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## Entertaining the Royalty. A forgotten tradition of the Vidushaka in Ancient Indian History

<https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2023.12.14>

**Abstract:** *This paper provides an overview of the importance of dwarf figures/jesters in Ancient Indian history and society. There are numerous dwarf-like figures depicted in ancient Indian temples. These little figurines would have not only filled the area and add decorative value but also, they have a small but significant place in iconography. A dwarf-like figure, the Vidushaka, who was a brahmin with a tuft on his head and a staff in his hand, was found on the walls of Ajanta and in the Natyashastra text. His occupation is to light the stressful environment by making the court laughing. It goes without saying how valuable the Vidushaka is as a kind of entertainment in ancient India. The objective of this research is to look at how the Vidushaka (jester) had been contributing to the 'entertainment industry' of ancient India and how they have been portrayed through out the history (from ancient to medieval times). This would also allow us to discover that jesters were not only adept at entertaining others with amusing jokes, but also able to express himself on the oddities of human life.*

**Key words:** History, Dwarfs, Vidushaka, Jester, Brahmin, Entertainment, Ancient Indian History

### Introduction

Ancient Indian temples show a large numbers of depictions of figures resembling dwarfs. We can find them anywhere if we only look closely, including on walls, pillars, ceilings, in interiors, and on facades. A certain range of interpretations that are characteristic of a particular image are clearly dictated by the placement of representations of dwarfs in the iconographic programme of temples and, as a result, its elements are always a reflection of a variety of ideas and trends, corresponding to both the time period and stage of development of society, as well as to individual perception; it reflects religious views, the political aspirations of the user and characteristics of real life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vorobyeva, 2013; 2014; 2017: 590; See also Sastri, 1959; Godbole, 1978; Kuiper, 1979; Jefferds, 1981; Bhat, 1982; Otto, 2001; Rosen, 2012; Zin, 2015; Sanathanan & Balakrishnan, 2021.

Dwarfs serve as the deity's entourage, armies, and associates most often in Hindu religious literature and Hindu Mythology.<sup>2</sup> These depictions of dwarfs in temple story scenes are referred to as mythological levels [Fig. 1].

It is important to identify who, specifically, we mean by 'dwarfs'. These are anthropomorphic creatures with long heads and small arms and legs that can occasionally be mistaken for children running and playing. Other times, the traits of the achondroplastic dwarf type are depicted quite realistically, such as an expanded Tami face and nose shape. Sometimes, small men who play a clowning and grimacing game go beyond what is acceptable. They are frequently depicted dancing and holding musical instruments. The images could have fantastical elements like a fusion of animal and human traits or even a fusion of plant forms.<sup>3</sup>

Dwarfism is a distinguishing quality that largely points to the images' folkloric origins. Sculptures of dwarfs are folklore figures that serve the same folkloric purpose of "offering an avenue for delivering what cannot be stated",<sup>4</sup> however this is not their only function. In the perimeter spaces of the temples, their images serve as amulets. The dwarf appears in both serious and lighthearted scenes, bad and good, on earth and in heaven, and alongside both gods and demons [Fig. 2].

Hindu mythology describes Apasmra as a dwarf who stands for verbal absurdity and spiritual ignorance. He goes by the names Muyalaka or Muyalakan as well. Apasmra must be tamed, not destroyed, in order to maintain the proper balance between spiritual understanding and ignorance in the world.<sup>5</sup> Killing Apasmra would represent achieving knowledge without the (important) effort, devotion, and hard work required, which would result in a reduction in the value of knowledge in all its manifestations. Lord Shiva performed the cosmic dance of Tandava to subjugate Apasmra in the avatar of Nataraja, the Lord of Dance. Nataraja subdued Apasmra by stomping on him with his right foot during dance. Since Apasmra is one of the few demons doomed to eternal life, it is commonly held that Lord Shiva will always exist in his Nataraja form, restraining Apasmra.

The dwarfs, who have different physical characteristics from the major characters, could be positioned on the relief in the same scene as them without disrupting the composition, damaging the readability of the motif, or going against the hierarchy, in contrast to other peripheral celestials. However, they precisely filled the gaps that the master was so concerned about.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hindu mythology is the body of myths and literature attributed to, and espoused by, the adherents of the Hindu religion, found in Hindu texts such as the Vedic literature, epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the *Puranas*, and regional literature like the *Tamil Priya Puranam*, the *Naalayira Divya Prabandham*, and the *Mangal Kavya* of Bengal. Hindu stories can also be found in popular literature that has been widely translated, such as the Panchatantra fables. (Macdonell, 1897: 1-9).

<sup>3</sup> Vorobyeva, 2017: 590.

<sup>4</sup> Sastri, 1959: 38.

<sup>5</sup> Gopinatha Rao, 1997: 223-9.

<sup>6</sup> Vorobyeva, 2017: 596.

Dwarfs are occasionally employed in the sculpture to highlight the central people. Typically, the dvarapala are accompanied by dwarfish-like human figures. A better impact cannot be achieved just by the two enormous figures flanking the entryway. If a dwarf figure were to be added below, the giant's personality would be strengthened. Thus, to create a relative effect, the dwarf theme is applied.<sup>7</sup>

In order to fill up empty space, a small dwarf figure is used. It is highly possible that occasionally there will be extra room after the main scene has been depicted. Instead of leaving the area empty, dwarfish figures are presented [Fig. 3]. They are occasionally depicted marching in formation. They are seen using musical instruments. There are flutes and shells in addition to percussion instruments like drums, cymbals, pots, ghats, and scrapers that are mostly found in hands of ganas. As a result, when the actual music in the temple faded, stone dwarfs perched on pillars and holding musical instruments produced immortal music that exalted their master.

The fact that the depictions of dwarfs in an ancient Indian temple brings up several crucial issues, including the relationship between comedy and religion in Indian culture. In Indian Aesthetics, Hasya's treatment is unfair. It is solely thought of as a safety valve – a way to vent off erratic passion.

Giving the performing arts a divine origin is a means of praising them and proving their value in human life. But to think that something has a heavenly or holy origin is to overlook the secular components of dramatic art, the human urge for mimicking and acting, and the goal of pure amusement and pleasure. This is especially important in the context of laughter because in India, ritual or religious performance has always been taken seriously and solemnly; it is never regarded as ridiculous or humorous, even though some of the imitative or mimic acts in a ritual may seem humorous to an outsider.<sup>8</sup>

After all, dwarfs frequently display comical appearances, postures, and gestures. There are also clear similarities between the Vidushaka in Sanskrit play, dwarfs and the typical picture of the palace jester amusing the gods with his antics, dancing, and grimacing. In fact, in Sanskrit play, the jester or clown is known as the Vidushaka. It must have been a skilled performer from a dramatic group. Dramatic performances are primarily intended to provide entertainment and pleasure to the tired or distressed mind. It goes without saying how valuable the Vidushaka is as a kind of entertainment. Every honorable endeavor, including the arts, was regarded as a kind of devotion to God in India. Music, dance, and drama are all recognized as distinct kinds of worship in the *Natyashastra*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sastri, 1959: 35.

<sup>8</sup> Bhat, 1982: 2.

<sup>9</sup> The *Natyashastra* is a thorough textbook and treatise on dramatic art that covers every facet of traditional Sanskrit theatre. It is thought that the mythical Brahman priest and sage Bharata was the author (1st century BCE-3rd century CE). Its several chapters include in-depth analyses of all the various arts, such as dance, music, poetry, and general aesthetics, that are represented in the traditional Indian idea of

For the temple area to be complete, where, according to aesthetic principles, all emotional states should have been present, a hilarious beginning was required. As ambassadors for the hilarious race *hasya*, the Ganas, dwarfs and the Vidushaka therefore made a positive contribution to the harmony and balance of the world [Fig. 11].

It is also possible that dramatists themselves took their lead from the *Shastra* and assigned their own the Vidushaka in a variety of characteristics, keeping in mind his crucial function as an entertainer and a source of on-stage laughter. The Brahmin Vidushaka depiction finest exemplifies this.

Beyond his sacred thread and possibly some aspect of his attire, this Vidushaka, who appears in the royal court plays of love, is only a Brahmin in name; he lacks any internal characteristics that would identify him as a genuine Brahmin. He cannot speak literate Sanskrit; instead, he speaks in the local language, and he even forgets the Gayatri mantra. He also does not know how many *Vedas* there are. Santushta (of *Bhasa's Avimaraka*) boasts that he learned five verses of a *Natyashastra* called the *Ramayana* in a year! Although the Vidushaka cannot read, he is prepared to bluff his way out of a situation involving written words by claiming that the specific letters do not exist in the manuscript he has examined.

Despite being uneducated, he is clever enough to take a short bath at the garden well, make a show of chanting Vedic mantras, and move quickly towards the royal harem in order to not miss the meals and gifts the queen offers.

A Brahmin's strength, according to Bhavabhuti, is in his words, which suggests that he is a physical coward. Like Vasantaka and Gautama, many the Vidushakas are paralyzed by their fear of snakes. Maitreya is afraid of the dark and will not venture outside without a female servant to keep him company. According to Madhavaya in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, the palace attendants also terrify the Vidushaka. The maids frequently triumph over the Vidushaka and make fun of him.

The Vidushaka pretences of being a high caste Brahmin, his ignorance of the *Vedas* and the *Shastras*, his gluttony, and his weakness have all been employed by Sanskrit dramatists to evoke humor. He is commonly referred to as a *mahabrahmana*, which is another word for fool. Nevertheless, he continues to expect the honor and respect due to a Brahmin.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, providing laughs is the Vidushaka most crucial duty. Bharata claims that the Vidushaka can make people laugh with his body, his attire, and his voice. The first two speak of the Vidushaka performance on stage. The physical appearance of the Vidushaka is certain to make people laugh if they are made to look like a defor-

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the drama. Its main significance is in its support of Indian play as a means of achieving religious enlightenment.

<sup>10</sup> Bhat, 1982: 2-4.

med person with protruding teeth, baldness, hunchback, lameness, or a malformed and ugly visage. It is important to keep in mind that this is a stage makeup issue.

Some aspect of physical ugliness or deformity went into the creation of the Vidushaka persona. For instance, he makes his clowns look like ‘brown monkeys’. Shudraka’s Maitreya has a head that is crooked, resembling a camel’s knee. Moreover, he has two side-locks that resemble crawfish on his head. Rajashekhara’s Vidushaka is bald. The Vidushaka walk and his gestures are further details. His actions would be amusing if he walked like a crane with his eyes up and rolling, or if he waved his crooked stick (kutilaka) while taking extra-long steps. There are no known details of the Vidushaka attire. The idea specifies the usage of barks and skins, a dhoti (lower garment) knotted extremely loosely, and a face with lines made of either red chalk or black soot ash.<sup>11</sup>

Most likely, the Vidushaka’s funny yet incomprehensible speech was what provided the true humor. Despite frequently being a target of jeers and a source of amusement for others. The Vidushaka can express himself on the peculiarities of human life with wit and wisdom and has a good sense of awareness. However, occasionally the Vidushaka comments go far beyond simple humor or cheap vulgarity and make a profound observation about human nature.

### **Traits of Vidhushaka**

The *Natyashastra* and archaeological evidence provide us the information essential for determining the precise traits of the Vidushaka look. The man has a hairless head, but there are odd artefacts visible there. Most likely, these are little buns of hair that have been styled and frequently adorned with flowers. Only flowers are seen in one instance, but these must have been strung together on hair strands, just as the strings of flowers seen hanging down the back. The man’s second characteristic, which is always visible is a staff that has been twisted into an unusual and distinctive shape that is unique to this figure.<sup>12</sup> The staff was to be grasped in the left hand and is known as “the bent one” (kutilla or kutilaka). The god Brahma himself gave the kutilla to theatre. Given that it appears in various dramas that the Vidushaka staff resembles a snake, it must have been used in theatre [Fig. 4].

The Vidushaka is described in the *Natyashastra* as having a bald head, while also suggesting that his head has the “crow’s foot” (kaka-pada). Furthermore, given the Vidushaka is portrayed as having a “crow’s foot” on top of his head in the drama *Mrcchakatika*, it appears that this was truly demonstrated on stage. The kaka-pada was most likely a unique type of tuft [Fig. 5]. Numerous literary sources suggest that hair

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<sup>11</sup> Bhat, 1982: 6.

<sup>12</sup> Zin, 2015: 380.

tufts, such as those worn by youngsters, slaves, and apparently also jesters, may have served as a symbol of humiliation in ancient India.<sup>13</sup>

A guy wearing the sacred thread across his breast and carrying a chain of pearls to recite the mantras, which identify him as a Brahmin, is plainly evident on one of the images, however other distinctive aspects are not replicated in all of them. He is shown in a way that is rather entertaining despite his acceptable social standing as he gestures to show that he is not going to sacrifice the candy he is carrying in a bowl.<sup>14</sup> His hands are occasionally bound with a string, and he is frequently depicted as an underling, either under the arm of his master or mistress, or even with his legs bowed as if in a dance position [Fig. 4].

The Vidushaka, or the jester who appears in Indian drama, is without a doubt the humorous Brahmin of ancient India; the Ajanta paintings<sup>15</sup> accurately capture the style of humor he generally exhibits. Although he speaks Prakrit on stage but he mixes up well-known literary titles or names that are typically associated with mythological tales, for example, the comedic dialogue in the dramas results from a blending of high social standing, unrestrained gluttony, and crude stupidity.<sup>16</sup>

Humor is not deliberate, but wit is. Humor almost never aims to hurt other people and is typically never hostile. It is a shield instead of a sword, as the Vidushaka in a Sanskrit play depicted. Humor depends on the situation, but wit depends on the phrase; it aims to safeguard the self. Humor implicitly criticizes both life in general and the flaws, foolishness, pretenses, and hypocrisy of the person.

Despite always being the hero's confidant in Sanskrit plays, the Vidushaka may have been classified as a Nicha patra due to this constraint on decorum.<sup>17</sup> When plays started to be employed as a form of entertainment after the Post Vedic Literature, it seems that the value of humor was realized. Laughter was meant to make us forget our sorrows, not to bring us joy.

The entire outlook on this attitude was drastically altered when the Vidushaka appeared in a Sanskrit play, yet he quickly established himself as a traditional

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<sup>13</sup> In the *Mahābhārata* III, 256 (ed. pp. 893-5; trans. pp. 722-3) there is a story about a king, who had to suffer the humiliation of having his head completely shaven except for five tufts (pañcasata). Similarly, in the *Mahābodhijātaka* (No. 528, ed. Vol. 5, p. 246; trans. pp. 125-6) bad ministers are punished by the king by having their property taken away; further, to humiliate them, the king orders, among other things, that their heads be shaved, leaving just five tufts.

<sup>14</sup> Zin, 2015: 380.

<sup>15</sup> The Ajanta Caves are a group of 30 Buddhist cave monuments carved out of rock in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra state, India, between the 2nd century and about 480 CE. The paintings and rock-cut sculptures found in the caves are among the best examples of ancient Indian art that have survived, especially the expressive paintings that convey emotions through gesture, posture, and form. See Michell, 2009: 336; The Jataka stories are mostly shown in the paintings in the Ajanta Caves. These are Buddhist stories that detail the Buddha's earlier incarnations. The fables and legends of Hindu and Jain literature also contain ancient values and cultural traditions that are incorporated into these fables, see Spink, 2009: 147-8.

<sup>16</sup> Zin, 2015: 380.

<sup>17</sup> Godbole, 1978: 107.

character. For example, the Vidushaka is a ‘must’ in every the *Act of a Trotaka*.<sup>18</sup> The Vidushaka in all the plays do not fit the ‘traditional definition’ because its functions have changed and developed throughout the history.

### Archaeological Evidence

The *Natyashastra*’s guidelines for portraying the jester may have been inspired by customs at courts, where jesters were distinguished by the comical “crow’s foot” on their shorn heads, as seen in art. According to the paintings of Ajanta, the “crow’s foot” was thought to be made up of hair strands organized in spherical pompons and embellished with flowers; these tufts were even more reminiscent of a bird’s foot.<sup>19</sup>

The Ajanta paintings do not adhere to any additional the *Natyashastra* requirements regarding the Vidushaka appearance. The treatise specifies that his skin should be painted black and red, that his body should be presented crooked (kubja), that he should limp, and that his face should be distorted [Figs. 4, 5].<sup>20</sup>

Such jesters are depicted at Ajanta as companions of ladies who appear to be yakshnis or river deities, either in the decorative ornamentation of door and window frames or in the architectural ornamentation of pillars at the entrances [Figs. 6, 7]. Twelve instances are known today; in the most of them, traces of vivid red, dark orange, or pink may still be seen on the figure’s body.

The companion of the women in each of the twelve sculptures from Ajanta is clutching a staff. The staff is always bent excessively. The depiction of the man’s head is done in a style reminiscent of the paintings: it is bald, occasionally resembling a skull cap, and it shows at least three round or somewhat pointed things above the temples and the forehead. Because he is always shorter than the woman he is with, the man is just tall enough for her to rest her arm on his shoulder [Fig. 6].<sup>21</sup>

The depiction of court jesters in Gupta and post-Gupta art is a perfect match for the *Natyashastra*’s description of the Vidushaka. The appearance of previously undiscovered visual material – including many jester depictions in Mathura and Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh – seems to require a review of the entire body of evidence, pushing the *Natyashastra*’s evidence even further back [Figs.8-10].

The Gupta-period terracotta plaque from Mathura [Figs. 9, 10] is not the only artefact that can be compared to representations in Ajanta; once the jester with his bent staff and tufts of hair has been identified, it can be found in many Gupta/Vakataka-period sites as well as post-Gupta India. For example, the Aurangabad caves.

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<sup>18</sup> Godbole, 1978: 108.

<sup>19</sup> However, it is quite impossible that the jester depicted in the Vidushaka could be depicted without having a “crow’s foot” on his head see Bhat, 1965: 336-43.

<sup>20</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra* XIII, 138-142 (ed. vol. 1, pp. 20-1; transl. pp. 230-1).

<sup>21</sup> Zin, 2015: 382.

The small companion can be seen not only next to the yakshinis at the entrances, but also next to Tara in Aurangabad cave VII. This is likely his most exquisite depiction. This image has a special meaning as well because his tufts have been connected to esoteric chants and it has mythological elements he was identified as the yaksa Manibhadra.<sup>22</sup>

Yakshas, mythological deities connected to the ground, the concepts of abundance and fertility, are first shown as represented as dwarfs. The oldest and most well-known cult in India is the Yaksha one. In the kingdom of Kubera, their lord, and the spirits of trees, mountains, etc., they were regarded as treasure keepers. Yakshas were therefore closely associated with riches, wealth, and success.

Yakshami refers to the dwarfs in Coomaraswamy's artwork as "guardians of the source of life", describing them as spirits of flora with plant themes emerging from their mouths and navels.<sup>23</sup> Kubera, who is associated with the Yakshas both mythologically and symbolically, is frequently pictured as a dwarf.<sup>24</sup>

Since the Shunga dynasty's rule (3rd-2nd century BC), Kubera has been widely represented in sculpture as a dwarf with a protruding belly who resides in the sacred space's threshold zone and benefits people who worship him. Later, Ganesha, who is similarly pictured with short limbs and legs and a large body, took up his duties.

Even more than 300 years later, the figure's comical nature is still obvious, as seen, for instance, in a sculpture in Bhuvaneshvar a pictured dancing next to the musicians.<sup>25</sup> Although his original characteristics, such as his triple-bent staff and round hair tufts, are still evident, he has been given a new feature that undoubtedly emphasizes his original humorous role. It is impossible to ignore the kutilaka and the hairstyle that, particularly in Nagarjunakonda and Mathura, so perfectly match the "crow's foot" recommended for the Vidushaka [Figs. 8, 9].<sup>26</sup>

A similar coiffure may be seen on a terracotta plate from Ahicchatra from the Gupta period (some 200 years later), where one of Siva's dwarfs, who is about to smash the sacrifice of Daksha, has hair tufts arranged in precisely the same way [Fig. 2].<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Huntington, 1981: 47-55.

<sup>23</sup> Coomaraswamy, 1971: 8.

<sup>24</sup> Vorobyeva, 2017: 593.

<sup>25</sup> Zin, 2015: 384.

<sup>26</sup> Zin, 2015: 387.

<sup>27</sup> Zin, 2015: 385.

## Continuance of Vidusaka as jester

The humorous courtier who serves as a constructive critic at the royal court in India seems to be carrying on the rich Indian tradition of the Vidushaka, a significant figure in Sanskrit drama. In India, a court jester is referred to as a Vidushaka. In terms of their importance at the court, the characters of the Vidushaka and the court jester are similar. The court jesters are described as being dwarfish and hunchbacked in the renowned work of traditional Indian dramaturgy *Natyashastra*.

The jester is a person who appears to be typical but stands out to others due to their profession or conduct. Some claim that jester is a figure who makes people laugh, while others assert that they are not just there to make people laugh. Some claim to be employed by the king. There are many distinct definitions, and there are numerous talks.

According to a broad definition, the Vidushaka stands for the creative person who interacts with society and offers satirical comments on its happenings; he challenges the egotistical narratives of those in authority and works as a platform for the voice of the people.<sup>28</sup>

Jesters have told stories of heroic deeds for many centuries and across many cultures, but they did more than just recall the past; they entertained, persuaded, and dreamed up tales that took their audiences to the brink of fascinating worlds. They reconstructed what was already understood and made new realities that went beyond the existing order from it using the transformational power of play and imagination.<sup>29</sup>

The jester displays an icon of play and subversive comedy as well as a strong, imaginative mind. These intricate, multifaceted characters were more than just clowns or storytellers; they were profoundly perceptive, provocative, and – in the words of King Lear – “oft prophetic” game changers. Throughout history and across cultures, the function of the jester has been crucial as a force for change. The jester's artful sense of play is a key driver of creative change in the greater world, just as his biting humor sparked political reform within the court. Jesters bewildered, dislocated, and transported both monarchs and commoners to the edges of the familiar by luring listeners into an unsettling traveler's zone that neither entails departure nor arrival and sets everything at a distance from recognisable places.<sup>30</sup>

In Indian history, the Vidushakas were not just jokers or performers who brought some humor into the ritualistic atmosphere of the courts of ancient India. Their razor-sharp humor and sympathetic observations were always supported by wisdom, which Kings frequently employed to good effect. Officially, the Vidushaka had no power in court, which is typically seen as a disadvantage, but it was precisely this

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<sup>28</sup> Sanathanan & Balakrishnan, 2021: 107.

<sup>29</sup> Rosen, 2012: 310.

<sup>30</sup> Rosen, 2012: 310.

lack of rank that permitted the jesters to speak freely because their remarks might be taken as jokes. They had to take care not to over the line and incur the wrath of their Kings.

The Vidushaka seems to have evolved through time into a court jester as well. There is a definite indication of this professional role played by the Vidushaka in Rajashekhara's plays. In this role, the Vidushaka frequently acts as a critic of royal whims and court life.<sup>31</sup>

An entertainer was required in the king's court to keep the guests amused. They hired a lot of skilled people. As an illustration, Tansen was hired by King Akbar to sing at the court. Some of these professional musicians, actors, or artists who played court jesters gained respect and worth as confidants. These talented comedians frequently made subtle jabs at their King's adversaries while also calling his majesty's attention to social issues. So, basically more than just making people laugh, the jester's primary role is that of an advisor.<sup>32</sup>

There are several historical records that demonstrate the existence of jester, and showed them relying more on wisdom than humor. There are some well-known jesters who have made history both renowned and spoken about. Jester can be found at the Kings Palace court. For instance, Gonu Jha was one of the first jesters in North India and worked for Mithila Hari Singh. According to a legend, Goddess Kali bestowed him great intelligence, and he used it to beat Kali and earn the nickname 'Pruttupannamoti' (Ready witted person). His story and the events surrounding it have spread throughout North India thanks to his wit.<sup>33</sup>

Another one is Tenali Rama who served as a poet in the court of King Krishnadevaraya in south India. He belonged to the Ashtadiggaja tribe. He was raised by Brahmins. Later, he adopted the name of the city Tenali, where his uncle resided, as his new name. He mostly worshipped Lord Shiva, but he also received the blessing of Goddess Kali. He is also known for funny poems like Udbhataradhya Charitamu and Panduranga Mahatmyam, which mostly narrate stories through song.<sup>34</sup>

The wit and wisdom of Birbal had endeared him not only to Akbar, but also to vast majority of the subjects of the Mughal empires. He had the rare distinction of achieving immense popularity during his lifetime, next only to that of Akbar. He was a good administrator, a good soldier and perhaps what pleased Akbar the most a good jester.<sup>35</sup>

Birbal, Tenali Raman, Gonu Jha and Gopal Bhar each resolved their Kings' diplomatic issues. Gonu Jha used his quick wit and intelligence to help the people solve their problems, as well as the problems of other kingdoms. Like how Birbal

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<sup>31</sup> Bhat, 1982: 7.

<sup>32</sup> Wade, 1998: 108-10.

<sup>33</sup> Rakesh, 1998: 26.

<sup>34</sup> Shulman, 1985: 180-98.

<sup>35</sup> Otto, 2001: 16.

resolved the Afgan King's pot of knowledge conundrum, Gopal Bhar did the same for Nawab Murshid Kuli Kha. The statues of Gopal Bhar are still on display in Ghurni, Krishnagar Town, and the palace of Krishna Chandra.<sup>36</sup>

The narratives best exemplify how the Vidushaka goes about its regular cases.

- The court jester's entertainment makes a visiting King very happy. When a King comes to town, he asks the jester to say something novel, and if the King is delighted, he gives the jester some gold coins. The jester initially turned down the offer because there were not enough gold coins, he said. But it was not until the visiting King raised the stakes and parted with the bag of gold coins that the jester finally decided to accept the offer. The jester refused to accept the bag of gold at this time, claiming that the king's act of generosity had made him happy. The jester then began to disparage his King as stingy and miserly. The court erupted in laughter as a result of this. The court laughed because both Kings were pleased, the host King laughed because the jester had humorously expressed the truth, and the visiting King chuckled because of the jester's flattery. The jester ultimately received a substantial award.
  
- A magician from North India visited the durbar one day. He performed several magical acts that delighted King KrishnadevaAyar. During the performance, the magician displayed an uncommon item. His head being cut off from his body. He asked the durbar's guests: "Can anyone in Vijayanagaram execute this magic?". However, no one dared to. The king was discouraged. then, Raman approached. He bowed in front of the King and the crowd before approaching the magician: "Can you perform the magic I do by closing my eyes with open eyes?". The magician was pushed by Raman. The magician saw nothing out of the ordinary in Raman's offer. The magician reassured himself, "I can perform any trick Raman performs with closed eyes with open eyes", and agreed to the challenge. Chili powder was brought by Raman in a bag. He applied the powder to it as he was dozing off. He remained still for a while. He opened his eyes after removing all the powder. Later, Raman brought the magician another bag filled with red chili powder. He instructed the magician to do the act with his eyes open. The magician tried to flee the situation. He was made fun of by the crowd gathered there. The defeated magician stopped his programmes and went back to his house. The king got enthusiastic. Tenali Raman's cleverness and brilliance paid off. Raman was chosen by the monarch to be his court jester. The crowd that had gathered there praised Raman.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Siegel, 1987: 314-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Stories of Tenali Raman*, 2002: 11-2.

- One sunny morning, Akbar and Birbal were strolling around the king's garden. When Akbar noticed the crows in his garden, he enquired as to their population in his realm. He asked Birbal the query. After giving it some thought, Birbal estimated that there are 90 000 239 9 crows in the realm. In awe of his prompt reply, Akbar questioned him: "What if there are more crows than the number you just mentioned?". Birbal retorted: "Then, crows from the neighboring kingdoms must be visiting". Akbar then enquired: "What if there are fewer than the number you mentioned?". Birbal calmly retorted: "The crows must have taken a holiday to the next kingdom".<sup>38</sup>

### **Reasons for Decline**

One of the numerous cultural items that colonial power brought to India was political cartooning. Narratives regarding the nature and development of Indian cartooning have been created using this inheritance from the British. These narratives, however, almost always ignore the Indian satirical heritage as well as the country's unique cultural character. In terms of social and political functions, the Vidushaka, a comedic character in Sanskrit play, has served as a precursor to the political cartoonist in the Indian satirical tradition. Additionally, it locates the fundamentals of caricaturing in pre-colonial Indian visual arts and illustrates the first vernacular cartoons as the nexus between the regional satirical tradition and the Western political cartoon model.<sup>39</sup>

The decline of the traditional culture of entertaining people can be attributed to the rising demand for modern art forms over traditional indigenous work because of its availability in more variety and lower prices, especially among young people.

There is not enough promotion to the literature that are available to younger generations to study and learn more about this. For fun, we all choose to use Facebook or YouTube. What if indigenous art forms were presented in an engaging way on these social networking sites and in textbooks to appeal to young people?

In addition to this, there are other factors, such as a decline in political desire to restore the traditional system and subsequent negligence. While numerous parties discuss issues such as poverty and education, none of them even consider include concerns for the revival of historic art forms in their election agendas or policy plans.

While the electronic media and the invasion of Western culture had hampered the development of the theatre, but the theatre itself should share some of the blame because it sought in vain to modernize itself rather than adhering to its traditional style. Traditional art forms are frequently delicate, expensive to maintain, and complex to comprehend. People typically choose modern art over traditional since it is

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<sup>38</sup> Patel, 1946: 20.

<sup>39</sup> Sanathanan & Balakrishnan, 2021: 91.

not economically advantageous. The traditional arts are having trouble competing in the expanding field of modern arts. At least in India and the subcontinent, its practitioners are having issues with the revenue and opportunities provided by the traditional form, which are much lower than those afforded by modern art. The lack of a sense of pleasure has led to the extinction of traditional art forms.

### Conclusion

Images of dwarfs or ganas can be found in the reliefs of temples dedicated to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. This attests to the deep integration of folk ideas into the iconographic programme of temples and points to some changes in religious beliefs over time, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, as well as characteristics of the value system that resulted in the fusion of folk and religious-dogmatic into a single whole.

In India, folk art has a long history and as its name implies, it provides voice to the ordinary people, displays a variety of popular beliefs (both religious and non-religious varieties), and expresses the sentiments and viewpoints of the common citizen. The *Maitrayee Upanishad* refers to the idea of folk-art culture, which is utilized to showcase popular expressions. This concept is represented through songs, dances, and many types of dramas, which are now collectively referred to as performing arts. To sum it up, performing arts or folk culture are the most observable aspects of ideological tendencies of the common people's ideologies within a certain era.

The historicity of the tradition of comic criticism that has been a vital part of the Royal Courts in India. The folk heroes of with Birbal, Tenali Ram, Gonu Jha, and Gopal Bhar elevate themselves from commoners to dignified courtiers by their wit and clarity of linguistic expression.

They were all intelligent, but they applied their intelligence to their work rather than to amuse people. With their special arsenal of wit and humor, great Indian jesters were always on the side of the oppressed against the wealthy and strong. In this way, court jesters served as conventional political humorists. Because they were independent of the hierarchical court system and had no stake in any one region, estate, or religion, their guidance was more likely to be objective and reliable. Their duty was to hold the monarch in check by making fun of his political choices and court life in general, much like modern political satirists do for people in positions of authority.

After independence, most of the folk arts are gradually dying off as other forms of entertainment have gained more and more popularity among the general public. It is time for the national and state governments to back these artistic endeavors and give the performing arts the much-needed patronage by raising public awareness of their significance. Because the art forms are not only the reflection of the culture, they are the indigenous intelligence passed through generations. With the loss of the art

form and practitioner, the entire knowledge is lost. Heritage art forms need to be introduced in “gifting culture,” especially by large companies with huge gifting budgets. By procuring art and craft objects from social enterprises, we can ensure the sustainability of many of these ancient traditions that are in danger of extinction. Hence, they are need to be conserved.



Fig. 1. Ghana “supporting” Shaivite cave temple. Shaivite cave temple No. 2, 7th century, Badami, Early Chalukya dynasty. Photo from (after Vorobyeva, 2017: 782, Fig. 131)



Fig. 2. Ahicchatra, National Museum New Delhi (after Zin, 2015: 394, Fig. 15)



Fig. 3. Decor of the vault of the cave Buddhist chaityagriha. Decor of the vault of the cave Buddhist chaityagriha No. 10 (Vishvakarman temple) in Ellora, 8th century, Early Chalukya dynasty (after Vorobyeva, 2017: 783, Fig. 134)



Fig. 4. Ajanta, cave XVII, porch, left rear wall (after Zin, 2015: 391, Fig. 3)



Fig. 5. Ajanta, cave II, right chapel, right side-wall (after Zin, 2015: 390, Fig. 1)



Fig. 6. Ajanta, cave V, porch, main entrance to the cave, door frame, right side (photo Rajesh Singh, after Zin, 2015: 392, Fig. 6)



Fig. 7. Ajanta, cave I, right pillar at the entrance to the shrine antechamber (photo Rajesh Singh, after Zin, 2015: 392, Fig. 5)



Fig. 8. Nagarjunakonda, site 37, Archaeological Site Museum, No. 36 (photo Wojtek Oczkowski, after Zin, 2015: 394, Fig. 13)



Fig. 9. Mathura Government Museum, No. 2795 (after Zin, 2015: 393, Fig. 10)



Fig. 10. Katra, Mathura Government Museum, No. 54.3768 (after Zin, 2015: 396, Fig. 19)



Fig. 11. Ghana, frolicking next to the bull Nandi. Relief fragment. cave temple No. 21 in Ellora, 7th century, Kalachuri dynasty (after Vorobyeva, 2017: 782, Fig. 129)

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**To cite this article:** Singh, P., Sharma, P. (2023). Entertaining the Royalty. A forgotten tradition of the Vidushaka in Ancient Indian History. *Historia i Świat*, 12, 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2023.12.14>



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