Theatre Olympics in India

What is the issue?

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- Starting in Greece in 1995, Theatre Olympics fest has since been held across the world every few years since 1995.
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- The 2018 edition will be hosted by India (the first time in the country) and Preparations for the same are on in full swing.
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What is Theatre Olympics?

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- Greek theatre director ‘Theodoros Terzopoulos’ conceptualised Theatre Olympics and it was held for the first time in Delphi, Greece.
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- The idea was to gather the best theatre practitioners from around the world and create a forum for exchange — of ideas, cultures, forms and practices.
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- It was also to be another kind of exchange, between eras, trying to find a continuum between the past, present and future of theatre.
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- The current edition in India is being organised by the National School for Drama (NSD), which is an autonomous body under the ministry of culture.
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- This event will see numerous Indian and foreign drama troops performing across multiple cities over the course of the fest.
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How has Indian theatre fared historically?

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- India has had a rich theatre history as early as 200 BCE and saw the likes of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, Sudraka and Bhasa producing masterpieces.
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- Simultaneously, there is an equally fertile landscape produced tribal, subaltern and folk theatre that morphed and thrived down the ages.
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- The anti-colonial theatre of the mid-19th century brought in the draconian Dramatic Performances (Prevention) Act of 1876.
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- Later, the pre-Independence Left movement generated vital critical energy through the Indian Peoples Theatre Association.
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- But our long theatrical tradition hasn't been sufficiently exhibited to our own people and the "Indian theatre needs a push, to become vibrant again.
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- Thus, the Olympics being envisaged is not just about bringing international theatre to India but also about brining Indian theatre to Indians.
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Is the initiative massive?

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- The itinerary for the program looks huge with 465 productions from 35 countries in 51 days across 17 cities.
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- Each production will get up to Rs.1.5 lakh per show besides travel, accommodation and other costs.
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- There is also technical support such as sets, lighting, sound and subtitles along with photography, videography and publications.
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- Apart from the main plays, there will be ambient performances — tribal, folk, street, puppetry, magic shows — before each show.
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- In total, the fest is expected to present roughly 35,000 artistes across India.
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What are the concerns?

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- There is considerable concern on how the festival will respond to political dissent, Dalit concerns or other controversial topics.
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- Notably, there is no censorship and a mere guideline against “nudity and anti-nationalism” has been provided.
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- Plays were selected through a two-tier process and most plays were submitted on DVD, many of which were of poor quality (due to small regional groups).
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- The sheer numbers and content diversity often hindered the review process, and also language and cultural barriers got aggravated by distance.
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- The review format also tends to neglect thoughtful, text-based plays and also results in loss of context and local traditions, which are lost in translation.
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- Notably, Germany has a hefty theatre culture, and each play usually comes with a booklet that gives an overview of the contextual setting and its customs.
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What can be hoped out of the festival?

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- Theatre Olympic is a massive effort, but mere massiveness alone can do little to help theatre, although it need not be dismissed completely.
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- This event can potentially become the very first theatre census conducted in the country, and can serve as an invaluable research project.
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- There will be Catalogues, brochures, papers, videos, a documentary, and live streaming of the recordings of thousands of hours of performances.
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- The extensive documentation planned around the Olympics, thus, stands to become its single most significant legacy.
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- This will also help in increasing networking of various drama teams and provide the much needed oxygen for the currently struggling art form.
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- This event will also boost awareness and therefore theatre infrastructure.
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Source: The Hindu

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