



# The Exhaustive list of Folk Theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre forms of Odisha

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## Abstract

The Theatrical tradition of Odisha had been flowing through its many categories like Traditional Folk Theatre, Classical Sanskrit Theatre, Folk Theatre and Modern Odia Theatre. Basically the tradition of FT and TFT had been playing very important role in the field of Theatre of Odisha as well as India since its origin. Gradually Modernization, Globalization and Post-Modernism brought many changes in these forms FT and TFT. Due to its impact on theatre Some of them became dead and others were struggling for their survival. So this study focused to identify the exhaustive list of FT and TFT forms of Odisha.

**Key words :** Folk Theatre, Traditional Folk Theatre, Rupaka, Upa- Rupaka, Pravriti, Content, Style, Form, FT, TFT, Natyasashtra, Exhaustive list, Modernization, Globalization and Post modernism.

## Introduction

The antiquity of Odishi Theatre was as old as our civilization. It was proved from the descriptions of Natyasashtra written by Bharata Muni. It was written during 200 BCE and 200 CE and playing a vital role in the medium of entertainment of ancient India so he had described it as “Lokopadesha Jananam” (Source of advice) and “Sarvakarmanubeshanam Lokasya” (Guide to all profession). He had also categorized it into ten types of Rupaka and eighteen types of Upa- Rupaka as per the differences of their contents, performances and socio-cultural importance also. Many forms of FT and TFT were coming under these categories of Theatre. In Natyasashtra Bharata Muni had categorized to **Pravritti**, the regional styles of Indian dramatic performances, into four types of and they were :- (i) Panchali (ii) Magadhi (iii) Oudra (iv) Dakshinatya. Among those Oudra was a developed theatrical performance tradition of undivided districts of Midnapur (Now it is under West Bengal) Baleswar, Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam districts of Odisha. So it could be accepted that a popular tradition of dramatic performances were prevalent in ancient Odisha during the period of Bharat Muni. It was collected from sources that Theatrical performances were organized in the royal court of King Kharavela during the period of first century B.C. He had built a stone stage (Cave stage) at Ranigumpha on Khandagiri. So it was very clear that the tradition of Odishi theatre had been popular in the ancient time of Odisha and had played a significant role in the field of Indian Sanskrit theatre as well as Traditional Folk Theatre. The Theatrical tradition of Odisha had been flowing through its many categories like Traditional Folk Theatre, Classical Sanskrit Theatre, Folk Theatre and Modern Odia

Theatre since its origin to till today. Basically the tradition of Folk Theatre (FT) and Traditional Folk Theatre (TFT) had been playing very important role in Odisha as well as India since its origin.

### Theatre tradition of Odisha

The tradition of Odishi Theatre had been entertaining and enlightening us being associated with our life, livelihood, passion, profession, rituals and religions. So many religious and ritualistic theatre forms were originated and developed from the base of ancient Folk culture. It was named as Traditional Folk Theatre. Danda Nata, Ghoda Nata, Pala and Oshakothi were categorized under this group. As time passes we became civilized, learned the application of language and literature. Many forms of literature were written on the literary base of Sanskrit. A highly developed dramatic tradition in Sanskrit was created as per the codified grammars of Natyashastra and developed by Kalidasha, Sudraka, Bhababhuti and others. It also influenced too many Odia dramatists to promote this Sanskrit theatre tradition in Odisha. In this regard King Kapilendra Dev, Murari Mishra, Jayadev and others were praiseworthy for their literary contribution. This tradition of Sanskrit theatre was named as Classical Theatre. Again a distinct type of Theatre tradition was originated from the strong influence of our regional literary tradition, regional languages, life, livelihood, passion, profession, music, dances and partial influence of Natyashastra. It was named as Folk Theatre. The forms of Folk Theatre were not originated from the religious and ritualistic tradition of society, not created by any divine character of mythology or not performed for ritualistic and religious observation so it was named as Folk Theatre. Rama Leela, Krushna Leela, Rasa Leela, Bharata Leela, Radhaprema Leela, Prahllad Natak, Jatra and others were categorized under this group. At last a new dramatic tradition was originated from the influence of Western theatre after the advent of British to India. Various historical, social and political contents were introduced in this theatre tradition. It was named as Modern Theatre

So the theatrical performance tradition of Odisha was categorized in to four types. They were: 1. Traditional Folk Theatre 2. Classical Sanskrit Theatre 3. Folk Theatre 4. Modern Theatre.

### Area of The study

Against this backdrop the present study has been conducted taking seven selected forms from the above mentioned Folk Theatre and Traditional Theatre forms of Odisha as its Population. They are Bharata Leela, Prahllad Nataka, Pala, Danda Nata, Chaiti Ghoda Nata, Rama Leela and Galpasagar. So some villages of prevalent districts of these theatre forms have been chosen as its area of study. A list of its area of study is given below.

SL NO	NAME OF THE FORM	CATEGORY	PREVALENT DISTRICTS	VILLAGES UNDER THE AREA OF STUDY
1	Bharta Leela	Folk Theatre	Ganjam Nayagarh Gajapati Rayagada	Gothagan Gudiapalli Kabisurya Nagar Ramachandrapur
2	Prahallad Nataka	Folk Theatre	Ganjam Gajapati Rayagada	Bomakei Dhbalapur Kharanipada Bholasingi

				Karadakana
3	Rama Leela	Folk Theatre	Cuttack, Khurdha, Nayagarh, Boudh,Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur	Putu, Khandadeuli, Machakote, Makarjhola, Golamundula
4	Galpasagar	Folk Theatre	Ganjam	Golamundula
5	Harikatha	Folk Theatre	Ganjam	Erendra
6	Pala	Folk Theatre	Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Baleswar,Bhadrak, Jajpur,Deogarh, Kendrapada,Puri, Jagatshinghpur, Khurdha, Nayagarh, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj	Jagannath Pur, Padampur, Pamasara, Khalikote, Repur
7	Danda Nata	Traditional Folk Theatre	Anugul, Bolangir,Boudh, Cuttack,Dhenkanal, Deogarh, Ganjam, Jharsuguda, Kandhamala, Khurdha, Nayagarh	Pittala,Burupada, Pankalabadi, Nalabanta,
8	Chaiti Ghoda Nata	Traditional Folk Theatre	Cuttack,Jajpur, Jagatshinghpur Kendrapada, Puri	Cuttack, Mahanga, Jajpur

### Main Objective

The main objective of the current study is to prepare a well researched, authentic document on bellow mentioned points.

1. Antiquity of Odishi Theatre.
2. Categorization of Odishi Theatre as per their contents styles and forms.

3. An exhaustive list of Folk Theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre forms of Odisha.

### Method of collecting Data

The main method which has been used in this work is field study. Other than this, qualitative method also has been used to collect data. Personal interviews of Gurus, performers and experts have been done to make the data authentic. Along with the secondary data whatever available are used for supplementing the documentation. Mainly Non probability sampling method has been used in this work. Apart from this the following methods has been implemented during the period of data collection.

- 1) Observation Method.
- 2) Opinionative Method.
- 3) Personal Interview Method.
- 4) Telephonic interview method.
- 5) Study of previous research work.

### Exhaustive List of TFT and FT of Odisha

The Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademy had identified to 136 numbers of performing art forms. These forms were not categorized as per the differences of their content, form and style due to lack of authentic and scientific research in this field . Because any forms of art can never be accepted as the form of Folk theatre or Traditional Folk theatre. A form can be declared as the form of Theatre on the ground of its literary contents, dramatic structure and performance elements. So an exhaustive list of 23 numbers of Folk theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre forms of Odisha has been prepared after a critical study of their contents, forms and styles. A list Folk Theatre (FT) and Traditional Folk Theatre (TFT) of Odisha was given bellow.

#### The list of TFT forms of Odisha

SL. No	Name of the Form	Category	Prevalent Districts	Period of Performance
1	Danda Nata	TFT	Anugul Bolangir Boudh Cuttack Dhenkanal Deogarh Ganjam Jharsuguda Kandhamala Khurdha Nayagarh	Chaitra Month of Hindu Calender (March)  It was associated with the Meru Jatra of Odisha and was observed for thirteen, eighteen or twenty one days under the ritualistic tradition of Goddess Kali. It was concluded on Chaitra Sankranti.

2	Mughal Tamsha	TFT	Bhadrakh	Month Phalguna and Chaitra
3	Ghoda Nata	TFT	Cuttack Jajpur Jagatshinghpur Kendrapada Puri	Month Chaitra of Hindu Calender. It was observed for eight days as per the ritualistic tradition of Goddess Basheli  (Chaitra Purnima to the Ashtami of Month Baisakha)
4	Dhanu Jatra	TFT	Bargarh	Month Pausha  (January)  It was observed during the traditional festival Dhanu Jatra of Bargarh.
5	Oshakothi	TFT	Ganjam	It was observed from the eighth day of bright lunar fortnight (Shukla Pakhya) to full moon of month Aswina of Hindu calender.

### The List of Folk Theatre (FT) forms of Odisha

SL No	Name of the Form	Category	Prevalent Districts	Period of performance
1	Rama Leela	FT	Cuttack Khurdha Nayagarh Boudh Ganjam Jagatsinghpur	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
2	Krushna Leela	FT	Cuttack Puri Ganjam	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)

3	Rasa Leela	FT	Puri Nayagarh Ganjam	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
4	Radhaprema Leela	FT	Ganjam Puri	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
5	Bharata Leela	FT	Ganjam Nayagarh Gajapati Rayagada	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
6	Pala	TFT	Cuttack Dhenkanal Baleswar Bhadrak Jajpur Deogarh Kendrapada Jagatshinghpur Khurdha Puri Nayagarh Sambalpur Jharsuguda Sundargarh Keonjhar Mayurbhanj	It was performed on the worship of Lord Satyanarayan throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
7	Geetinatya	FT	Kendrapada Jagatshinghpur Cuttack Puri	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
8	Jatra	FT	Cuttack Jajpur	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic)

			Puri Khurdha Kendrapada Jagatshinghpur Bhadrak Baleswar	festivals)
9	Prahlad Nataka	FT	Ganjam Gajapati Rayagada	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
10	Daskathia	FT	Ganjam Nayagarh Bhadrak Cuttack Keonjhar Kendrapada	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
11	Desiaya Nata	FT	Rayagada Koraput Nabarangpur Malakangiri	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
12	Bhutakeli	FT	Ganjam Gajapati Rayagada	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
13	Laxmi Purana	FT	Bolangir Bargarh Sambalpur Nuapada Deogarh Jharshuguda Sundargarh Sonapur	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
14	Dadhi Nata	FT	Baleswar Bhadrak	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic

			Mayurbhanj	festivals)
15	Bandi Nata	FT	Sambalpur Bargarh Bolangir Sonepur	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
16	Kandhei Nata  (Ravana Chaya)	FT	Anugul Cuttack Dhenkanal Keonjhar Ganjam Khurdha	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
17	Galpasagar	FT	Ganjam	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)
18	Harikatha	FT	Ganjam	Throughout the year  (Any social, cultural, religious and ritualistic festivals)

### Characteristics of FT

- 1) As per the Natyashastra, Folk Theatre had been continued since time immemorial. It was as old as the civilization. There were also many descriptions about such type of performances in Natyashastra of Bharata Muni.
- 2) FT was a performing art practice of the indigenous folk artists of a locality. It was created and developed by the artists of a locality. Prahlad Nataka, Rama Leela, Bharata Leela, Pala, Dasakathia, Galpasagara, Harikatha were created by our own writers as well as performers. These were not written by any divine characters.
- 3) The contents of FT were from the great epics like The Mahabharat, The Ramayan and the literary sources of ancient and middle era Odia literature. The Rama leela was collected from Ramayana, Krushna Leela from Bhagabata, Bharata Leela from Mahabharata, Harikatha From haribansha, Prahlad Nataka from Nrusingha Purana,
- 4) The content, style and form of Folk Theatre were partial structured and codified under the grammar of Indian Performance tradition. The application of Pancha Sandhi, Pancha Artha and Pancha Prakruti theory were found from the written text of some FT forms like Rama leela, Krushna leela, Geetnatya, Bhutakeli and Others.
- 5) The main interesting feature of FT was the presence of mediator (Sutradhara) or a comedian (Vidushaka) who narrated the story and linked it with the everyday problems of the audience.

- 6) Another interesting feature of FT was the invocation to God (Nandigana) and introduction (Prastavana) at the beginning of performance and the obligation to God and audience for their peaceful, successful performance (Bharata Bakya) at the end of Performance.
- 7) The forms of FT were created from the spontaneous artistic expression of a particular poets and artists of rural society. For example Prahllad natak was written by Ramakrushna Chotaray, Ramaleela was written by Baishya Sadashiva, Bharta Leela was written by Dinababndhu Das, Rasa leela was written by Mohan Sundar Dev Goswami, Geetinatya was written by Baishnab Pani.
- 8) Its main purpose of FT was to entertain the audience as well as to spread moral values as per their literary contents. For example Galpasagar, Harikatha, Jatra, Kandhei Nata, Bhutakeli, Pala, Desiya Nata and others
- 9) The literary contents of FT were formally written scripts. It was passed from generation to generations through the performance and training of Gurus. Artists of Folk Theatre were learning the skills of performance in an traditional process of art education. The performers of Rama Leela, Krushna Leela, Bharata leela, Prahllad Natak, Harikatha, Pala were trained under the guardianship of Guru/Gayaka till the ending if training as his disciple.
- 10) The forms of FT were recognized easily by the educated and elite class of the society. Because the contents of TFT forms were collected from the popular mythological Odia literature like Rama Leela, Prahllad Nataka, Dasakathia, Radhaprema Leela and others.
- 11) Participation of woman in the medium of FT was always allowed and encouraged. Because the forms of FT were not incorporated with our religion and ritualistic tradition. For example Rasa leela, Geeti Natya, Jatra, Bharata Leela, Radhaprema Leela, Ram Leela and others.
- 12) The forms of FT were remunerative in nature. The performers of FT were performing theatre having the aim to earn their livelihood and achieve artistic recognition.
- 13) Most of the forms of Folk Theatre were non-religious in nature and those were performed for recreational purpose on the occasion of social, religious and cultural festivals for example:- Rama Leela, Bharata Leela, Radhaprema Leela, Prahllad Nataka, Dasakathia and
- 14) They were acting as the carrier of literal values from one generation to other.
- 15) The contents of FT were mythological but its performances were non-religious in nature for example :- Pala, Rama Leela, Radhaprema Leela, bhrat Leela, Prahllad Nataka, Geetinatya, Harikatha
- 16) There were no scopes for the artists of FT to incorporate new issues of their life and livelihood with the medium of performance. Because it had already been written and fixed. Rama Leela, Prahllad Nataka were coming under this category.
- 17) FT meant to the theatre of common people and whenever the people felt the need to change its content, they were doing so for the larger interest of society like Harikatha, Galpasagar, Desiya Nata and Kandhei Nata.
- 18) Folk theatre was not a community and religion controlled form of theatre. Every one had any exclusive rights over its. Haikatha was created and developed by a single person Guru Tarini Charan Patra and Dasakathi was created and developed by also a single person Guru Agadhu Sahu.
- 19) Folk Theatre was the theatre of common people and whenever the people feel the need to change its content and style, they are allowed to do so for the large benefit of society.

### Characteristics of Traditional Folk Theatre

1. As per the Natyashastra, TFT had been continued since time immemorial. It was as old as the civilization.

2. TFT was a performing art practice of the indigenous folk artists of a locality/community. It was spontaneously created. The creator/originator were unknown/not recorded.
3. Those were originated from the socio-cultural base and religious influence of ancient society and controlled by various religious movements of society. Danda Nata, Ghoda Nata, Oshakothi and others the major TFT forms of this category.
4. The forms of TFT were created from the spontaneous artistic expression of a particular religious community. Danda Nata was created from the religious and ritualistic celebrations of two Sudra communities of Shaiva and Shakta. Ghoda Nata was created from the ritualistic activities of fisher communities of coastal Odisha. Oshakothi was also originated from the religious and ritualistic practices of Bauri (A SC community) of Ganjam district.
5. It was a distinctive form of theatre that represented to the communities, value, taste, life, livelihood along with their ritualistic tradition and religious beliefs. Ghoda Nata was representing to the life and livelihood of Kaibarta community of Odisha.
6. Most of the forms of TFT had been originated from the base of oral performance tradition but later its content was fixed, codified and written. Our social lives, Livelihood, religion, tradition, passion, profession were the fundamentals of Traditional Folk Theatre. At first the contents of Danda Nata, Ghoda Nata and Oshakothi were not written and fixed but later it was written by various poets and dramatists of concerned theatre forms.
7. Artists of TFT learned the skills of performance from two sources. The primary source was their religious and ritualistic activities and the secondary source was its relevant ancient religious literature.
8. The contents of the TFT were collected from the literary sources of ancient and middle era mythological literature along with our daily activities, life, life style, livelihood, problems, struggles and interaction of our common rural people.
9. The forms of TFT expressed and enriched the ritualistic tradition, religious belief along with the values of mythological texts.
10. The forms of TFT were completely rural, religious, ritualistic and traditional in nature. Those were not performed at any time, any place and by any characters. The performance of Danda Nata, Ghoda Nata, Oshakothi, Dhanu Jatra could never be arranged at any place, any time and by any people.
11. These were highly influenced by various religious movements of middle era. Danda Nata, Ghoda Nata and Oshakothi were influenced by Shakta movement. Dhanu Jatra was partially associated with Vashnabism.
12. The contents of the TFT forms were derived from the literary sources of ancient and middle era mythological literature along with our daily activities, life style, livelihood, problems, struggles and interaction of common rural people.
13. The content, style and form of TFT were not structured and codified under the grammar of Indian performance tradition. Because the forms of TFT were more religious and ritualistic by nature.
14. The forms of TFT were the theatre of the society, which are small, isolated, self sufficient and mostly homogeneous in nature. Most of TFT were associated with the Sudra communities of society.
15. TFT forms were partially recognized by the educated and elite class of the society.
16. The TFT forms were highly ritualistic and religious. Those were being observed as religious celebration of several days. Religious observation and spiritual satisfactions were the motto of TFT. So Participation of woman was strictly restricted in the forms of TFT.

17. The content and style of TFT were fixed as per the description of Mythological texts, ritualistic and religious deeds of artists. So, it can never be changed. Sometimes the artists of FT try to incorporate new issues of their life and livelihood with the medium of performance. Many modern issues were presented being incorporated with the performance of Danda Nata, Mughal Tamsha and Dhanujatra.
18. The forms of TFT were non remunerative in nature. At first devotees and artists were performing the forms of TFT touring from village to village to achieve their desired religious goal without charging any performance expenses. Gradually they started to collect fees to meet their performance expenses. Danda Nata was its brightest example.
19. It was a collective, community and religion-based form of theatre. No single individual had any exclusive rights over it. Danda Nata and Dhanu Jatra were coming under this category.
20. The forms of TFT were acting as the agent of mythological, religious, social and traditional values from one generation to other for example Pala, Ghoda Nata, Dhanujatra and Oshakothi

### **The conceptual Difference between FT and TFT**

- 1) The contents of Traditional Folk theatre were associated with our Myth, Mythological literature, religion and ritualistic deeds the contents of Folk Theatre were along with our livelihood. On the hand the contents of Folk Theatre were collected from the contents of mythological literature.
- 2) The performances of FT were arranged at any time and any place as per the interest of audiences. But the performances of TFT were not arranged like Folk Theatre.
- 3) The forms of TFT were performed only on the religious festivals of their concerned communities. But the forms of FT were allowed to perform at any social and cultural events of society.
- 4) All skilled and talented artists were allowed to participate in the performance of FT forms. But in the field of TFT the artists of its concerned communities, religions and ritualism's were permitted to participate. .
- 5) Every Place from village to city were used as the performance space of Folk Theatre. But only the temple courtyards, places of religious festivals, house front of devotees, in front of the house of village head man were only used for the performance TFT forms.
- 6) Mostly the performers of TFT were restricted in their costumes, food, resting and day to day behavior during the period of performance. Sometimes they had to adopt the life style of sages during the period of performance. But it was not observed in the medium FT. They were free from all restrictions during the period of performance.
- 7) Performances of TFT forms were not restricted under the performance tradition of Indian theatre. But the forms of FT were performed partially as per the grammars of Natyashastra. Importance was given to the performance of Mangalacharan, Nandigana, Prastabana and Bharatavakya in the performances of FT.
- 8) Most of times Kings, Landlords, priests and poets were patronizing to the performers of FT. But the temple priests, religious preachers and devotees of concerned religion were patronizing to the performance of TFT forms.
- 9) Women were allowed to take part in the performance of FT. But on the other hand, women were strictly restricted to take part in the performance of TFT.

- 10) Most of the forms of TFT had been originated and developed by the devotion, dedication and keen interest of Sudra communities of our society but the forms of FT were originated and developed by the devotion, dedication and keen interest of village landlords, Bramhins, Khyatriyas, poets and Kings of our society.

## Conclusion

Above all it can be said that there are twenty three numbers of FT and TFT forms in Odisha. Among those five numbers of theatre forms has been categorized under Traditional Folk Theatre. They are Danda Nata, Ghoda Nata, Dhanu Jatra, Oshakothi and Mughal Tamsha. On the other hand seventeen numbers of theatre forms has been categorized under Folk Theatre. They are Rama Leela, Krushna Leela, Rasa Leela, Radhaprema Leela, Bharta Leela, Geetinatya, Jatra, Prahllad Natak, Pala, Dasakathia, Desia Nata, Bhutakeli, Laxmi Purana, Dadhi Nata, Bandi Nata, Kandhei Nata, Galpasagara and Harikatha. It has been found during the period of data collection Galpasagar and Harikatha has already been extinct from the cultural scenario of Odia Folk Theatre. Many changes has been occurred in the content and style of Odia Folk Theatre and Traditional Folk Theatre forms due to Impact of Modernization, Globalization and Post modernism.

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