



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC, DANCE AND DRAMA
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Sangeet Natak Akademi: An Introduction

Sangeet Natak Akademi – India's national academy of music, dance and drama – is the first national academy of the arts set up by the Republic of India. It was created by a resolution of the (then) Ministry of Education, Government of India, dated 31 May 1952, which was notified in the Gazette of India of June 1952. The Akademi became functional the following year, with the appointment of its first Chairman, Dr P.V. Rajamannar, and the formation of its all-India council of representatives, the General Council. The first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, inaugurated it on 28 January 1953 at a special function held in the Parliament House.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, then Union Minister for Education, in his opening address at the inauguration of the Akademi, said:

India's precious heritage of music, drama and dance is one which we must cherish and develop. We must do so not only for our own sake but also as our contribution to the cultural heritage of mankind. Nowhere is it truer than in the field of art that to sustain means to create. Traditions cannot be preserved but can only be created afresh. It will be the aim of this Akademi to preserve our traditions by offering them an institutional form....

In a democratic regime, the arts can derive their sustenance only from the people, and the state, as the organized manifestation of the people's will must, therefore, undertake....maintenance and development [of arts] as one of [its] first responsibilities...

The Akademi's charter of functions was expanded along the original lines in 1961, when Sangeet Natak Akademi was reconstituted by the Government as a society and registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 (as amended in 1957). These functions are set down in the Akademi's Memorandum of Association, adopted at its registration as a society on 11 September 1961.

The registered office of the Akademi is in Rabindra Bhavan, 35 Feroze Shah Road, New Delhi. The foundation stone of this building was laid by President Rajendra Prasad on 14 April 1959. Rabindra Bhavan was inaugurated in 1961, the birth centenary of Rabindranath Tagore. The Akademi, earlier housed in rented office buildings, moved to Rabindra Bhavan in November 1961. This building also houses the two other national Akademies: Sahitya Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi.

Since its inception, the Akademi has been functioning as the apex body in the field of performing arts in the country, preserving and promoting the vast intangible heritage of India's diverse culture expressed in forms of

music, dance and drama. In furtherance of its objectives, the Akademi coordinates and collaborates with government and arts academies of different States and Union Territories of the Union of India, as also with major cultural institutions in the country.

The Akademi establishes and looks after institutions and projects of national importance in the field of the performing arts. The Akademi established the National School of Drama and the Asian Theatre Institute in July 1959. The objective of the School was to train students in all aspects of theatre, including theatre history, production, scenic design, costume design, lighting, make-up, etc. The Asian Theatre Institute merged with the National School of Drama when it separated from the Akademi in 1975 and became an autonomous organization. It was registered as a Society the same year.

Sangeet Natak Akademi now has three constituent units, two of these being dance-teaching institutions: the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy (JNMDA) at Imphal, and Kathak Kendra in Delhi. JNMDA has its origin in the Manipur Dance College established by the Governments of India in January 1964. Funded by the Akademi from its inception, it became a constituent unit of the Akademi in 1967. It was subsequently renamed after India's first Prime Minister. A leading institution in the teaching of Manipuri dance, JNMDA offers several comprehensive courses in the dance and music of Manipur, as well as other arts like Lai Haraoba and Thang-ta. The courses are designed as a foundation for professional artists. The Production Unit of the Academy has a rich repertoire of traditional and contemporary works.

Similarly, Kathak Kendra is one of the leading teaching institutions in Kathak dance. Located in Delhi, it offers courses at various levels in Kathak dance and in vocal music and Pakhawaj. Kathak Kendra was originally the Kathak department of Bharatiya Kala Kendra, which had been funded by the Akademi since 1964. It became a constituent unit of the Akademi on 16 July 1969. Like the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Kathak Kendra too has a Production Unit which strives to enrich the repertoire and technique of Kathak dance through experimental work.

Rabindra Rangashala is the third constituent unit of the Akademi. The management of Rabindra Rangashala was transferred to the Akademi by the (then) Department of Culture in April 1993. An open-air auditorium seating 7,000 people, the Rangashala is situated on the Delhi ridge.

National Projects of Support to Kutiyattam, the age-old Sanskrit theatre of Kerala, Chhau dance of eastern India, and Sattriya traditions of Assam have been launched subsequently. After ten years of intensive work under the Kutiyattam project, the UNESCO declared Kutiyattam as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of

Humanity in May 2001. The Akademi inaugurated its Centre for Kutiyattam, 'Kutiyattam Kendra' in Thiruvananthapuram on 27 May 2007.

The Akademi set up the Sattriya Kendra (centre for Sattriya dance, music, and theatre traditions) at Guwahati, Assam on 15 July 2008, to promote, propagate and preserve these traditions. The Akademi also set up its North East Centre in Shillong the same year on 20 August 2008, for the purpose of preserving the traditional and folk performing art traditions of north-eastern India. The office of this Centre has now been shifted to Guwahati and is housed in the Sattriya Kendra premises.

The Akademi Awards are the highest national recognition conferred on practising artists. The Akademi also confers Fellowships on eminent artists and scholars of music, dance and drama. The Akademi's Fellowship (Akademi Ratna) carry a purse of Rs 3,00,000 and the Akademi Puraskar (Akademi Awards) carry a purse of Rs 1,00,000.

In 2006, the Akademi also instituted awards to young artists in the name of Ustad Bismillah Khan, the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar. The number of Yuva Puraskars is thirty-two. The Yuva Puraskar carries a purse of Rs 25,000.

The Akademi subsidizes the work of institutions engaged in teaching, performing, or promoting music, dance or theatre; gives grants-in-aid for research, documentation, and publishing in the performing arts; organizes and subsidizes seminars and conferences of subject specialists; and documents and records the performing arts for its audio-visual archive.

The Akademi's archive, comprising audio/video tapes, photographs, and films is one of the largest in the country and is extensively drawn upon for research in the performing arts. The Akademi maintains a reference library consisting of books in English, Hindi, and some regional languages. The Akademi has a gallery of musical instruments, masks and puppets in Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi, where more than 200 musical instruments are displayed. It also has a documentation unit, which has recorded maestros in the field of music, dance and theatre. The Akademi's publication unit publishes literature on relevant subjects on a small scale.

As the apex body specializing in the performing arts, the Akademi also renders advice and assistance to the Government of India in the task of formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the field of the performing arts. Additionally, the Akademi carries a part of the responsibilities of the state for fostering cultural contacts between various regions in India, and between India and the world.

Sangeet Natak Akademi is an autonomous body of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, and is fully funded by the Government for implementation of its schemes and programmes. The management of Sangeet Natak Akademi vests in its General Council. The general superintendence, direction and control of the affairs of the Akademi vests in the Executive Board, which is assisted by the Finance Committee, Grants Committee, Publication Committee and Advisory Committees for Music, Dance, Theatre, Documentation and Archives, Puppetry, and the Folk and Tribal arts. In the management of the teaching institutions and centres created by Sangeet Natak Akademi, its Executive Board is assisted by Advisory Committees of each of the institutions. The present Chairman of the Akademi (2010-15) is Shrimati Leela Samson, eminent Bharatanatyam dancer and teacher. Well-known writer and critic Shrimati Shanta Serbjeet Singh is Vice-Chairman of the Akademi.

The Secretary and Principal Executive Officer of the Akademi is Helen Acharya. The Secretary is assisted by Deputy Secretaries for Music, Dance, Drama, Coordination, Finance & Accounts, Administration, Publication, Documentation, and the Librarian of the Akademi, besides the Assistant Director, Official Language Section. The Directors of Kathak Kendra and Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, the Director, North-east Centre and the Project Directors of Kutiyattam Kendra and Sattriya Kendra assist the Secretary in management of these institutions.

