

## VI. The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

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The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity aims at ensuring better visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and raising awareness of its importance while encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity. So far nine elements have been inscribed on this List in for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The following art forms were inscribed on the UENSCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

### **In the year 2010**

- Chhau dance
- Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan
- Mudi yettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala

### **In the year 2009**

- Novruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz, Nevruz Azerbaijan – India – Iran (Islamic Republic of) – Kyrgyzstan – Pakistan – Turkey – Uzbekistan
- Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India

### **In the year 2008**

- Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre
- Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana
- Tradition of Vedic chanting

### **A. Tradition of Vedic chanting (2008)**

The Vedas comprise a vast corpus of Sanskrit poetry, philosophical dialogue, myth, and ritual incantations developed and composed by Aryans over 3,500

years ago. Regarded by Hindus as the primary source of knowledge and the sacred foundation of their religion, the Vedas embody one of the world's oldest surviving cultural traditions.

The Vedic heritage embraces a multitude of texts and interpretations collected in four Vedas, commonly referred to as “books of knowledge” even though they have been transmitted orally. The Rig Veda is an anthology of sacred hymns; the Sama Veda features musical arrangements of hymns from the Rig Veda and other sources; the Yajur Veda abounds in prayers and sacrificial formulae used by priests; and the Atharva Veda includes incantations and spells. The Vedas also offer insight into the history of Hinduism and the early development of several artistic, scientific and philosophical concepts, such as the concept of zero.

Expressed in the Vedic language, which is derived from classical Sanskrit, the verses of the Vedas were traditionally chanted during sacred rituals and recited daily in Vedic communities. The value of this tradition lies not only in the rich content of its oral literature but also in the ingenious techniques employed by the Brahmin priests in preserving the texts intact over thousands of years. To ensure that the sound of each word remains unaltered, practitioners are taught from childhood complex recitation techniques that are based on tonal accents, a unique manner of pronouncing each letter and specific speech combinations.

Although the Vedas continue to play an important role in contemporary Indian life, only thirteen of the over one thousand Vedic recitation branches have survived. Moreover, four noted schools – in Maharashtra (central India), Kerala and Karnataka (southern India) and Orissa (eastern India) – are considered under imminent threat.

Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00062>

**B. Ramlila, the traditional performance of Ramayana (2008)**

Ramlila, literally “Rama’s play”, is a performance of the Ramayana epic in a series of scenes that include song, narration, recital and dialogue. It is performed across northern India during the festival of Dussehra, held each year according to

the ritual calendar in autumn. The most representative Ramlilas are those of Ayodhya, Ramnagar and Benares, Vrindavan, Almora, Sattna and Madhubani.

This staging of the Ramayana is based on the Ramacharitmanas, one of the most popular storytelling forms in the north of the country. This sacred text devoted to the glory of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, was composed by Tulsidas in the sixteenth century in a form of Hindi in order to make the Sanskrit epic available to all. The majority of the Ramlilas recount episodes from the Ramacharitmanas through a series of performances lasting ten to twelve days, but some, such as Ramnagar's, may last an entire month. Festivals are organized in hundreds of settlements, towns and villages during the Dussehra festival season celebrating Rama's return from exile. Ramlila recalls the battle between Rama and Ravana and consists of a series of dialogues between gods, sages and the faithful. Ramlila's dramatic force stems from the succession of icons representing the climax of each scene. The audience is invited to sing and take part in the narration. The Ramlila brings the whole population together, without distinction of caste, religion or age. All the villagers participate spontaneously, playing roles or taking part in a variety of related activities, such as mask- and costume making, and preparing make-up, effigies and lights. However, the development of mass media, particularly television soap operas, is leading to a reduction in the audience of the Ramlila plays, which are therefore losing their principal role of bringing people and communities together.

Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00110>

### **C. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre (2008)**

Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre, which is practised in the province of Kerala, is one of India's oldest living theatrical traditions. Originating more than 2,000 years ago, Kutiyattam represents a synthesis of Sanskrit classicism and reflects the local traditions of Kerala. In its stylized and codified theatrical language, netaabhinaya (eye expression) and hasta abhinaya (the language of gestures) are prominent. They focus on the thoughts and feelings of the main character. Actors undergo ten to fifteen years of rigorous training to become fully-fledged

performers with sophisticated breathing control and subtle muscle shifts of the face and body. The actor's art lies in elaborating a situation or episode in all its detail. Therefore, a single act may take days to perform and a complete performance may last up to 40 days.

Kutiyattam is traditionally performed in theatres called Kuttampalams, which are located in Hindu temples. Access to people, the stage performance was originally restricted owing to their sacred nature, but the plays have progressively opened up to larger audiences. Yet the actor's role retains a sacred dimension, as attested by purification rituals and the placing of an oil lamp on stage during the performance symbolizing a divine presence. The male actors hand down to their trainees detailed performance manuals, which, until recent times, remained the exclusive and secret property of selected families.

With the collapse of patronage along with the feudal order in the nineteenth century, the families who held the secrets to the acting techniques experienced serious difficulties. After a revival in the early twentieth century, Kutiyattam is once again facing a lack of funding, leading to a severe crisis in the profession. In the face of this situation, the different bodies responsible for handing down the tradition have come together to join efforts in order to ensure the continuity of this Sanskrit theatre.

Sources:<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00010>

#### **D. Novruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz, Nevruz (2009)**

Novruz, Nowrouz, Nooruz, Navruz, Nauroz or Nevruz marks the New Year and the beginning of spring across a vast geographical area covering, inter alia, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. It is celebrated on 21 March every year, a date originally determined by astronomical calculations. Novruz is associated with various local traditions, such as the evocation of Jamshid, a mythological king of Iran, and numerous tales and legends. The rites that accompany the festivity vary from place to place, ranging from leaping over fires and streams in Iran to tightrope walking, leaving lit candles at house doors, traditional games such as horse racing or the traditional wrestling practised in Kyrgyzstan. Songs and dances are common to almost all the regions, as are semi-sacred family or public meals. Children are the primary

beneficiaries of the festivities and take part in a number of activities, such as decorating hard-boiled eggs. Women play a key role in organizing Novruz and passing on its traditions. Novruz promotes the values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families, as well as reconciliation and neighbourliness, thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and various communities.

Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00282>

**E. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India (2009)**

Every year in late April, the twin villages of Saloor-Dungra in the state of Uttarakhand (northern India) are marked by Ramman, a religious festival in honour of the tutelary god, Bhumiya Devta, a local divinity whose temple houses most of the festivities. This event is made up of highly complex rituals: the recitation of a version of the epic of Rama and various legends, and the performance of songs and masked dances. The festival is organized by villagers, and each caste and occupational group has a distinct role. For example, youth and the elders perform, the Brahmins lead the prayers and perform the rituals, and the Bhandaris – representing locals of the Kshatriya caste – are alone entitled to wear one of the most sacred masks, that of the half-man, half-lion Hindu deity, Narasimha. The family that hosts Bhumiya Devta during the year must adhere to a strict daily routine. Combining theatre, music, historical reconstructions, and traditional oral and written tales, the Ramman is a multiform cultural event that reflects the environmental, spiritual and cultural concept of the community, recounting its founding myths and strengthening its sense of self-worth. In order to ensure that it remains viable, the community's priorities are to promote its transmission and to obtain its recognition beyond the geographical area in which it is practised.

Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00281>

### **F. Mudiyetu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala (2010)**

Mudiyetu is a ritual dance drama from Kerala based on the mythological tale of a battle between the goddess Kali and the demon Darika. It is a community ritual in which the entire village participates. After the summer crops have been harvested, the villagers reach the temple in the early morning on an appointed day. Mudiyetu performers purify themselves through fasting and prayer, and then draw a huge image of goddess Kali, called as kalam, on the temple floor with coloured powders, wherein the spirit of the goddess is invoked. This prepares the ground for the lively enactment to follow, in which the divine sage Narada importunes Shiva to contain the demon Darika, who is immune to defeat by mortals. Shiva instead commands that Darika will die at the hand of the goddess Kali. Mudiyetu is performed annually in 'BhagavatiKavus', the temples of the goddess, in different villages along the rivers ChalakkudyPuzha, Periyar and Moovattupuzha. Mutual cooperation and collective participation of each caste in the ritual instils and strengthens common identity and mutual bonding in the community. Responsibility for its transmission lies with the elders and senior performers, who engage the younger generation as apprentices during the course of the performance. Mudiyetu serves as an important cultural site for transmission of traditional values, ethics, moral codes and aesthetic norms of the community to the next generation, thereby ensuring its continuity and present times.

#### Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00345>  
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### **G. Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan (2010)**

Songs and dances are an expression of the Kalbelia community's traditional way of life. Once professional snake handlers, Kalbelia today evoke their former occupation in music and dance that is evolving in new and creative ways. Today, women in flowing black skirts dance and swirl, replicating the movements of a serpent, while men accompany them on the khanjari percussion instrument and the poongi, a woodwind instrument traditionally played to capture snakes. The dancers wear traditional tattoo designs, jewellery and garments richly

embroidered with small mirrors and silver thread. Kalbelia songs disseminate mythological knowledge through stories, while special traditional dances are performed during Holi, the festival of colours. The songs also demonstrate the poetic acumen of the Kalbelia, who are reputed to compose lyrics spontaneously and improvise songs during performances. Transmitted from generation to generation, the songs and dances form part of an oral tradition for which no texts or training manuals exist. Song and dance are a matter of pride for the Kalbelia community and a marker of their identity at a time when their traditional travelling lifestyle and role in rural society are diminishing. They demonstrate their community's attempt to revitalize its cultural heritage and adapt it to changing socio-economic conditions.

Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00340>

#### **H. Chhau dance (2010)**

Chhau dance is a tradition from eastern India that enacts episodes from epics including the Mahabharata and Ramayana, local folklore and abstract themes. Its three distinct styles hail from the regions of Seraikella, Purulia and Mayurbhanj, the first two using masks. Chhau dance is intimately connected to regional festivals, notably the spring festival ChaitraParva. Its origin is traceable to indigenous forms of dance and martial practices. Its vocabulary of movement includes mock combat techniques, stylized gaits of birds and animals and movements modelled on the chores of village housewives. Chhau is taught to male dancers from families of traditional artists or from local communities. The dance is performed at night in an open space to traditional and folk melodies, played on the reed pipes mohuri and shehnai. The reverberating drumbeats of a variety of drums dominate the accompanying music ensemble. Chhau is an integral part of the culture of these communities. It binds together people from different social strata and ethnic background with diverse social practices, beliefs, professions and languages. However, increasing industrialization, economic pressures and new media are leading to a decrease in collective participation with communities becoming disconnected from their roots.

Sources:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00337>