

Folk Theatre Forms of India:

Tamasha

Tamasha is considered a major traditional dance form of the Marathi theatre, which includes celebration filled with dancing and singing and is performed mainly by nomadic theatre groups throughout the Maharashtra region. The word “Tamasha” is loaned from Persian, which in turn loaned it from Arabic, meaning a show or theatrical entertainment.^[1] In the Armenian language, “To do a Tamasha” means to follow an exciting and fun process or entertainment. Unofficially, this word has come to represent commotion or display full of excitement.^[1] The traditional form of Tamasha was inspired by a lot of other art forms like Kathakali, Kaveli, ghazals etc.



The region of Maharashtra had a long theatrical tradition, with early references to the cave inscriptions at Nashik by Gautami Balashri, the mother of the 1st-century Satavahana ruler, Gautamiputras Satakarni. The inscription mentions him organizing Utsava's a form of theatrical entertainment for his subjects.^[1] Tamasha acquired a distinct form in the late Peshwa period of the Maratha Empire and incorporated elements from older traditional forms like Dasavatar, Gondhal, Kirtan etc. Traditional Tamasha format consisted of dancing boys known as Nachya, who also played women's roles, a poet-composer known

as Shahir, who played the traditional role of Sutradhar, who compered the show. However, with time, women started taking part in Tamasha.^[2]



Marathi theatre marked its journey at the beginning of 1843.^[3] In the following years, Tamasha primarily consisted of singing and dancing, expanded its range and added small dramatic skits known as Vag Natya.^[3] These included long narrative poems performed by the Shahir and his chorus, with actors improvising their lines. There are two types of Tamasha dance forms: dholki bhaari and the older form known as sangeet baari, which contains more music and dance than drama.^[4]



The government of Maharashtra has instituted annual awards in the memory of the late Vithabai Narayangavkar Lifetime Achievement Award for those who had extensively contributed to the preservation of the Tamasha Art form throughout the world.

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