

Name of the Element: Kalbelia: Folk Songs and Dances, Rajasthan, India

Community/ies: Kalbelia community of snake charmers living in Thar Desert

Region: Kalbelias are now found predominantly in the districts of Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Jalore and Barmer in western Rajasthan and in the cities of Jaipur and Pushkar in eastern Rajasthan.

Brief Description: Kalbelia Dance is an expression of the Kalbelia community's way of life as snake charmers. The women in flowing skirts dance to the beat of the 'khanjari,' a percussion instrument, and the 'poongi,' a wind instrument. Both these instruments are made by the Kalbelias themselves from natural materials like dried vegetable gourds and leather hide. On the occasion of Holi (the festival of colours), the Kalbelias perform a special dance with another percussion instrument called the 'chang.' While men play the instruments, the women sing and dance. It is remarkable that in today's context, the Kalbelia's traditional music and dance has evolved into a creative and contemporary version that enthralls audiences worldwide. The music of the 'poongi' has a sinuous quality, which makes a dancer swirl and dance like a serpent. The songs also portray the creative and poetic acumen of the Kalbelias. The Kalbelias are reputed to compose lyrics spontaneously and improvise songs impromptu during a performance. The vast repertoire of songs covers all the rites of passage in their life.

Kalbelia: Folk Songs and Dances of Rajasthan- Inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, UNESCO.