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Intangible Cultural Heritage

Representative List

ICH-02 – Form

REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY

**Deadline: 31 March 2026
for possible inscription in 2027**

*Instructions for completing the form are available at:
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/forms>*

A. State Party or States Parties

Uttar Pradesh (India)

B. Name of the element

B.1. Name of the element in the languages and scripts of the community(ies) concerned

Raas Leela, Braj Bhasha & Hindi

B.2. Name of the element in English

Raas Leela of Vrindavan-Mathura

C. Name of the communities, groups or individuals concerned

Brajwasis (People of Mathura)

1. General information about the element

For **Criterion R.1**, States **shall demonstrate that ‘the element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention’**.

1.1. Provide a brief description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it.

Not to exceed 300 words

Raas Leela (Raslila) is a traditional folk art form that beautifully combines Indian music, dance, and drama. It is more than entertainment; it is a meaningful expression of spiritual, moral, and cultural values deeply rooted in Indian heritage. Through its performances, Raslila communicates important philosophical ideas and preserves ancient traditions. Beyond its cultural significance, Raslila reflects harmony and balance, symbolizing unity and interconnectedness. It serves as a powerful medium for promoting peace, understanding, and cooperation among people. Because of these qualities, it holds relevance not only in India but also at a global level, contributing to the idea of international harmony and prosperity.

A key message of Raslila is the importance of knowledge and wisdom. It draws inspiration from the Samavedic tradition, especially through its use of music, rhythm, and performance. By blending singing, dance, and drama, Raslila helps sustain and strengthen Vedic traditions, ensuring they remain meaningful in modern times. Raslila also emphasizes the dignity and respect of women. It portrays feminine grace, strength, and generosity while highlighting equality and mutual respect. The relationships shown in its performances reflect the idea that a balanced society is built on understanding and shared values. Another important feature of Raslila is its inclusive and secular nature. It rises above differences of caste, religion, and gender, promoting social harmony and unity. It demonstrates how cultural traditions can connect people and create a sense of belonging.

In conclusion, Raslila is not just an art form but a holistic representation of life. It integrates culture, spirituality, and social values while spreading messages of peace, knowledge, and respect, making it a valuable heritage for the world.

1.2. Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element? Are there any specific roles, including gender-related ones or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of the element? If so, who are they and what are their responsibilities?

Not to exceed 100 words

The unique performing art of Raas Leela of Vrindavan-Mathura is based on Samvedic tradition of music and scriptures of ancient Sanatan Parampara like Vishnu Puran, Garg Samhita, Bhagvat Gita, Shrimadbhagvatam, Shri Brahm Vevart Puran, Sursagar, Govind Leelamritya etc.

1.3. How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today?

Not to exceed 100 words

There are many troupes in the Braj (Mathura) region that perform *Rasleela*. Some troupes are so well-established that they have their own dedicated *Rasleela* pavilions. Others perform in temples and sacred *kunj-nikunj* or places like *goverdhan* etc. Saints and spiritual leaders also organize these performances in their ashrams on various occasions. Apart from this, any organization or individual can make arrangements in their area and invite a *Rasleela* troupe to perform. Nowadays, these *Rasleelas* are also performed in auditoriums and theatres.

1.4. *What social functions and cultural meanings does the element have nowadays for the communities concerned?*

Not to exceed 200 words

Raas Leela of Vrindavan-Mathura today serves as a vital medium of religious devotion, cultural continuity, and community bonding. It preserves Braj traditions, promotes moral and spiritual values, and educates younger generations. It also fosters social unity, supports local artists, and attracts pilgrims and tourists, thereby contributing to cultural identity and sustainable livelihoods.

1.5. *Can the State Party or States Parties confirm that nothing in the element is incompatible with existing international human rights instruments?*

Not to exceed 50 words

Yes, the State Party confirms that Raas leela is fully compatible with international human rights instruments. It promotes values of inclusivity, devotion, and cultural harmony, without discrimination based on gender, caste, or belief. The practice respects human dignity, encourages community participation, and upholds principles aligned with universally accepted human rights norms.

1.6. *Can the State Party or States Parties confirm that nothing in the element could be perceived as not compatible with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals?*

Not to exceed 50 words

Yes, the State Party confirms that Raas Leela fully upholds mutual respect among communities, groups, and individuals. It promotes harmony, inclusivity, and shared cultural values. The performances foster dialogue and understanding, without demeaning any group, and are practiced in a spirit that respects diversity, dignity, and peaceful coexistence among all participants.

1.7. *Can the State Party or States Parties confirm that nothing in the element could be perceived as not compatible with the requirement of sustainable development?*

Not to exceed 50 words

Yes, the State Party confirms that Raas Leela aligns with the principles of sustainable development. It supports cultural sustainability by preserving traditional knowledge, provides livelihoods to local artists, encourages community participation, and promotes responsible tourism. The practice does not harm the environment and contributes positively to social and economic well-being in the Braj region.

1.8. *Are there customary practices governing access to the element? If yes, describe any specific measures that are in place to ensure their respect.*

Not to exceed 100 words

Yes, Raas Leela follows customary practices rooted in devotion and tradition. Performances are conducted with ritual purity, respect for sacred spaces, and adherence to established norms by organizers and participants. Access is generally open to all, while certain roles and rituals are guided by tradition to ensure respect, discipline, and cultural integrity.

2. Contribution to visibility, awareness, dialogue and sustainable development

For Criterion R.2, the States shall demonstrate that 'Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity'. In addition, States are encouraged, with reference to Chapter VI of the Operational Directives, to recognize the interdependence between the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development.

Given its extensive nature, criterion R.2 will be assessed based on the information provided in the nomination file as a whole including the answers provided in this section.

2.1. Do communities concerned consider that the element contributes to the following?

- ☐ Ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of intangible cultural heritage
- ☐ Encouraging dialogue
- ☐ Reflecting cultural diversity and testifying to human creativity

2.2. Do communities concerned consider that the element contributes to the following? (select only relevant options)

- ☐ Food security
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Quality education
- ☐ Gender equality
- ☐ Inclusive economic development
- ☐ Environmental sustainability including climate change
- ☐ Peace and social cohesion
- ☐ Others (please specify):

2.3. Provide explanations in support of the statement(s) made above, as appropriate.

Not to exceed 200 words

Communities concerned consider that Raas Leela significantly enhances the visibility and awareness of intangible cultural heritage by presenting living traditions rooted in devotion, music, and performance. It encourages dialogue by bringing together diverse audiences, artists, and communities in shared cultural spaces. Raas Leela reflects rich cultural diversity and human creativity through its varied narratives, artistic expressions, and regional styles. At the same time, it contributes to inclusive economic development by providing livelihoods to performers, artisans, and local stakeholders. It also promotes peace and social cohesion by fostering shared values, mutual respect, and a collective sense of identity and belonging among participants and audiences alike.

2.4. States are encouraged to submit audiovisual materials that convey the communities' voice in support of the statements made above (optional).

- ☐ Materials (written, audiovisual or any other way) are submitted (referred to as 'R.2 materials')

3. Safeguarding measures

For Criterion R.3, States shall demonstrate that ‘safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element’.

What safeguarding measures are put in place to protect and promote the element?

Include in your answer:

- *the description of the safeguarding measures;*
- *the communities’ role in the planning of measures described;*
- *the communities’ role in the implementation of measures described.*

Not to exceed 500 words

Measures for addressing challenges and safeguarding

- 1- A committee should be established whose task will be to collect, publish, and preserve the literature related to Raas Leela, however Mr. Sanjay Sharma has published the literature on his personal level. (details has been enclosed)
- 2- Only qualified individuals should be permitted to form Raas Leela troupes, and such troupes should be formally registered.
- 3- A specialized school should be established to train children associated with Raas Leela troupes. Along with education in vocal and instrumental music and dance, they should be trained, according to their interests, in traditional instruments such as sarangi, pakhawaj, flute, tabla, sitar, etc., many of which are becoming extinct. Dance forms like Dhrupad-Dhamar, Jhoomar, and Mayur dance should also be promoted and expanded.
- 4- Proper arrangements should be made to ensure that children involved in Raas Leela receive education at least up to high school or intermediate level.
- 5- Cultural departments should organize performances across the country, and just as Ramleela is continuously performed in Ayodhya with government support, similarly, continuous performances of Shri Krishna Leela should be initiated in Vrindavan.
- 6- The remuneration of Raas Leela artists should be standardized, daily wages should be discontinued, and adequate annual salaries should be provided.
- 7- Pension facility should be given to senior or retired artists.

4. Community participation in the nomination process and consent

For Criterion R.4, States shall demonstrate that ‘the element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent’.

- 4.1. *Describe how the communities, groups or individuals concerned have actively participated in all stages of the preparation of the nomination.*

Not to exceed 300 words

For a long time, all the troupes had desired that ‘Raas Leela’ receive recognition under an institution like UNESCO. This had been a subject of discussion. Therefore, detailed personal discussions were held with the leaders of all the troupes on this matter. So that the government’s attention is drawn to this matter and meaningful steps can be taken to save this tradition from the brink of extinction.

The condition of Raas Leela troupes has long been a matter of discussion. The situation of the troupes and the problems faced by the people associated with them are interconnected. New and younger performers are not coming forward, and the new generation of Braj residents is losing interest in this field.

Main Reason:

1. Due to the social and economic condition of the troupes, families discourage their children from entering this field.
2. Children are being sent outside for education and jobs.

When new and younger performers do not join, how will *Bal Leelas* and *Braj Leelas* continue? Earlier, only boys up to the age of 14 would portray the divine forms, but today it is difficult to find performers below that age.

Second problem:

Earlier, performers had contracts of at least one year and remained with a single troupe, forming a family-like bond. Entertainment options were limited, and wealthy patrons supported Raas Leela. Both emotional and artistic aspects were strong. Today, with 20–40 performers in a troupe, financial burden has increased, leading to instability and fear of disbandment.

Third problem:

Traditional instruments like sarangi, pakhawaj, jhanjh, manjira, and tanpura are being replaced by modern instruments like pads and organs. Classical styles like Dhrupad-Dhamar are fading, replaced by pop and even film music, affecting authenticity.

Fourth problem:

Earlier, performers maintained a dignified lifestyle and attire—dhoti, kurta, tilak, tulsi mala—commanding respect. Today, dress and behavior have changed, affecting devotional depth.

Decline in discipline and devotion:

Earlier, both emotional and artistic aspects were strong. Today, commercialization and practices like dancing to film tunes are harming the dignity and traditional values of Raas Leela.

- ☐ Consent (written, audiovisual or any other way) to the nomination of the element from the communities, groups or individuals concerned is attached in support to the description above (referred to as 'consent materials')

4.2. Community organizations or representatives concerned

Contact person for the communities:

Title (Ms/Mr, etc.): Mr. Bhagwat Kishor Sharma 'Vyas ji'
Family name:
Given name:
Institution/position: Shri Braj Madhuri Raasleela Sansthan
Address: Gopal Khar, Parikrama marg, adjacent to Bade Hanumanji Mandir, Vrindavan
281121
Telephone number: 9897260006
Email address: bhagwatvyasji@gmail.com

Other relevant information:

- ☐ Additional contact information for main community organizations or representatives, non-governmental organizations or other bodies concerned with the element are attached in a separate annex, and their details can be published on the website of the Convention as part of the nomination

5. Inventory

For **Criterion R.5**, States **shall demonstrate that the element is identified and included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies)** in conformity with Articles 11 and 12 of the Convention.

5.1. Name of the inventory(ies) in which the element is included

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5.2. Name of the office(s), agency(ies), organization(s) or body(ies) responsible for maintaining and updating that (those) inventory(ies), both in the original language and in translation when the original language is not English or French

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5.3. Reference number(s) and name(s) of the element in the relevant inventory(ies)

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5.4. Date of the element's inclusion in the inventory(ies)

Is the information concerning the updating and periodicity of the inventory(ies), as well as the participation of communities, groups and NGOs concerned to the inventorying process, included in the periodic report on the implementation of the Convention? ☐ Yes, the information is included in the periodic report. Specify in the box below the year in which that report was submitted ☐ No, the information is not included in the periodic report. Provide information in the box below <i>Not to exceed 200 words</i>
☐ An extract of inventory(ies) in English or in French and in the original language, if different, is submitted

6. Checklist for audiovisual materials

Confirm that the following audiovisual materials have been submitted:

☐ 10 recent photographs in high definition submitted ☐ Form ICH-07-photo is attached to grant rights for the 10 photographs submitted ☐ A video (from 5 to 10 minutes) is submitted ☐ Form ICH-07-video is attached to grant rights for the video submitted ☐ R.2 materials (written, audiovisual or any other way) submitted (<i>optional – with reference to section 2.4; audiovisual materials should last no more than ten minutes</i>) ☐ Form ICH-07-video is attached to grant rights for the R.2 materials submitted (<i>only if the materials are audiovisual</i>) ☐ Consent materials (written, audiovisual or any other way) submitted (<i>with reference to section 4.1; audiovisual materials should last no more than ten minutes</i>) ☐ Form ICH-07-video is attached to grant rights for the consent materials submitted (<i>only if the materials are audiovisual</i>)
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7. Correspondence and signature

7.1. Designated contact person

Provide the contact details of a single person responsible for all correspondence concerning the nomination. For multinational nominations, provide complete contact information for one person designated by the States Parties as the main contact person for all correspondence relating to the nomination.

Title (Ms/Mr, etc.):	Professor Dr. K K Sharma, Ex Principal
Family name:	
Given name:	
Institution/position:	
Address:	204, Bhakti Apartments, Dawanal Kund Marg, Kaimarwan, Vrindavan – 281121 Mathura (U.P.) India
Telephone number:	9837636068
Email address:	nmqeeredu@gmail.com; nmqeeredu25@gmail.com
Other relevant information:	

7.2. Other contact persons (for multinational nomination only)

Provide below complete contact information for one person in each submitting State, other than the primary contact person identified above.

Title (Ms/Mr, etc.):	Mr. Sanjay Sharma
Family name:	
Given name:	
Institution/position:	Author and expert of Raas leela
Address:	House No. 266, Dhakka, Kingsway Camp. Behind Methodist Church Delhi-110009 (India)
Telephone number:	9760151813
Email address:	shridwarkanath@gmail.com

Other relevant information:

7.3. *Signature on behalf of the State Party or States Parties*

Name:
Title:
Date:
Signature:

7.4. *Name(s), title(s) and signature(s) of other official(s) (for multinational nominations only).*

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