man. Religion and the religious sphere are used as occasions for irrepressible sorties into the domain of everyday life. Indeed, this sanctified freedom from the constraining aspects of religion is one of the main attractions of religious theatre for the general populace. Throughout South Asia, an impressive array of genres has emerged based on the basic philosophical tenets of the religions concerned¹.

A major feature of religious theatre is the extensive use of versification to convey all kinds of content. Information, knowledge, insights, and worldly wisdom

¹ Varadpande, M. L. (1983). Religion and Theatre. National Book trust, New Delhi.

presented in verse form all find a place in this category. The various verse forms are simple to remember as well as to apply, and in the great spread of religious ideas, this unerring choice between prose and poetry has been an important force for shaping the dramatic impulse. The Indian epic tales of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in their many versions have been the mainstay of many religious theatre genres, and the easy and almost archetypal versifications of the epics are well known.

Religious theatre performances do not place a great premium on originality, novelty, creativity, or other such values. Their emphasis is on the intensity of passions aroused through the combined power of religious and theatrical associations. Theatrical occasions enable the audience to work out its collective and often undefined tensions; propitiation, worship, repentance, grateful prayers, intense emotional and often cathartic outbursts, and other such stock responses typically characterize performances. Frequently, it is frenzied participation rather than aesthetic appreciation that is elicited.

This category of religious theatre is a "total" theatre, invoking all sensory powers. It is also collective: the crowd or mob psychology takes hold. From among the five categories, folk and religious theatre could easily be described as eminent examples of the totality of theatrical vision. They appeal not only to many senses, but also to many strata of society simultaneously.

Art theatre

The first and most important feature of art theatre is its very separation from all other forms of theatre in South Asia. It aims at being artistic or aesthetic, and its performers try to carve out their own territories by keeping their traditions distinctive. Toward this end, art theatre has developed with determination and method. With notable tenacity, a scholarly tradition has also grown up in which theatrical activity is analyzed in all its various aspects. A strong written body of work exists alongside the performance tradition, and codification is valued. Emphasis is also placed on training, appreciation, and criticism.

This category of theatre has been the one most fundamentally reshaped by Western colonization. Industrialization, urbanization, and the advent of Westernized education are all factors that have affected art theatre deeply. Debates about modernity, authenticity, and self-identity have assumed greater relevance in this category than in any other, and such intellectual discussion accounts for the comparatively wider accessibility to "outsiders" of art theatre than of other types of theatre.

Art theatre in general has very limited appeal in rural societies. This fact seems to generate fierce loyalty among its practitioners, giving rise to movements, manifestos, schools, and other such activist manifestations. Intermittently, the category appears to make claims to the universality of art and to an aesthetic validity that can transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

This category is eclectic; producers and performers will typically pick up concepts, performing strategies, presentation formats, and the like from any other theatre category. Whenever ideas are borrowed, however, art-theatre personnel feel compelled to back up the assimilating ventures with some aesthetic reasoning. This aesthetic sanction has an immense legitimizing capacity. In many ways, such personnel also try to sublimate what they borrow as, for example, when they radically change superstitions or primitive religious beliefs. The scholarly tradition surrounding art theatre seriously and persistently seeks rational or theoretical explanations for everything that the category values or rejects; it verbalizes concepts, considers ideas to be focally important, and propagates them.

The development of present-day art theatre has moved through three phases: folk-like religious presentation, music drama, and prose play. Music has been so integral to theatrical performance in South Asia that many genres, even today, follow the convention of seating the musicians on stage during a performance. This arrangement has been on the decline in art theatre, although occasionally it is deliberately included as an act of experimentalism.

Popular theatre

The most obvious feature of popular theatre is the extreme eagerness of its producers to provide the "people" with what they are reported to like. Topical themes, fashionable presentations, and an innate attraction to anything novel (which does not always mean modern) characterize popular theatre. Its main goal is to offer pleasure and entertainment.

Of all the five theatre categories, the popular is the most inclined toward the structure and operation of an industry. The primary consideration of producers is what sells. Market forces, supply and demand, imitation of the successful, and a desire to seek the security of brand names and other image-building devices assume importance.

It also has the most heterogeneous audience, and so popular theatre producers are keen on formulating and following success formulas to ensure that they

produce what a majority of people like most. It is sometimes described as a category targeting the "lowest common denominator" in audiences.

Instant sense gratification is an immediate goal for popular plays. Producers often add gimmicks or technical tricks to attract attention, seeking to stimulate the eye before the ear.

Popular theatre is noticeably accommodative and borrows from every possible source, indigenous and foreign. Unlike in art theatre, the reasons put forward by producers for such eclecticism are not artistic or aesthetic, but largely relate to pleasing the public.

INDIA

Sanskrit theatre, with its remarkable sophistication, flourished in ancient India, but had ceased to exist effectively by the tenth century, when regional voices began to be heard. With the legendary and real contributions of Ashvaghosha (A.D. 100), Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidasa, and Bhavabhuti, among others, the Sanskrit tradition continued to remain in view beyond this time as a model to be deviated from or followed. However, the most influential legacy of the tradition is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata Muni, dating from about 200 B.C.-A.D. 200. The work is at once a treatise, a manual, and a compendium. Along with the *rasa* theory of aesthetics in the arts, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* has percolated into all theatrical expression in India, whether consciously or otherwise. However, it is widely accepted that the *kūṭiyāttam*, a dance drama of Kerala, is the only genre performed today that closely approximates the dramatic model laid down by Bharata.

In South Asia, India is perhaps the only country in which all five theatrical categories have flourished over many centuries (unless one equates the art theatre with the modern, urban, Western-oriented, British-inspired stage play).

Jugglers, acrobats, magicians, animal tamers, and wrestlers have existed from earliest times, as have rituals and ceremonial performances involving roleplaying, collective expression, dialogues, mask wearing, and stylized dancing. These and other such features are found in tribal life today, and thus reveal the long continuity of primitive theatre traditions in South Asia. Three examples suggest the variety of this category today: the courting dance of females of the Gadaba tribe in the Nicobar islands, a tribal dance enacting seasonal changes and agricultural operations in Tamil

Nadu, and the marriage dance of the BaroNagas, which includes masked presentations and comic interventions by a jester.

Dramatic narrations - that is, character-oriented recitations-have been in vogue since Vedic times. Secular in spirit and voicing the concerns of the Indian people, these belong to the folk-drama category: performances always represent a particular cultural and linguistic group, and each Indian region has its own distinctive array of folk dramas. Some well-established examples are tamāsā in Maharashtra, bhavāi in Gujarat, bhand-jashna in Kashmir, cavittunātakam (practiced by Christians) in Kerala, nautankī in Uttar Pradesh, and bidesia in Bihar.

Given the religious spirit of India's original inhabitants, as well as of the later chose to make India their home, religious theatre assumed great importance. Even after Islam had transformed Indian culture by the tenth century, religious theatre continued. Among the reasons for this were the bhakti cult (with its doctrine of avatar 'incarnation') that flourished all over the country and its mainstay, the Vaishnav Krishna-centered movement that actively employed the performing arts. Also, the Muslims in India remained less puritanical than their brethren elsewhere. Religious theatre in each of the major linguistic areas had its own character leading to an immense array of genres and formats. The following genres are representative: bhavana and ojpali in Assam, jātrā in Bengal, jātrā and pala in Orissa, vidhinātak in Andhra Pradesh, kūtiyāttam in Kerala, and yakṣagāna in Karnataka.

The categories of art and popular theatre had their respective historical correspondences. As understood today, however, they are a product of post independence India. Each Indian region responded to modern stimuli in accordance with its own cultural dynamics, and the history of modern theatre differs in chronology, quality and quantity from region to region. However, certain characteristics of the modern theatre stand out irrespective of region: plays are in local languages, even though their early developmental stages were inspired by Sanskrit and Western classics; themes are selected for contemporary relevance; play scripts are more structured than those in the folk category, with a greater use of prose; costumes, set design, and lighting assume aesthetic importance; attention is paid to the unity of time and action; the acting and audience areas occupy separate spaces; performances take place in enclosed/sheltered acting areas, preferably in auditoriums; a curtain divides the proscenium arch stage and the audience; audience size is regulated by ticket sales; and theatre management attends to publicity and reviewing.

Bombay and Calcutta have long been active centers for theatre performance; other places are now also becoming prominent. The scene is full of possibilities, as new playwrights, actors, and directors struggle to make their mark, although television-like cinema in the 1930s-threatens to draw audiences away from the theatre. Since independence, institutes established to promote theatre have become more active, and some autonomous bodies have dedicated themselves to this purpose. In addition, the central and state governments have become more involved in theatre development. Amateur groups, university drama departments, competitions for amateur and professional groups, and awards and grants to individuals and institutions have all provided more opportunities. Training institutes have been founded, and opportunities on the "small screen" have also made theatre more attractive to a greater number of people.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan and India share a cultural history that dates back to the Indus Valley civilization, c. 2500-1600 B.C. However, since Pakistan came into existence, at partition in 1947, the nation's identification with Islamic ideology has restricted the country's cultural freedom. Pakistan's cultural identity, including its theatrical traditions, is shaped by such factors as a strongly patriarchal family organization, limited freedom for women, a severe stratification of society, a Western orientation among the affluent, a less influential middle class, and the slow spread of modern education.

Muslim culture in the Middle East has frowned on the performing arts, but Islam in India soon assumed its own identity. Theatre in Pakistan did not have to look to the Arab or Persian traditions for inspiration. With Urdu as its national language, Pakistan drew on two theatrical sources: Bengali theatre (as it had existed prior to 1971, when East Pakistan broke away to form the new nation of Bangladesh) and the Urdu/Persian theatre that came to fruition in Wajid Ali's court in 1855. Wajid Ali, the ruler of the princely state of Oudh (near Lucknow) and a patron of both Hindu and Muslim art, nurtured kathak dance and supported a dramatic spectacle known as *Indrasabha*. The court poet Agha Hasan ("Amanat") wrote this musical dance drama based on the love story of a fairy and a prince. The drama, entirely in verse, was picked up by Parsi theatre companies in Bombay that produced Urdu plays in India, presenting their own versions of *Indrasabha*. These companies toured Pakistan with great success, and also performed in Sri Lanka and in Southeast Asia.

This Urdu theatre was secular, as is evident in the plays of Agha Hashr (1876-1935), the other major playwright in the tradition. Hashr wrote *Sita Banwas*, on a theme from the *Ramayana*; *Bilwa Mangal*, on a social theme; *Rustom-o-Sohrab*, from the Persian epic love story of the same name; as well as adaptations of Shakespeare. In lavish productions, the Parsi theatre made free use of elements of folk drama, including a wide variety of music ranging from vocal recitation and song to dance music, dialogue in rhymes and verses, and the participation of a large and heterogeneous audience. Actors' voices were extremely loud, the emotional content was dependent on stock phrases and responses, and the use of trick scenes to produce astonishment was an accepted theatrical practice. The genre became known as the "Parsi musical", as other writers created works in a similar vein, borrowing from Persian legends and Hindu mythological sources. Among these playwrights were Raunak Banarasi, Narain Prasad Betab, Munshi Mohammad "Dil", Man Zarif, Ahsan Lucknowvi, and Vinayak Prasad Talib.

After independence, college drama clubs became the pioneers of a new Pakistani theatre when they staged both Urdu and English plays. Imtiaz Ali Taj (1900-1970), whose *Anarkali* (1922) became a classic, represented a link between Indian and Pakistani forms of Urdu theatre. In 1956, the Pakistan Arts Council helped establish a theatre in Lahore, and also helped produce plays. In Karachi, the older Parsi theatrical style current in Bombay and Calcutta continued for a while. Also in 1956, the Arts Council provided active assistance when the Karachi Theatre was formed under the direction of Sigrid Nyberg Kahle, the German wife of a diplomat; Khwaja Moinuddin and Zia Mohyeddin were its major playwrights. After Ms. Kahle left, the Avant Garde Arts Theatre came into being. Ali Ahemad, who had previously produced children's plays in Lahore, moved to Karachi and established both the Avant Garde Theatre and Natak, an allied institute for teaching drama. Besides adapting Molière, Beckett, and other Western playwrights, he forged new ground by producing plays that satirized Western imperialism and neocolonial regimes.

Art theatre in Pakistan suffers from a lack of longstanding professional theatre groups. Amateur clubs in cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi, however, stage plays on an occasional basis. Lahore has a comparatively stronger history of theatre productions, for an open-air theatre, built by a Mr. Sondhi in 1942, has facilitated such activities. Among the "hot themes" that have proved appealing are Agha Babar's adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *Inspector General* (Rawalpindi, 1961), Naseer Sahmasi's interpretation of an aristocratic family's plight in Delhi, and Khwaja Moinuddin's comic depiction of refugees. These plays reflect a movement to break away

from dramas based on stock responses. Influential writers include the actor-playwright Rafi Pir, who was trained in Berlin in the 1930s and has contributed much with his versatility and professionalism, and Saadat Hassan Manto (1912-1955), whose radio plays, short stories, and features are notable for their theatrical absurdity, realism, and moving dialogue. Since 1968, some theatrical groups have begun touring the country with their productions. Furthermore, state awards have been instituted. In the art theatre category, many more Urdu plays have been written than have actually been produced on stage.

Considering the terrain, the proportion of tribal peoples, and the village-based economy in Pakistan, it is no wonder that the primitive and folk categories of theatre are flourishing. Fortune-tellers with parrots, snake charmers, mendicants (jogī), and wandering medicine men present one-man theatre performances-the latter two often including reptiles and other animals. In the chili-gari-ai (literally 'juniper and goat') ritual, performed in the Astor Valley of the Northern Areas, a goat, children selected for piety, and juniper-over-a-fire are given roles in a purifying ritual typical of the primitive theatre category. Acrobatic performers from the Tharparkar area are notable for their skilled movements with a pitcher that they carry in their hands and also use as a wind instrument. The thari horse-dance from Multan in the desert area of Punjab is theatrical. Also in Punjab, the bhand performance and puppet theatre are part of the folk drama of Pakistan.

BANGLADESH

The cultural identity of Bangladesh (East Pakistan prior to nationhood in 1971) is closely linked with that of West Bengal, formerly its other half, now a contiguous Indian state. The theatre landscape indeed results from the development of Bengali theatre as a totality, encompassing both regions, now politically in two different nations.

Agriculture being the mainstay of the land, folk drama functions as the predominant form of theatrical expression. Jātrā 'procession' is the chief genre, a composite presentation of dance, music, and drama flexibly employed to propagate the Vaishnav cult of Hinduism. The religious bias was strong until the nineteenth century, when moral didacticism slowly took over, in turn replaced in more recent decades by a secular orientation. After the advent of the modern urban proscenium-stage tradition, jātrā adopted scenic displays as well as acting and writing concepts imported from the West by the upper middle class. Jātrā groups are highly organized and operate as an

industry; the owner, director, actor, prompter, technician, and so on... have well-defined roles, with specific tasks. Performances are long and loud, but well constructed for the desired effect. The form remains relevant today due to its ability to communicate to heterogeneous audiences, its character of the *vivek* (literally 'conscience') who comments on and joins in the drama at will, its musical orchestration (blending native and foreign instruments), and its performance style, which mixes a modern format with a traditional manner of execution.

The present capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, was the first seat of the modern urban theatre movement in South Asia, which began in the nineteenth century. This urban theatre voiced the concerns of the growing middle class. Until partition in 1947, Calcutta and Dhaka shared many views and positions on Indian and Bengali problems. After partition, when Bengal was divided into East and West and East Bengal became a province of Pakistan, women began appearing on the stage, co-acting as it was then known. In the University of Dhaka, amateur activity took root.

Western and other theatrical influences, including that of Japanese theatre, had their impact. Furthermore, experimental theatre took risks, such as staging plays by the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg (1849-1912) in the *jātrā* style. The liberation movement gave theatre new motivation and momentum, and many new theatre groups were founded during the 1970s including the Aranyak, Bahubachan, Nagorik, Dacca Drama, and Kathak. Centers other than Dhaka are now emerging as Bangladesh takes its place on the international theatre map.

AFGHANISTAN

The earliest mention of the word Afghan (*avagana*), by the Indian astronomer Varahamihir in A.D. 600, reflects the close historical link between Afghanistan and India. The country was formerly known as Gandhara; Buddhism flourished there until the fifth century. The main cultural influences on the country have been Persian, Indian, and Central Asian.

Only 8 percent of the population is urban, the remainder being farmers or nomads. Outside the main cities, Afghan society is tribal in composition and lifestyle. Theatre in the modern sense came into existence only since the 1960s; the first plays were adaptations of Western classics, followed by works often on contemporary problems. Folk singing, Indian music, and Western music have each in turn influenced theatre in Afghanistan. On account of Afghanistan's long ties with India, it is no

surprise that North Indian classical music secured a following in the country, as did Hindi film music prior to the ban on all music and dance by the Taliban movement in the 1990s.

BHUTAN

The kingdom of Bhutan is tucked away in the Himalayan ranges with Tibet to the north, India to the south and east, and Sikkim to the west. A central mountain range divides the country, the western portion inhabited by people of Tibetan origin, the eastern area populated by Assamese descendents. Northern Bhutan, with valleys 3,600-5,500 meters above sea level and heavy rainfall, and southern Bhutan, also with high annual rainfall and dense forests, both have low population density, whereas the fertile valleys of central Bhutan have moderate rain and are comparatively well populated. Following four centuries of Tibetan rule (with British influence in the nineteenth century) the country became a British protectorate in 1910 before gaining independence in 1949. Today, the nation's relation to India is defined by a treaty that guarantees its independence, with India guiding its foreign relations and supplying aid.

The Bhutanese, though largely Buddhist, have maintained links with the earlier, "natural" religious faith. People of Assamese origin are greatly influenced by Hinduism, and a strong Nepalese presence also stresses Hindu leanings. The main theatrical event in Bhutan belongs to the primitive category. Participants in the annual archery competitions wear colorful clothes, and are encouraged by richly attired girls, who dance intermittently. To the accompaniment of dhol 'large cylindrical drum' and tutari 'high-pitched horn', dancers wearing long robes and animal and bird masks execute heroic dances.

NEPAL

The kingdom of Nepal is situated in the Himalayas, with India to the south and west, Tibet to the north, and Sikkim to the east. Some of the world's most rugged mountain ranges are found in Nepal, where nearly 75 percent of the land is mountainous. Over the centuries, massive migrations of Mongoloid groups from Tibet, and Indo-Aryans from India, have produced considerable ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. By the sixteenth century, Nepal was ruled by high-caste Hindus who favored an isolationist stance. Gradually however, local nobles gathered influence

and power, and in the 1950s the monarchy established a cabinet system of government; the accompanying religious tolerance, political conservatism, and cultural accommodation are reflected in Nepal's theatrical traditions.

The following fairs and festivals (jātrā) associated with various deities exemplify typical Nepalese theatrical elements that blur the borders between primitive, folk and religious expressions: the Bhairav jātrā, a buffalo sacrifice and dance; the Macchindra jātrā, a procession of the idol with celebrations; the Indra jātrā, the setting up of a tall wooden column with masked dancing and a procession of virgins; and the Holi festival, complete with the erection of a pillar, color throwing, and revelry. The Sherpa dance drama mani-rimdu is another example of a religious/folk presentation. Lasting over three days, this outdoor spectacle is designed to assert the superiority of Buddhism over other religions. The ritualistic setting up of a flagpole, group dances, improvised comic skits, masked dances, and singing are the main features. Modern theatrical activities are confined to Kathmandu, the political and cultural nerve center of Nepal.

SRI LANKA

Located off the southern tip of India, this island country won independence from Great Britain in 1948 and changed its name from Ceylon to the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. The island is linked to India through the great Indian epic, the *Ramayana*, as the seat of the demon king Ravana. Frequent references to it in Buddhist literature suggest the early introduction of Buddhism. The Indian emperor Ashoka (c. 269–232 B.C.) propagated the religion in Sri Lanka, although the earlier animistic religion survived. Hinduism, especially Brahminism, flourished later, and South Indian Chola and Pandya dynastic rule from the tenth century onward enabled Shaivism to take firm root. By the sixteenth century, as the Portuguese and Dutch managed to secure footholds in Sri Lanka, Christianity also made its presence felt, and it continued to do as the British entered the stage in 1796 and colonized the country in 1802.

Literary drama developed late in Sri Lanka, since Buddhist monks shunned theatre. However, influences from South India, as well as indigenous traditions prevalent from pre-Buddhist times and the multi-religious, multiracial character of Sri Lanka, soon led to the crystallization of a distinctive theatre.

Many Sri Lankan theatre forms include dance. The devil dance, for example, is a form in which music, dance, and spectacle are all combined to cure a person

suffering from disease, bad luck, or insanity. The chief exorcist plays the role of the demon king Vesamuni. For this all-male dance, each performer is dressed to suggest a half-male, half-female character. Bells, drums, choral singing, flaming torches, whirling and energetic movements (including leaps and dives), and masks complete the theatrical experience. Sanniyakku, another curing dance, has some humorous (including female) impersonations.

Kandyan dance, in contrast, is more sophisticated, with four varieties: panteru, naiyadi, udekki, and ves. The genre is reminiscent of the South Indian kathakali tradition in artistry as well as in its intricate structure. Besides the four major varieties there are eighteen other styles employing animal motifs such as the elephant, monkey, and peacock. Early manifestations of the dance were based on Hindu mythology, especially the *Ramayana*. However, thematic sources were soon extended to include legends of kings and other tales. Royal patronage in Kandy enhanced the quality of the dance to such an extent that even the Buddhist authorities admitted it in their tributary rituals. The dress of the male Kandyan dancer is designed to dazzle and promote an atmosphere of royal splendor and authority. His headdress is impressive, as are his leaps and swirls. While narrating a story, the dancer acts and dances. During the annual perahēra celebration, dancers move in procession to the Temple of Buddha's Tooth where they successfully create a theatre of opulence permeated with devotion.

Four other genres of masked folk drama are pasu, sokari, kolam, and nādagama. Pasu is a Roman Catholic passion play originating in the Jaffna area in the late nineteenth century. It sometimes uses life-size statues. Sokari, perhaps the oldest performance genre in Sri Lanka, is a devotional music-drama dedicated to the goddess Pattini on the occasion of the Sinhalese New Year. In kolam the dancers wear brightly painted and intricately carved wooden masks to represent a series of characters including a king, a demon, a deity, a hunter, animals, and birds. Using strong and deliberately distorted movements, the dancers present secular stories during the annual, all-night performances. The fourth genre, nādagama, is today viewed as the first creative departure from the conventional processional displays, group dances, ritual performances, and choruses that dominate the Sinhalese performing tradition. The folk drama has intoned verse dialogues and minimal prose; songs; scripts that include improvisation; religious, mythological, and contemporary themes; and a leader who directs the proceedings.

Modern theatre made its entry into Colombo in the nineteenth century, its immediate inspiration provided by touring Parsi musical troupes from India. The amalgam of music, dance, pageantry, and the proscenium stage resulted in a genre

called nurti, which edged out the indigenous nādagama. Although C. Don Bastian's nurti of 1884 (based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) was the first, the works of playwright John de Silva (1857-1922) proved immensely popular. The Arya Subadha Natya Sabha and Vijay Ranga Sabha were two major institutes that fostered the new genre. The nurti prospered until sound cinema nudged out the form in the 1930s. The 1920s saw the emergence of a new brand of playwrighting, named after the main protagonist, Eddie Jayamma. The Jayamma plays, as they were known, were unabashed satires on high society in Colombo. In the 1940s, university students were active in promoting prose plays and adaptations of plays by such dramatists as Molière, Oscar Wilde, and Anton Chekhov. In 1956, Ediriwira Sarachandra dramatized Buddhist Jataka tales employing native folk genres, including nadagama and sokari. Thus realistic theatre and folk-related modern drama both became firmly established in Sri Lanka.
