



PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU
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Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

(Ministry of Culture)

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Intangible Cultural Heritage: An Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with them that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as a part of their cultural heritage. Its importance is not in the cultural manifestation itself, but in the wealth of knowledge, know-how and skills that are transmitted from one generation to the next.¹

The term ‘cultural heritage’ has changed content considerably in recent decades, partially owing to the instruments developed by [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#). Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes **traditions or living expressions** inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.



While fragile, intangible cultural heritage is an important factor in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization, an understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of different communities helps with intercultural dialogue, and encourages mutual respect for other ways of life.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but

¹<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1781868> dated 20th Dec 2021



rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.²

Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

With the recent inscription of Durga Puja in Kolkata (2021) on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

of Humanity, India now has **14 intangible cultural heritage** elements on the prestigious UNESCO's Representative List of ICH of Humanity.

In recent years, the ICH elements that saw inscriptions are **Kumbh Mela** (inscribed 2017), **Yoga** (inscribed 2016) among others.³

List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

S.No.	Intangible Cultural Heritage Element	Year of Inscription
1.	Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre	2008
2.	Tradition of Vedic chanting	2008
3.	Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana	2008
4.	Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India	2009
5.	Chhau dance	2010
6.	Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan	2010
7.	Mudiyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala	2010
8.	Buddhist chanting of Ladakh: recitation of sacred Buddhist texts in the trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir, India	2012
9.	Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur	2013
10.	Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India	2014
11.	Nawrouz, Novruz, Nowrouz, Nowrouz, Nawrouz, Nauryz, Nooruz, Nowruz, Navruz, Nevruz, Nowruz, Navruz	2016
12.	Yoga	2016
13.	Kumbh Mela	2017
14.	Durga Puja in Kolkata	2021

1. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Theatre

²<https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>

³<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1781868> dated 20th Dec 2021

Kutiyattam was inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (originally proclaimed in 2001).

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, neta abhinaya (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.⁴

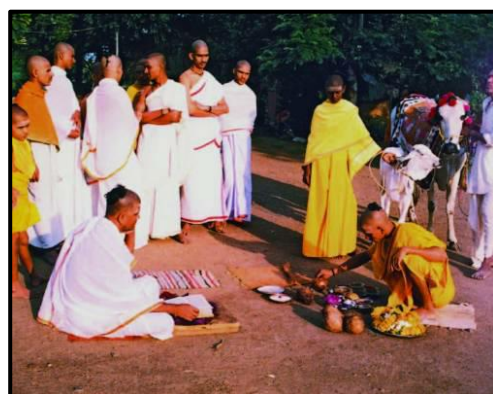
For video on Kutiyattam, [click here](#).

2. Tradition of Vedic Chanting

Tradition of Vedic Chanting was inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (originally proclaimed in 2003).

The Vedas comprise a vast corpus of Sanskrit poetry, philosophical dialogue, myth, and ritual incantations developed and composed over 3500 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.⁵



For video on Vedic Chanting, [Click Here](#).

3. Ramlila, The Traditional Performance of The Ramayana

Ramlila was inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (originally proclaimed in 2005).



⁴<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kutiyattam-sanskrit-theatre-00010> accessed on 11:00 hrs Dated 21st Dec 2021

⁵<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/tradition-of-vedic-chanting-00062>

Ramlila, literally “Rama’s play”, is a performance of 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 was composed by Tulsidas in the sixteenth century in a form of Hindi in order to make the Sanskrit epic available to all.⁶

For video on Ramlila, [Click Here](#).

4. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India



Ramman was inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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.⁷

For video on Ramman, [click here](#).

5. Chhau Dance

Chhau was inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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 Chaitra Parva. Its



⁶<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ramlila-the-traditional-performance-of-the-ramayana-00110> dated 21st Dec 2021

⁷<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ramman-religious-festival-and-ritual-theatre-of-the-garhwal-himalayas-india-00281> dated 21st Dec 2021

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.⁸

For video on Chhau Dance, [click here](#).

6. Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances of Rajasthan

Kalbelia was inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.



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.⁹



For video on Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances of Rajasthan, [click here](#).

7. Mudi yettu, Ritual Theatre and Dance Drama of Kerala

Mudi yettu was inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Mudi yettu 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



⁸ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/chhau-dance-00337> accessed on 11:28 am dated 21st dec 2021

⁹ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kalbelia-folk-songs-and-dances-of-rajasthan-00340> accessed on 11:25 am dated 21st dec 2021

harvested, the villagers reach the temple in the early morning on an appointed day. Mudi yettu performers purify themselves through fasting and prayer, 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.¹⁰

For video on Mudi yettu, [click here](#).

8. Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh: Recitation of Sacred Buddhist Texts in The Trans-Himalayan Ladakh Region, Jammu and Kashmir, India

Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh was inscribed in 2012 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

In the monasteries and villages of the Ladakh region, Buddhist lamas (priests) chant sacred texts representing the spirit, philosophy and teachings of the Buddha. Two forms of



Buddhism are practised in Ladakh – Mahayana and Vajrayana – and



there are four major sects, namely Nyingma, Kagyud, Shakya and Geluk. Each sect has several forms of chanting, practised during life-cycle rituals and on important days in the Buddhist and agrarian calendars. Chanting is undertaken for the spiritual and moral well-being of the people, for purification and peace of mind, to appease the wrath of evil spirits or to invoke the blessing of various Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, deities and rinpoches. The chanting is performed in groups, either sitting indoors or accompanied by dance in monastery courtyards or private houses.¹¹

For video on Buddhist chanting, [click here](#).

9. Sankirtana, Ritual Singing, Drumming and Dancing of Manipur

Sankirtan was inscribed in 2013 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

¹⁰<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mudi yettu-ritual-theatre-and-dance-drama-of-kerala-00345> accessed on 11:20 am dated 21st dec 2021

¹¹<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/buddhist-chanting-of-ladakh-recitation-of-sacred-buddhist-texts-in-the-trans-himalayan-ladakh-region-jammu-and-kashmir-india-00839> accessed on 11:16AM dated 21st Dec 2021



Sankirtana encompasses an array of arts performed to mark religious occasions and various stages in the life of the Vaishnava people of the **Manipur plains**. Sankirtana practices centre on the temple, where performers narrate the lives and deeds of Krishna through song and dance. In a typical performance, two drummers and about ten singer-dancers perform in a hall or domestic courtyard encircled by seated devotees. The dignity and flow of aesthetic and religious energy is unparalleled, moving audience

members to tears and frequently to prostrate themselves before the performers.

Sankirtana has two main social functions: it brings people together on festive occasions throughout the year, acting as a cohesive force within Manipur's Vaishnava community; and it establishes and reinforces relationships between the individual and the community through life-cycle ceremonies.¹²

For video on Sankirtana, [click here](#).

10. Traditional Brass and Copper Craft of Utensil Making Among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab, India



Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab was **inscribed in 2014** on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The craft of the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru constitutes the traditional technique of manufacturing brass and copper utensils in Punjab. The metals used – copper, brass and certain alloys – are believed to be beneficial for health. The process begins with procuring cooled cakes of metal that are flattened into thin plates and then hammered into curved shapes, creating the required small bowls, rimmed plates, to larger pots for water and milk, huge cooking vessels and other artefacts.¹³

For video on Traditional Brass and Copper Craft of Utensil Making, [click here](#).

¹²<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sankirtana-ritual-singing-drumming-and-dancing-of-manipur-00843> Accessed on 11:30 Am dated 21st dec 2021

¹³<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-brass-and-copper-craft-of-utensil-making-among-the-thatheras-of-jandiala-guru-punjab-india-00845> accessed on 11:53 am dated 21st dec 2021

11. Nawrouz

Nawrouz was inscribed in 2016 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

New Year is often a time when people wish for prosperity and new beginnings. March 21 marks the start of the year in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It is referred to as Nauryz, Navruz, Nawrouz, Nevruz, Nooruz, Novruz, Nowrouz or Nowruz meaning ‘new day’ when a variety of rituals, ceremonies and other cultural events take place for a period of about two weeks.



An important tradition practised during this time is the gathering around ‘the Table’, decorated with objects that symbolize purity, brightness, livelihood and wealth, to enjoy a special meal with loved ones. New clothes are worn and visits made to relatives, particularly the elderly and neighbours. Gifts are exchanged, especially for children, featuring objects made by artisans¹⁴

For video on Nawrouz, [click here](#).

12. YOGA

Yoga was inscribed in 2016 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The philosophy behind the ancient Indian practice of yoga has influenced various aspects of how society in India functions, whether it be in relation to areas such as health and medicine or education and the arts. Based on unifying the mind with the body and soul to allow for greater mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing, the values of yoga form a major part of the community’s ethos.



Yoga consists of a series of poses, meditation, controlled breathing, word chanting and other techniques designed to help individuals build self-realization, ease any suffering they may be experiencing and allow for a state of liberation.¹⁵

For video on Yoga, [click here](#).

¹⁴<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/nawrouz-novruz-nowrouz-nowrouz-nawrouz-nauryz-nooruz-nowruz-navruz-nevruz-nowruz-navruz-01161> accessed on 11:42 am dated 21st dec 2021

¹⁵<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/yoga-01163> accessed on 11:49 am dated 21st dec 2021

13. Kumbh Mela

Kumbh Mela was inscribed in 2017 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred Pitcher) is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, during which participants bathe or take a dip in a sacred river. Devotees believe that by bathing in the Ganges one is freed from sins liberating her/him from the cycle of birth and death.



Millions of people reach the place, and the congregation includes ascetics, saints, sadhus, aspirants-kalpavasis and visitors. The festival is held at Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik every four years by rotation and is attended by millions of people irrespective of caste, creed or gender.¹⁶

For video on Kumbh Mela, [click here](#).

14. Durga Puja in Kolkata

The Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO's 2003 Convention on Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has inscribed '**Durga Puja in Kolkata**' on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during its 16th session being held at Paris, France from 13th to 18th December 2021.

¹⁶ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kumbh-mela-01258> accessed on 11:41 am dated 21st dec 2021

The Committee commended Durga Puja for its initiatives to involve marginalized groups,



and individuals as well as women in their participation in safeguarding the element.

Durga Puja is an annual festival celebrated in September or October, most notably in Kolkata, in West Bengal of India, but also in other parts of India and amongst the Bengali diaspora. It marks the ten-day worship of the Hindu mother-goddess Durga.

In the months preceding the festival, small artisanal workshops sculpt images of Durga and her family using unfired clay pulled from the Ganga River. The worship of the goddess then begins on the inaugural day of Mahalaya, when eyes are painted onto the clay images to bring the goddess to life. It ends on the tenth day, when the images are immersed in the river from where the clay came.¹⁷

For video on Durga Puja, [Click here](#).



National List for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

The [National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage \(ICH\) of India](#) is an attempt to recognize the diversity of Indian culture embedded in its intangible heritage. It aims to raise awareness about the various intangible cultural heritage elements from different states of India at national and international level and ensure their protection.

¹⁷<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/durga-puja-in-kolkata-00703> accessed on 11:40 am dated 21st dec 2021

Following UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, this list has been classified into five broad domains in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested:

1. Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
2. Performing arts
3. Social practices, rituals and festive events
4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
5. Traditional craftsmanship

The present items in the list have been collated from the projects sanctioned under the scheme for 'Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India' formulated by the [Ministry of Culture](#).



[Nautanki](#)



For complete details and state wise list on Intangible Cultural Heritage of India (ICH), [click here](#).

Efforts of Ministry of Culture for Preservation, Protection and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Country

The Ministry of Culture has appointed the [Sangeet Natak Akademi](#), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture, as nodal office for matters relating to the intangible cultural heritage including for preparation of the nomination dossiers for the Representative List of UNESCO. The Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) accordingly makes necessary interaction with the stakeholders, experts/officials etc. prior to finalization of the dossier in respect of element identified for the nomination. Being the nodal office, the SNA maintains a National Inventory of ICH elements and the inclusion of the identified element for UNESCO in the National Inventory/Register etc. of the applicant member state is also a pre-requisite for inclusion in the UNESCO's Representative List of ICH.



The Ministry of Culture makes regular Schemes, and organisations make efforts towards preservation, protection and promotion of intangible cultural heritage in the country. Various autonomous bodies under the Ministry of Culture have comprehensive mandates in this regard and are functioning in various spheres of preservation and promotion of intangible cultural heritage and diverse traditions of the country.

Some of the major organisations involved in preservation of propagation of ICH are named below:¹⁸

1. [Sahitya Akademi](#), [Lalit Kala Akademi](#), [Sangeet Natak Akademi](#)
2. [Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts](#)
3. [National School of Drama](#)
4. [Centre for Cultural Resources & Training](#)
5. [Zonal Cultural Centres](#) (seven in number)
6. [Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya](#)
7. [Anthropological Survey of India](#)

Schemes for preserving Indian Heritage by Ministry of Culture¹⁹

Scheme of Financial Assistance under Seva Bhoj Yojna (NEW)
Scheme of Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture
Scheme of Financial Assistance for Creation of Cultural Infrastructure
Scheme of Scholarship and Fellowship for Promotion of Art and Culture
Museum Grant Scheme
Scheme for Pension and Medical Aid to Artistes
Scheme for Promotion of Culture of Science (SPOCS)
Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage
Global Engagement Scheme
Schemes/Awards:Rajbhasha
Indian Conservation Fellowship Program (ICFP)

¹⁸ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1522577> accessed on 11:00 am dated 22nd Dec 2021

¹⁹ <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/schemes> accessed on 11:09 am dated 22nd Dec 2021

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- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ramlila-the-traditional-performance-of-the-ramayana-00110>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ramman-religious-festival-and-ritual-theatre-of-the-garhwal-himalayas-india-00281>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/chhau-dance-00337>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kalbelia-folk-songs-and-dances-of-rajasthan-00340>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mudiyettu-ritual-theatre-and-dance-drama-of-kerala-00345>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/buddhist-chanting-of-ladakh-recitation-of-sacred-buddhist-texts-in-the-trans-himalayan-ladakh-region-jammu-and-kashmir-india-00839>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/sankirtana-ritual-singing-drumming-and-dancing-of-manipur-00843>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-brass-and-copper-craft-of-utensil-making-among-the-thatheras-of-jandiala-guru-punjab-india-00845>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/nawrouz-novruz-nowrouz-nowrouz-nauryz-nooruz-nowruz-navruz-nevruz-nowruz-navruz-01161>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/yoga-01163>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kumbh-mela-01258>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/durga-puja-in-kolkata-00703>
- <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1522577>
- <https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/schemes>

Videos links:

- Durga Puja in Kolkata: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Az8SGiqk9-o>
- UNESCO video tweet: <https://twitter.com/unesconewdelhi/status/1471081944331001860?s=20>

AG/HP/RC/AKP/SS