

# RAMLILA PERFORMANCES



**SYNDICATE GROUP – 7**  
**IST MES FC, DR. MCR HRD IT**

# INTRODUCTION

Ramlila - 'Ram' and 'Lila'

Hindu Epic 'Ramayana' (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) or 'Ramcharitmanas (RCM)' (1574 CE).

Post monsoon autumn festival of Navaratri - 'Sharad Navratri'. Ends with Dussehra/Vijayadashami

Dramatic plays and dance sequences lasting 9 to 31 days

Declared by UNESCO an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' in the year 2008

# ORIGIN AND DEVELOPEMENT

Emergence – Bhakti Movement between the 15th and 17th centuries.

1<sup>st</sup> Ramlila shows – **Megha Bhagat** – disciple of Tulsidas in 1625 AD – Chitrakoot Ramlila in UP – Based on RCM

Existence before creation of this version – somewhere between 1200 and 1500 AD

Explosion in Hindi Heartland only after RCM – in people's language i.e. Awadhi

Krishna Das Kaviraj mentions in his 16th century hagiography of saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1533), Chaitanya Charitamrita

# FORMAT OF RAMLILA

- Performed in open arrangement in night.
- Staged by local mandali, Ramlila committee, Samiti.
- Actors drawn from same social grouping as the audience.
- Includes episode, dialogues, narratives, musical recitation and songs.
- Scenes stage management is done under the guidance of Vyasa.
- Singer (occasionally a priest) in the sidelines recites relevant verses.
- Dhol drummers, dholak and other musicians.
- Performance usually financed by self-organized Ramlila Committees.

# RAMLILA - INDIA

Chitrakoot  
Ramlila

Ramnagar  
Ramlila

Bakshi Ka  
Talab Ramlila

Agra Ramlila

Delhi Ramlila

Kumaoni or  
Almora Ramlila

Mithila Ramlila

Himachal  
Ramlila

# RAMNAGAR RAMLILA

Performed over 31 days.

Started– Circa 1830 by Maharaja Udit Narayan Singh, Kashi Naresh.

Most extensive, best performed and draws the largest audience (few thousands to 100,000).

City – OAT, Several sets – Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Lanka, Ashok Vatika, Panchvati etc.

Each day's performance begins – arrival of Maharaja.

Important roles – inherited by families. Role of Ravana – same family from 1835 to 1990. Role of Hanuman, Jatayu, and Janaka – belong to one Vyasa family.

Hundreds of sadhus – 'Ramayanis' – recite the Ramcharitmanas text.

# RAMNAGAR RAMLILA



# RAMNAGAR RAMLILA

All the characters – ‘Swarups’.

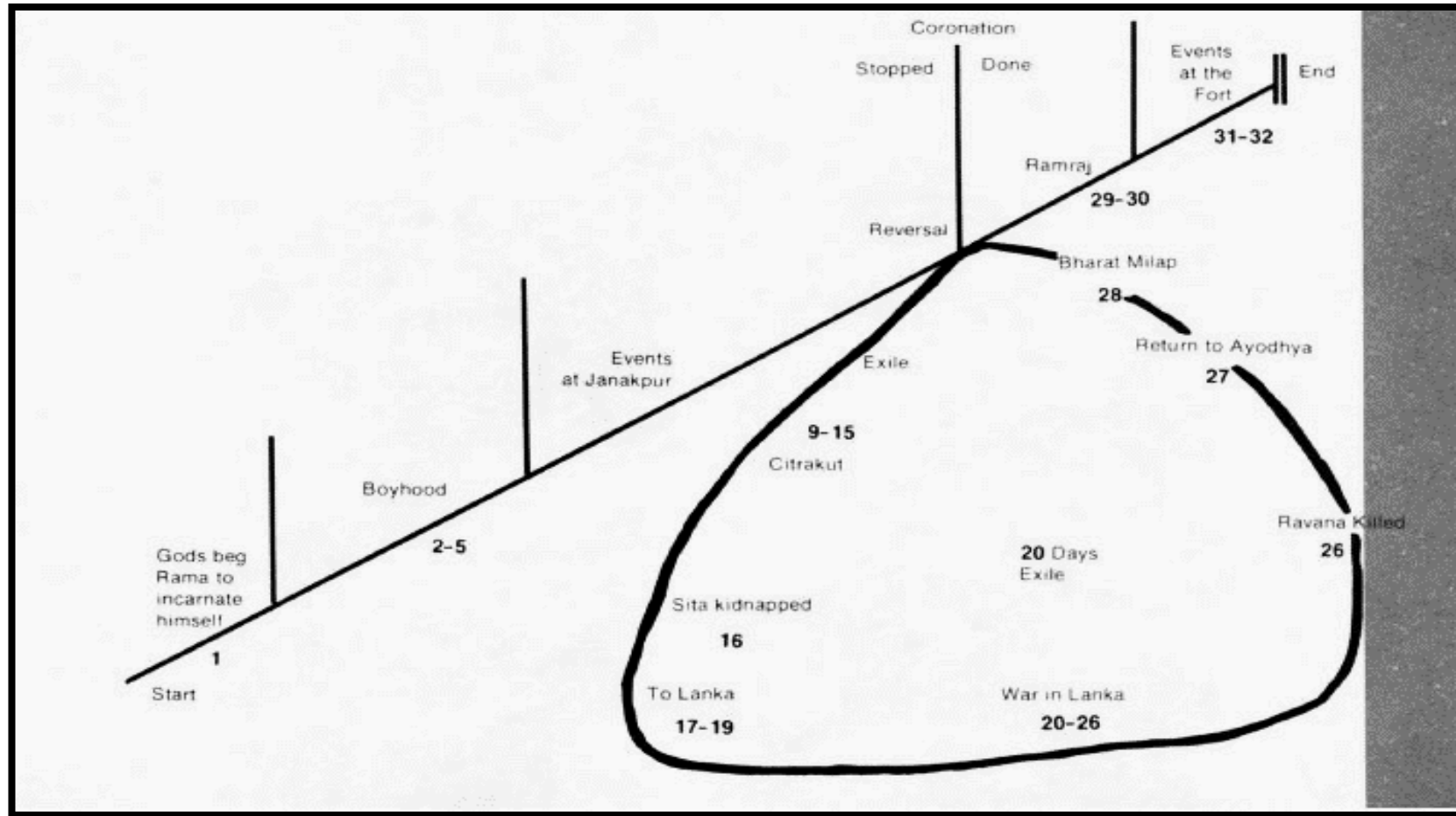
Considered divine for the entire month, worshipped by everyone.

Subject – Pilgrimage, Bhakti (Devotional Worship), Hindu ideas of reincarnation, the nature of a mixed oral–literate culture of immense sophistication, relationship between Government, Maharaja, and Ordinary people



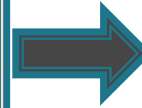


# RAMNAGAR RAMLILA



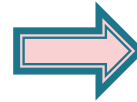
# CHITRAKOOT RAMLILA

- Oldest known ramleela to the world around 470 years ago.
- Chitrakoot Ramleela has not stopped for historic upheavals.
- Ramayanis read the RCM to the beat of drums and cymbals and swaroops enact accompanied by Vyas.
- Days are named after the chapter to be played — Van Gaman , Hanuman Milan, etc
- fixed roles assigned to different communities.
- accommodates the other bigger religion of the land ,Muslim.



# KUMAONI OR ALMORA RAMLILA

- First organised in Badreshwar Temple in 1860
- Spread to Nainital, Bageshwar and Pithoragarh.
- Dialogues - in form of songs based on classical Hindustani ragas.
- Symbol of communal solidarity with many songs use Urdu and Nepali words
- Muslims playing lead characters.
- Modernised by legendary dancer Uday Shankar in 1940



# DELHI RAMLILA

Oldest one on Ramlila Ground , Started by the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar.

Now performed by Luv kush Ramlila Committee.



# MITHILA RAMLILA



- Makeshift open-air theater at night.
- All males. No female participates.
- Focus is always given on the exploitation and pains of Seeta.
- Majority of the roles are played by the Brahmins except few characters.
- Lack of sponsorship from the maharaja of Mithila and Ramayan mainly responsible for disappearance.

# AGRA RAMLILA

Famous for marriage procession of Rama, Ram Barat through various localities of city during festivities of Ramlila.



# HIMACHAL RAMLILA

- Started in Jaisinghpur, Kangra almost 90 years ago.
- All actors were Brahmin (Awasthi Community).
- Uniqueness: used sanskrit language .

# BAKSHI KA TALAB

- Lead characters like Rama, Lakshman and Hanuman are played by Muslim youths.
- Adapted into a Radio play, 'Us Gaon ki Ram Lila', by Lucknow All India Radio, won the Communal Harmony Award in 2000
- four-day event starts on Dusshera



# RAMLILA – OUTSIDE INDIA

Ramlila is present in many countries like: Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji etc.

In south-east Asian countries Ramlila is very old and is based on their own versions of Ramayana. It is due to spread of Hinduism in ancient time by the Hindu rulers.

In the Caribbean countries like Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana etc. Introduced by the Indian immigrants during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

## MYANMAR

- 'Yama Zatdaw' – Myanmar version of Ramayana.
- Zatdaw means 'acted play' and Yama refers to Rama.
- Introduced during the reign of King Anawratha, the father of Burmese nation, in the 11th century CE.

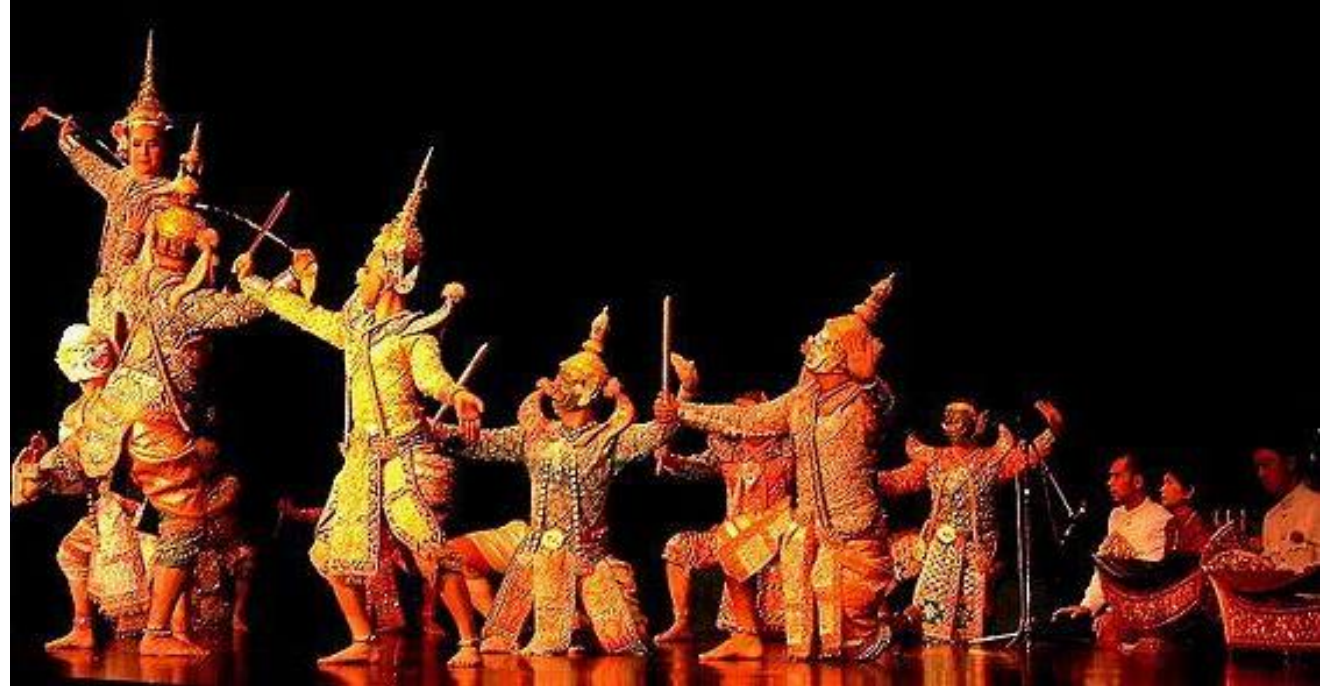


# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

## THAILAND

Thailand's national epic is 'Ramakien', adopted from Valmiki Ramayana

Ramakein has been widely adopted into art and theater.



# RAMLILA – OUTSIDE INDIA

## INDONESIA

A popular adage in Indonesia goes: “Islam is our religion. Ramayana is our culture.”

Follows an old Javanese version of Ramayana called ‘Kakawin Ramayan’(9th century)



# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

LAOS

'Phra Lak Phra Ram', is the national epic of the country  
Based on Valmiki Ramayana



# RAMLILA – OUTSIDE INDIA

## MALAYSIA

Hikayat Seri  
Rama– Stories of  
Rama  
Wayang Kulit–  
Puppet show



# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

TRINIDAD AND  
TOBAGO



# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

SURINAME





# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

GUYANA



# RAMLILA - OUTSIDE INDIA

MAURITIUS



# INNOVATIONS

## Shadow Ramlila

- All actions take place behind a screen and audience can see only shadows in front.

## Theatrical Ramlila-

- Delhi Bharatiya Kala Kendra.
- Started in 1957 by Shobha Deepak Singh.

## Puppet Ramlila

- Created 52 years ago by Gwalior based Little Ballet Troupe of Human Puppets.
- Angular movement.

## Russian Ramlila

- Each Soviet actor was chosen for His/Her attributes.
- e.g. Ram looked royal and benign, Sita dainty and tender and Lakshman truly angry. Russian production.

# DETERIORATION & CHALLENGES

No Funding

Lack of Youth in  
villages

Item Numbers being  
introduced

Less audience – Growth  
of television soap opera



# SIGNIFICANCE

People were illiterate –  
couldn't read – so drama.

Spreading of religion and  
celebration.

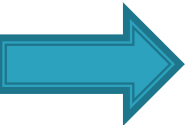
Brings the people and communities together  
w/o caste, religion and age.

# SIGNIFICANCE

What makes Ramayana and tales from other epics like Mahabharata, so enduring?

- Is it the inbuilt drama, the huge cast or something else?

It is the basic connection with human beings. These stories and lessons are still valid in families, societies and Politics. These epics live in our hearts and culture!





THANK YOU