UNIT 3  YAKSHAGANA

Structure
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3.0  OBJECTIVES

To develop in the learner the ability to:
- read an expository text on an art form and understand its characteristics;
- comprehend new lexical items using cues from within the text;
- make inferences from the text;
- make predictions as they read;
- look for patterns and generalize;
- use the simple present tense to describe an art form;
- practice Articles (a, an and the); and
- describe an art form providing the necessary details.

3.1  WARM UP

Activity 1
Think about these questions and answer them.

1. How does one get to know the culture of a society? Tick the ones that you find are relevant.
   i) Food
   ii) Dress
   iii) Festivals
   iv) Religion
   v) Traditions and customs
   vi) Language
   vii) Industries
   viii) Cottage industries
   ix) Universities
   x) Malls and shopping plazas
   xi) Literature
   xii) Art forms
   xiii) Movie theatres
3.2 READING COMPREHENSION: YAKSHAGANA

Read the following passage and answer the following questions:

1. If you ever had the opportunity to witness a Yakshagana performance in Karnataka you would know what a rich art form it is, both acoustically and visually, since like an opera it tells its story through song and dance. Yakshagana, a theatre form, which is pronounced as yaksha-gaana is an art form popular in the coastal areas of Malnad, Karnataka and nearby areas of Kerala. Yakshagana shares many characteristics with other art forms of the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra.

2. The name of this performing art, ‘Yakshagana’ literally means the song of the Yaksha. According to mythology, Yakshas were a class of benevolent nature spirits who were the custodian of the treasures that are hidden in the earth and in the roots of trees. A Yakshagana performance, called Aataa in Tulu language, goes on all through the night.

3. It normally begins at the twilight hours with the beating of drums. After the beating of drum has gone on for about a couple of hours, the ‘actors’ get on the stage. They offer a breathtaking view with their resplendent costumes, head-dresses, and painted faces which they themselves would have painstakingly painted. A performance usually depicts a story from the Hindu epics and puranas. It consists of a narrator, who narrates the story in a song-like fashion. Musicians play on traditional instruments to which the actors dance. The actors do not have much of dialogue. They portray the story through their actions as they dance.

4. It is difficult to classify Yakshagana into any one category of folk, classical or rural. In fact, it has characteristics of all depending upon how we look at it. Being a theatre form, unlike a pure dance form, it is more plural and dynamic, exhibiting many types and varieties in its performances. Certainly, Yakshagana can be rightly called a traditional form.

5. The origin of Yakshagana can be traced back to the Vaishnava Bhakti movement which spread with vigour after the 10th Century. The Bhakti Movement took religion to the common man, to the lower strata of society, those classes to whom the highly formalized and Vedic religion was beyond reach. Hence Bhakti movement was a social movement as well.

6. In order to propagate and spread the message of devotion, it adopted and adapted the existing folk as well as classical literary forms and performances. In doing so, it created its own forms. Most of the traditional theatre forms are the result of this phenomenon. Hence a clear resemblance can be noticed among the members of the ‘Traditional Theatre Family’. These are Ankhia Nata (Assam), Jathra (Bengal), Chau (Bihar, Bengal), Prahlada Nata (Orissa), Veedhinatakam & Chindu (Andhra), Terukoothu Bhagavathamela (Tamil Nadu) and Kathakkali (Kerala). These theatre forms also differ from each other in various ways. Like these theatre
forms, the origin of Yakshagana too is connected with a wider historical situation, namely the Bhakti movement.

Yakshagana is said to have originated somewhere between the 11th Century to the 16th Century. It is said that Sage Narahari Thirtha started a Dasvathara Aṭa performance and a performing troupe in Udupi around 1300 circa. It later spread to other places and grew into what we call Yakshagana today. As it spread, it slowly evolved, drawing upon elements from the ritual theatre, temple arts, secular arts like Bahurupi, the royal courts and artists’ imagination.

The 1930s saw some changes in compositions, organizations and presentation. Dance and the spoken word was further developed and refined. But in costume, a type of transformation started with the use of ‘modern’ clothing and stone jewellery, which replaced handloom clothing and wooden ornaments. A Yakshagana artiste wears a pagaDe, a kind of head-wear. Among the head-wears pagaDe and kireeTa are worn by male characters and only small pagaDe by female ones. Exceptionally different head-wears are also used by comedians and some side artists.

By the early decades of this Century the structure of Yakshagana had reached a definite shape and form. The year 1950 saw the birth of ‘tent’ troupes, who gave performances to audience, using ‘tent theatres’ and furniture for seating. These troupes ushered in the commercialization of Yakshagana.

Yakshagana saw major changes in form and organisation. Electrical lights replaced the ‘gas lights’ or ‘petromax’ lamps. Seating arrangements improved. Major changes came in the themes, with the inclusion of folk epics, Sanskrit dramas and imaginary stories often formed the thematic base. Popular entertainment became the criterion in place of ‘classical’ presentation. Performances were now held in Tulu as well, and Kannada was no longer the exclusive language of Yakshagana. This helped Yakshagana to gain great popularity. Today it exists in various forms and styles which include puppetry as well.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Read the first sentence of the first paragraph. Can you predict what the text is going to be about?

2. Read the text quickly once and say which paragraphs are talking about the following. There may be more than one paragraph

   The actors and costumes: ..........................................................

   Origin of Yakshagana: ..........................................................

   Similarity with other art forms: ...........................................

   Relationship with religion or ‘Bhakti’: .................................

   The meaning of the word Yakshagana: ................................

   The stage of Yakshagana: ...................................................

3. Pick words from the text that are associated with ‘theatre’ or ‘drama’.

   ......................................................................................

   ......................................................................................

   ......................................................................................

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   ......................................................................................
4. Pick sentences from the text which mean the following:

   i) Yakshagana is an art form which grew and flourished in southern India.

   ii) The performance of Yakshagana is not a brief affair.

   iii) The costumes are elaborate and attractive.

   iv) Traditional stories are used in the plays and performances.

   v) There is more narration and music rather than dialogue unlike a normal play.

   vi) Yakshagana cannot be classified into any one category.

   vii) Yakshagana helped in the spread of religion.

   viii) The Yakshagana draws its style from many sources.
5. Describe the costume of a Yakshagana actor.

6. How was the Yakshagana performance modernized after the 1950’s?

7. Every art form has to evolve and change with the times. Explain with reference to the evolution of Yakshagana.

3.3 VOCABULARY

Check Your Progress 2
1. Find from the text words which mean the same as the following:
   i) a musical play of the West (Para 1)
   ii) referring to sound (Para 1)
   iii) a person who has the responsibility of taking care of something (Para 2)
   iv) bright and colourful in an impressive way (Para 3)
   v) with great care or taking great pains (Para 3)
   vi) characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress (Para 4)
   vii) related to the traditional style of a country (Para 6)
   viii) connected to literature or having language or style typical of literature (Para 6)
   ix) change (Para 8)
   x) a group of actors or singers who work together (Para 10)

2. Complete the passage below by using appropriate words from those given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>narrator</th>
<th>musicians</th>
<th>costumes</th>
<th>form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>traditional</td>
<td>performers</td>
<td>troupe</td>
<td>artistes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comedian</td>
<td>audience</td>
<td>form and style</td>
<td>opera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jatra is a ............... theatre ............... of Bengal. The ............... comprises ............... like actors, ............... a ............... and perhaps a ............... .

The stories which are narrated in the form of songs are very much like the ............... of the western world. Jatra is similar to Yakshagana in much of its ............... .

The ............... are bright and decorative. There is however a difference. In many jatras the ............... sits around the stage so that all can see the ...............
3.4 GRAMMAR: ARTICLES (A, AN AND THE)

In this section you will learn the use of articles.

*A* and *an* are called **indefinite articles**, and *the* is called the **definite article**.

We use *a/an* only with singular countable nouns and to talk about a person or a thing for the first time.

Examples: If you ever had the opportunity to witness a Yakshagana performance in Karnataka.....like an opera it tells its story through song and dance.

We use *the* at the beginning of a noun or a noun phrase:

- The most common use of *the* is refer to a person/thing/event that has been mentioned once.
  
  Examples: *The* performances have a narrator.
  
  *The* narrator relates the story in a song-like fashion.

- *The* is used to refer to things which are unique, i.e. things of which there is only *one* in the universe.
  
  Examples: *the* sun, *the* Earth, *the* Himalayas, *the* Ganga, *the* song of the Yaksha, etc.

- Uniqueness of the objects may also arise because of the immediate context which is specific to the speaker and the listener.
  
  Example: Pass me the milk bowl, please. (while sitting together and having tea).

- We use *the* before countable nouns when we wish to refer to the whole system.
  
  Example: The origin of …

- *The* is used before Nationality:
  
  Examples: *the* British, *the* Irish, *the* Americans

- *The* is sometimes used with adjectives without there being a noun.
  
  Examples: *The* poor (people) get poorer and *the* rich richer. *the* old, *the* homeless, etc. (poor and rich are both adjectives)

- The names of regions, islands, oceans and newspapers generally have *the* before them:
  
  Examples: *the* Middle East, *the* Andaman and Nicobar islands, *the* Atlantic Ocean, *the* Times of India.

- In superlative constructions:
  
  Examples: *the* fastest, *the* most expensive, *the* best, *the* worst

Check Your Progress 3

Read an old folk tale of Japan and fill in the blanks with appropriate articles.

Hachiko was born in 1923 in Akita in ....... north of Japan. Akita dogs are famous in Japan. It was fortunate for Hachiko when ....... professor of Tokyo University found him. ....... professor took him to his house not far from Shibuya station, and there he showed himself ....... good and kind master. ....... dog loved him. He left ....... house
every morning with ....... professor and walked along with him as far as Shibuya station. He watched him buy his ticket and disappear towards ....... train. Then Hachiko used to sit down in ....... small square and wait for his master’s return from work in ....... late afternoon. This happened every day. ....... professor and his dog became a familiar sight, and ....... story of ....... faithful animal spread around Shibuya.

Then, one afternoon in 1925, there was tragedy. For some time ....... professor’s health had not been good, and he had ....... sudden heart-attack at ....... university. He died before he could be taken home. Back in Shibuya, ....... dog waited in front of ....... station.

The next morning Hachiko was seen in front of ....... station, waiting for his master. ....... following day he was there again. And ....... next day. And ....... next. ....... days became weeks, ....... weeks month, ....... months years. He was ....... young dog, ten months old, when his master died; he grew old; but ....... daily wait continued. He became ....... public hero — ....... best-loved figure in Shibuya. Travelers returning to Shibuya after ....... long absence always asked about him.

3.5 WRITING: WRITING A DESCRIPTION

Activity 2

Write a description of the folk art of Madhubani based on the notes given below. Remember to use the present tense.

Madhubani Painting

I. Introduction

1) Indigenous art form of a particular village in Bihar
2) Practised mainly by women
3) Vary from decorations on village and home walls to wedding cards
4) Technique zealously guarded
5) Passed on from mother to daughter

II. History of the art form

1) Existed for centuries
2) 1960, drought affected agriculture
3) Need for an alternate way of livelihood
4) This art form came to the forefront for survival
III. Details and themes

1) Painted on hand made paper
2) Themes vary from nature, Hindu deities, celestial bodies, Holy Tulsi plant
3) Also include scenes of famous court scenes
4) Gaps and drawings filled in by geometrical designs
5) Patterns largely traditional

IV. Status and popularity

1) Made popular on hand made paper
2) Easy to carry and sell
3) Today most celebrated folk art

3.6 LISTENING AND SPEAKING: THE DESERT FESTIVAL OF JAISALMER

Check Your Progress 4

Listen to this description of the Desert Festival of Jaisalmer and discuss the following.

1. The most striking quality of the people of the desert.

2. The importance of turban in Rajasthan.

3. Women’s attire and what it symbolizes.

4. Major features of their dance forms.

5. The life of a Bedouin is a difficult one.

6. Ways one can reach Jaisalmer.
3.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have exposed you to an array of different art forms and cultural events: the Yakshagana performance in Karnataka, the Madhubani paintings from Bihar and the desert festival of Jaisalmer. In the reading comprehension section you were required to answer question on Yakshagana to make sure you understood the passage. In the writing section you were given practice in writing a guided composition on Madhubani paintings, their origin and development. The listening section was a note-taking task on the desert-festival of Jaisalmer. Finally we gave you practice in the use of articles in the Grammar section.

3.8 ANSWERS

Activity 1
1.  
   i)  Food- food is an important indicator of the way of life of a community
   ii) Dress- dress tells us about the history and the weather of a place
   iii) Festivals- these tell us about the history, religion and ancient literature
   iv) Religion- tells us about the beliefs that people have as well as some of the rituals that people follow
   v) Traditions and customs- tell us about the way of life of a place
   vi) Language- their history, their ideas and way of thinking
   vii) Cottage industries- their handicrafts and their traditional skills
   viii) Universities- the courses that are taught in a university sometimes tells us about the history, life-style and ideology of a place
   ix) Literature- literature is culture summed up in poetry, stories, novels, drama etc.
   x) Art forms- dances, theatre and other art forms depict the way of life and sometimes their history
   xi) Movies may tell about the culture as they give a peep into life style, ideologies, thinking or literature of a community

2.  
   i) Through its art forms
   ii) By discussing themes from their culture in the textbooks for children or the young
   iii) Government encouraging projects that deal with and are concerned with culture and cultural issues
   iv) Making movies that depict some aspect of the culture

Check Your Progress 1
1. It tells us the theme of the text ‘Yakshagana, which is a classical folk art form of Southern India’. The text would be a description of this art form.

2. The actors and costumes: Paragraphs 3 and 8
   Origin of Yakshagana: Paragraph 5 and 7
   Similarity with other art forms: Paragraph 6
   Relationship with religion or ‘Bhakti’: Paragraph 5
   The meaning of the word Yakshagana: Paragraph 2
   The stage of Yakshagana: Paragraph 10

3. opera, costumes, roles, performances, actors, painted faces, narrator, musician, dance, tune, action, portray, dialogue, classical, folk, traditional theatre, troupe, artiste, character, comedians, audience, lights, seating arrangements, furniture, themes, folk epics, stage, dramas and stories.
4. i) Yakshagana (pronounced as yaksha-gaana) is a classical folk art form of the state of Karnataka in India, mostly popular in the coastal and Malnad areas of Karnataka and in adjacent areas and Kerala.

ii) The actors of Yakshagana wear costumes and enact various roles in plays that would, traditionally, go on all night.

A Yakshagana performance begins at the twilight hours with the beating of drums for up to a couple of hours before the ‘actors’ get on the stage.

iii) The actors wear resplendent costumes, head-dresses, and painted faces which they paint themselves.

A Yakshagana artiste wears a pagaDe, a kind of head-wear. Among the head-wears pagaDe and kireeTa are worn by male characters and only small pagaDe by female ones. Exceptionally different head-wears are also used by comedians and some side roles.

iv) A performance usually depicts a story from the Hindu epics and puranas.

v) It consists of a narrator who narrates the story in a song-like fashion, backed by musicians playing on traditional musical instruments while the actors dance to the tune. Their actions portray the story as it is being narrated. The actors have limited dialogue during the course of the performance.

vi) Yakshagana, like many other forms, defies neat classification into categories like folk, classical, rural. It can be included into each of these, or all of them together, depending upon our line of approach. Being a theatre form, unlike a dance form, it is more plural and dynamic. And hence it exhibits many types and varieties itself.

vii) It took religion to the common man, to the lower strata of society, those classes to whom the highly formalized and Vedic religion was beyond reach.

viii) It underwent a slow evolution drawing its elements from ritual theatre, temple arts, secular arts like Bahurupi, royal courts of the time and artists’ imagination — all interwoven over a period of time.

5. Resplendent costumes
   Elaborate head gear, which differs for different characters
   Jewellery made of stones (colourful) and
   Painted faces

6. Appearance of tent troupes
   Concept of audience
   Tent theatres and furniture for seating
   Use of electrical lights in place of petromax lamps
   Change in themes
   Inclusion of Sanskrit texts, imaginary stories
   Tulu included as the language, Kannada no longer the only language of use

7. Began as an offshoot of the Bhakti movement
   Underwent slow change and included elements from ritual theatre, temple art and secular art called Bahurupi.
   In 1930’s change in compositions, organization and presentation
   Development of dance and spoken word
   Use of modern clothing and ornaments
   Development of the stage and its accompanying seating arrangements, lights etc.
   Incorporating other languages so that it could spread.
Modernization according to the times
All these have ensured that this art form lives on.

Check Your Progress 2

1. i) a musical play of the West (Para 1) opera
   ii) referring to sound (Para 1) acoustically
   iii) a person who has the responsibility of taking care of something (Para 2) custodian
   iv) bright and colourful in an impressive way (Para 3) resplendent
   v) with great care or taking great pains (Para 3) painstakingly
   vi) characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress (Para 4) dynamic
   vii) related to the traditional style of a country (Para 6) classical
   viii) connected to literature or having language or style typical of literature (Para 6) literary
   ix) change (Para 8) transformation
   x) a group of actors or singers who work together (Para 10) troupe

2. Jatra is a traditional theatre form of Bengal. The troupe comprises artistes like actors, musicians, a narrator and perhaps a comedian.

   The stories which are narrated in the form of songs are very much like the opera of the western world. Jatra is similar to Yakshagana in much of its form and style.

   The costumes are bright and decorative. There is however a difference. In many jatras the audience sits around the stage so that all can see the performers.

Check Your Progress 3

Hachiko was born in 1923 in Akita in the north of Japan. Akita dogs are famous in Japan. It was fortunate for Hachiko when a professor of Tokyo University found him. The professor took him to his house not far from Shibuya station, and there he showed himself a good and kind master. The dog loved him. He left the house every morning with the professor and walked along with him as far as Shibuya station. He watched him buy his ticket and disappear towards the train. Then Hachiko used to sit down in the small square and wait for his master’s return from work in the late afternoon. This happened every day. The professor and his dog became a familiar sight, and the story of the faithful animal spread around Shibuya.

Then, one afternoon in 1925, there was tragedy. For some time the professor’s health had not been good, and he had a sudden heart-attack at the university. He died before he could be taken home. Back in Shibuya, the dog waited in front of the station.

The next morning Hachiko was seen in front of the station, waiting for his master. The following day he was there again. And the next day. And the next. The days became weeks, the weeks month, the months years. He was a young dog, ten months old, when his master died; he grew old; but the daily wait continued. He became a public hero – the best-loved figure in Shibuya. Travelers returning to Shibuya after a long absence always asked about him.
Activity 2

1. You may use the points to talk about the art of Madhubani paintings. Points
   give in para I will form the first and introductory paragraph and so on. You
   could conclude the description with a sentence saying how Madhubani art
   has survived the test of time and has adapted itself to modern times.

2. The tense form would be largely present tense but at times while referring to
   the past it would be in the past tense.

3. Appropriate connectors and discourse markers would be used like: however,
   nevertheless, in addition, in spite of, in order to, also, in short etc.

Listening text for Desert Festival of Jaisalmer - Experience
Rajasthan - Fun Amidst Sands

Come to Rajasthan in winter and see how it comes to life with colours,
music, dance and fun. If you visit Rajasthan in months of January or February
remember not to miss the great Desert Festival. For three days, the city of
Jaisalmer bounces to life and becomes a confluence of brilliant colours,
music and laughter. It is during these days that Jaisalmer gets a chance to
parade its exuberant charisma to the world.

It is here that men with majestic turbans and imposing mustaches ride their
camels amidst the wind caressed sand dunes. Just as the men are imposing,
the women here are vibrant. You will be overwhelmed by the cheerfulness
of the veiled beauties in their gaily coloured clothes and their heavy jewellery.
Take a romantic journey on a camel through the golden sands and see how
this desert is really not as arid as it seems. Let the romance of Jaisalmer
enliven your spirit.

The Desert Fair will leave you with a hundreds of memories

The Desert Fair is something you should not miss. It is a grand carnival
which presents some chosen and cherished moments of the glorious past
and affluent traditional culture of Rajasthan. Rajasthani men and tall beautiful
women dressed in their brightly coloured and embroidered dresses dance
dance and sing lingering ballads of chivalry, romance and tragedy. They move
round and round, sometimes anti-clock-wise and sometimes clockwise. They
whirl in unison, or at times, individually. Watch them hold hands, take
measured steps and perform various balletic gestures of the body. They
beat their palms or snap fingers at the rhythms and move in a circle with the
resonance of a kettledrum.

As the tempo of the drum rises and the accompanying high pitched music
reaches its climax, participants separate themselves into pairs and swirl
swiftly about their own axis. Watch and be mesmerized by this harmony
between the music, rhythm and body balance.

Another fascinating activity is the turban-tying competition. Popularly
known as a safa or pagri, the turban is an indispensable part of a Rajput
man’s attire. A saffron coloured turban is very important for it was often
worn by warriors and signifies chivalry. The exchange of turbans symbolizes
a bond of friendship and honour. Well, did you know that an average turban
is about 9 metres long! One can tell which part of Rajasthan a man comes
from and what his social class is according to the way he ties his turban.

The turban is not merely decorative. It also serves as protection from the
scorching desert sun.
Enjoy the Desert, Your Way

Decorated Camel at Desert Festival, Rajasthan

The grand finale of the festival is marked by a trip to the sand dunes where you can enjoy the pleasures of a camel ride amidst the golden sands. Try to catch the silhouette of the Bedouin way of life and survival, and discover where and how to find water, how to protect yourself against the heat during the day or the cold windy nights in winter. Enjoy the lifetime experience of sitting on the dunes, under the solitary moonlit sky and listening to stories about the more dangerous desert species: snakes and scorpions. You really don’t need your watch; the sun will wake you up. No concrete boundaries limit your sight, just incredibly magnificent sand dunes always changing colors and shapes.

Get Going

And this is how you can reach there. There are convenient and comfortable road connections to Jaisalmer from Jodhpur and Jaipur. RSTC offers a diverse array of luxurious buses and tourist coaches that ply regularly on these routes. Once in Jaisalmer, you can hire an auto-rickshaw or a private cab to reach the fair. But if you want to squeeze every moment of enjoyment from your holiday trip, then go for a camel cart ride.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Lively, cheerful in spite of the hardships they face, like vibrant colour, lot of music and dance to keep themselves happy, know how to celebrate life.

2. The importance of turban in Rajasthan: (important part of man’s daily dress, makes them look majestic and complements their imposing moustaches, the colour and the style of tying indicates social position and where one hails from, exchange of turbans is an act of friendship etc. Practical value as it protects them from the harsh sun).

3. Bright gaily coloured skirts that fan out as they dance, keeps them cool and protects them from the scorching sun, veil to cover the face and to protect it from the harsh sun too, silver jewellery, their zest for life.

4. Major features of their dance forms: swirling and moving, doing balletic gestures, beat of drums and music, vibrant and active.

5. The life of a Bedouin is a difficult one: everyday is a struggle for water, to escape the desert sun during the day and protect themselves from the cold in the night.

6. Ways one can reach Jaisalmer: convenient and comfortable road connections to Jaisalmer from Jodhpur and Jaipur. RSTC offers a diverse array of luxurious buses and tourist coaches that ply regularly on these routes.