



Indian Council for Cultural Relations
Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre
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Sanskarika

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Amrit Mahotsav

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

ECHOES OF ANCIENT INDIAN TALES



India's storytelling traditions are as diverse as the culture of the country. Nalini Ramachandran explores a few of India's traditional storytelling methods that not only have immense social relevance but are ways of preserving the nation's heritage and passing them down to the next generation

Tanhaji (Tanhaji) Malusare, the commander of the Maratha army under Shivaji's rule, was determined to win back Kondhana Fort. From inside an enclosure, he brought out

a ghorpad (monitor lizard) named Yeshwant. As Tanhaji tied a rope around its torso and placed it against the wall, Yeshwant clambered up. A ghorpad's grip was said to be so strong that after it latched on to the ramparts, the entire army could climb up using the rope tied to its torso. But that day, sensing Tanhaji's life was in danger, Yeshwant turned back halfway. Tanhaji realised that Yeshwant had had a premonition, and said, "I've won 27 forts. Not once has the monitor lizard turned back! But I'm a true Maratha, and



A Bahurupiya (impersonator) artiste dressed as Hindu deity Lord Hanumana. This image was taken on October 07, 2018, at the Behrupiya festival held in New Delhi

"I'm not afraid of death!" And so, led by Yeshwant, he scaled the wall. This episode may or may not appear in official records, but it does in a centuries-old Powada, a form of Marathi folk poetry-cum-ballad that thrived during Shivaji's reign. Powada is one of the several Indian storytelling methods that chronicle historical events. But often, they present lesser-known accounts, thereby highlighting that history, like storytelling itself, is diverse. So, just as Powada uses verse, prose and music to narrate tales of valour, the glorious lives of the Rajputs, the Mughals and the Deccan sultanates are, respectively, presented through Rajasthani, Mughal and Deccani miniature paintings. These

artworks also depicted scenes from mythology, especially from epics such as the Ramayana. Similarly, Pa#achitra painting, practised widely in Raghurajpur (a heritage village in Odisha's Puri district), is also known for its mythological renditions. Intricate and vibrant, this art often comprises the 'frame within a frame' layout, with each section presenting iconic episodes. Pa#achitra artists also practise Tala pa#achitra, a storytelling method where tales are engraved on dried palm leaves. Odisha is popular for Chhau too. A dance form that is also performed in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, Chhau originated from ancient warrior camps. Using energetic dance, superfast spins,

high jumps and swordplay, it presents stories of legendary and divine warriors.

A Bahurupiya (impersonator) artiste dressed as Hindu deity Lord Hanumana. This image was taken on October 07, 2018, at the Behrupiya festival held in New Delhi

Preserver of language

Tales of brave heroes have also been the mainstay of Dastangoi, a popular form of storytelling during the Mughal era that was traditionally rendered in Urdu. But these characters lived in fantastical worlds alongside djinns (spirits) and dragons. When listeners of the time began preferring realistic tales, Dastangoi faded from the storytelling horizon. Decades later, modern storytellers revived the

tradition and today, one can enjoy a Dastangoi performance at art festivals. Preservation of languages and dialects has been at the centre of Indian storytelling. Several traditions have never had written texts, and yet, they have lived on for hundreds of years.

Storehouse of knowledge

Apart from language, storytelling has also turned the spotlight on traditional knowledge — be it scientific concepts or ways of living. Kolam (sacred floor design) from Tamil Nadu is based on mathematical calculations and geometrical concepts. Agricultural folk songs of Arunachal Pradesh narrate tales about the origin of grain, the process of jhum cultivation (slash-and-burn)

and more. Wooden and clay dolls and figurines from Channapatna (Karnataka), Krishnanagar (West Bengal) and Kondapalli (Andhra Pradesh) beautifully portray people from all walks of life and depict, to the minutest detail, their dressing styles and professions.

Vehicle of Faith

For ages, storytelling has helped people learn about shared beliefs and religious teachings. Sculptures and engravings in temples, stained-glass paintings in churches and Jain manuscript paintings are a few examples. Such visual depictions have been one of the best ways to explain religious teachings to those who were unable to read the sacred texts. Take for instance, the vibrant thangka art. It is a Tibetan Buddhist practice that is popular in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, and depicts teachings and tales from the lives of Shakyamuni Buddha and other gurus like Padmasambhava, Marpa, and Milarepa through painting or appliqué work.

Social relevance

Not just religious beliefs, but stories have also helped impart socially-relevant messages. Bahurupiyas (Behrupiyas) from Rajasthan, who take on the personas of mythological, historical and everyday characters, use cosplay and wit for this very purpose. A great tool for

mass communication, storytelling traditions are also an effective way to raise awareness on various subjects like gender equality, girls' education, hygiene and healthcare, and environment conservation. The identity of communities, especially of storytellers, comes from the storytelling traditions they follow, which, in turn, is closely associated with their primary occupation. Telangana's Cheriya scroll painting epitomises this point. Cheriya scrolls, which look like traditional, hand-painted, narrative comics, are created by the Nakash community of artists. However, nine different communities narrate nine different sets of mythological stories that are depicted in these paintings. Often, these are tales about the origin of certain communities. For example, the Koonapuli (Kunapuli) community of storytellers uses specific Cheriya scrolls to narrate tales to the Padmashali people (a weaving community) about legends related to the weaver community.

Protector of Nature



Former Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh (extreme right) presents a Chamba rumal to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (second from right) on October 18, 2016, during an event at the state's Mandi district



Theyyam, a ritualistic performance held inside Kerala's sacred groves, is deeply rooted in nature worship. There are about 400 types of Theyyam and in each, the performers appear as manifestations of a tree or forest spirit, a tiger or serpent god, or some other local deity. Considered to be one of India's oldest art forms, Theyyam performances present tales of ancient tribal gods

and heroes. Nature forms the basis of most traditions. Which is why, conservation of the environment guarantees, to a large extent, the continuation of these rich and indigenous traditions too.

The Guiding Light

In his monthly radio address to the nation (Mann ki Baat) in September 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra

Modi had pointed out, "The traditions created by our ancestors are significant even today. When they cease to exist, there is a void. One such tradition is storytelling." All these methods not only connect people to the past, but guide us towards the future too. Understanding their significance, culture enthusiasts, heritage conservators and NGOs are innovating and finding modern

mediums to keep them alive. Also, with the Prime Minister's encouragement and the initiatives of various government agencies, stories are set to find newer audiences. Meanwhile, the traditional storytellers continue to look ahead and scale barriers with determination, just as Tanhaji had done at Kondhana.



NALINI RAMACHANDRAN

Nalini Ramachandran is an author with multiple books to her name. She takes a keen interest in Indian traditions, especially in the art and craft of storytelling. She has worked as a writer and an editor across various media — film and television, newspapers and magazines, and children's books and graphic novels.

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INDIAN DIASPORA IN SRI LANKA



DHYAN CHAND

For many, Dhyan Chand is simply the greatest Indian field hockey player of all time. He was the man who mesmerized everyone with his silky stick-work, earning him the nickname "The Wizard". Fans also regarded him as the best athlete in Olympic history. He was known for his extraordinary goal-scoring feats.

Early years:

He was born in Allahabad, on 29th August 1905. His father Subedar Sameshwar Dutt Singh was in the British Indian army and also a hockey player. His mother

was Sharadha Singh and he two brothers named Roop Singh and Mool Singh. Due to his father's numerous transfers, Dhyan Singh (Chand) had no proper education, in fact he dropped out of school in six years.

He had no interest in Hockey or any other sport, in early age except for wrestling.

Growing up:

Dhyan Singh (Chand) graduated from Victoria University, Gwalior in 1932. He joined the Indian Army at the age of 16 and between

1922 & 1926, he played in the Indian Army hockey team. He was eventually selected as a center forward, in his first tour to New Zealand. Returning to India he was promoted to the rank of Lance Naik, and went on to play in the 1925, Amsterdam, Olympics. He played domestic Hockey after getting permission from the Army, to play for UP. He won the tournament, and it was decided that the tournament would be held every two years.

Golden years:

In the 1928, Summer

Olympics. India beat Netherlands 3-0 in the finals, Chand scoring 14 goals became the top scorer. In the 1936 Berlin Olympics, India beat Germany 8-1 and Chand and his brother Roop shared the glory, with both of them scoring 4 each. Roop became top scorer

After he returned from Berlin, he mostly was devoted towards army hockey as the commencement of the 2nd World War made it difficult to play international hockey. He did win his last domestic tournament though, the Beighton Cup

in Kolkata. He also played his last international game in Mombasa, where he captained the team, and obviously winning all matches and scoring 33 goals in 12 games. He then at his forties served the Indian nation to help the British fight the 2nd World War. Later he was promoted to Lieutenant.

Autumn of life:

Chand retired from the army in 1956 aged 51, with the rank of Major. The Government of India honored him the same year by conferring him the Padma Bhushan, India's third highest civilian honor. After retirement, he accepted the position of Chief Hockey Coach at the National Institute of Sports, Patiala, a post he held for several years. Chand spent his last days in his hometown of Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India.

In 1970, he was diagnosed with stage I liver cancer. He died on December 3, 1979. A statue was built in Jhansi to show respect towards him.

He scored over 400 goals in the 10 years he played Indian hockey.

The national stadium in Delhi was renamed Dhyan Chand National stadium in 2002 in his honor. An AstroTurf pitch at the Indian Gymkhana club in London has also been named after the legend.

The government of India has issued a commemorative postage stamp and a First day Cover in honor of Dhyan Chand, as he is believed to be the greatest ever Indian Hockey player to ever played the game.

Some rarely known facts:

His actual name was Dhyan Singh, he was called Chand by his teammates because he used to wait for the moon to come out for practice.

During 1936 Olympic final against Germany, Dhyan Chand removed his spiked shoes and stockings in the second half and played barefoot, but still he managed to score three goals. During 1936 Olympics,

the whole city of Berlin had posters "Visit the hockey stadium to watch the Indian magician Dhyan Chand in action".

Adolf Hitler was very impressed with his game and offered him German citizenship and the rank of Colonel in his army.

It is said that once while playing, Dhyan Chand was not able to score a goal against the opposition team. After several attempts he argued with the umpire over the measurement of the goal post and surprisingly it was found to not be in conformation with official width of a goal post under international rules. Hockey authorities in the Netherlands once broke his hockey stick to check if there was a magnet inside!

Dhyan Chand was among the nominees considered for India's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna in 2014, however he didn't receive the award.

Chand's birthday, 29 August, is celebrated as National Sports Day in India.

India's highest award for lifetime achievement in sports is the Dhyan Chand Award which has been awarded annually from 2002 to sporting figures who not only contribute through their performance but also contribute to the sport after their retirement.

Chand's autobiography, Goal! was published by Sport & Pastime, Madras in 1952.

By

Aarrosh Chakrabarti



3 to 24

Every Sundays
4.00 pm

Monthly Lecture Series -55,58,60,62

IDY 2022- Curtain raiser event

Online Yoga lecture / workshop sessions for Param
Dhamma Chaitya Pirivena, Ratmanala
by Shri Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga expert from India

Sanskriti Sandhya Series – 23

A documentary lecture on
“Sri Rama Navami”.

“Sri Rama worship in Sri Lanka”

By Dr. Subashini Pathmanathan
Outstanding scholar & Renowned Bhartha Natya
artiste

10

Sunday
6.00pm

7

Thursday
7.30pm

Monthly Lecture Series-57

IDY 2022- Curtain raiser event

On World Health Day

Online Yoga- Gautam Buddha Astangik Marga
by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India

Monthly Lecture Series-59

IDY 2022- Curtain raiser event

On the occasion of World Voice Day

Yoga for voice culture - Online

by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India

16

Saturday
7.30pm

8

Friday
6.00pm

Sanskriti Sandhya Series – 22

An evening of Bollywood Music

by
Visharadh Khanika Edirimanne

Poya day celebration -21

Event to mark Bak Full Moon Poya Day

16

Saturday

Sanskriti Sandhya Series – 24

An evening of musical performance –

“Nasha”

By Bollywood ensemble

21

Thursday
7.30pm

For details in regard to online classes on
Bharatha Natyam, Kathak, Sitar, Violin, Tabla, Carnatic vocal, Yoga and Hindi
please call on tell no. +94 77 672 6143 or email to iccrcolombo2@gmail.com.
For upcoming facebook live events, visit www.facebook.com/ICCRSriLanka

Free Events. All are cordially invited.