

SAANG: Its Origin And Relevance In Modern Haryanvi Folk Literature

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Abstract: To know any country, state or a specific region one should try to find out its culture, civilization, social morals and folk literature. Folk literature is actually the peek through of any country's culture. Folk literature is actually associated with the common inhabitants of that country, state or region. Folk itself includes people from both urban as well as rural regions of that area. Folk literature arises from the very soil of the area and it serves the people of that very region. Folk literature has its roots in oral verse tradition and it generally travels from generation to generation, entertaining and informing the generations to come.

Keywords: Saang, Drama, Culture, Folk, Literature, Natak, Nakal, Mujra

I. INTRODUCTION

Folk literature depicts the emotions and feelings of the people of that area in a very easy and natural way. Saang is one of the most prominent genre of folk literature. The Problem with origin of Saang is it that it is hard to find the original writer of creator of a particular Saangbut it travels from one generation to another generation through the age old oral tradition. Along with the problem of anonymity the boon of it is it belong to everyone thus uniting the society in cultural and moral platforms. Common life of the region serves as nutrition to folk literature and folk literature serves as the documents of common life and its morals that leaves legacies for the future generations to come. Saang or village plays/dramas play a vital role in the culture of Haryana. It contains seeds joys and sorrows, expectations and fears of the commoners and their life in it.

Saang is popular known as Swang which could be translated as imitation is a popular folk dance-theatre form in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. Swang incorporates suitable theatrics and mimicry (or *nakal*) accompanied by song and dialogue. It is dialogue-oriented rather than movement-oriented. Religious stories and folk tales are enacted by a group of ten or twelve persons in an open area or an open-air theatre surrounded by

the audience. Swang as an art of imitation means Rang-Bharna, Nakal-Karna.

Swang can be considered as the most ancient folk theatre form of India. Nautanki, Saang, Tamasha originated from the Swang traditions. Old Swang traditions are:

"EK MARDANA EK JANANA MANCH PAR ADE THE RAI"

"EK SAARANGI EK DHOLAKIA SAATH MEIN ADE THE RAI"

(One male and one female performers start the story. One saangi player and one dholak player joins the performance.)

This Swang/Saang performance was active at the time of SantKabir and Guru Nanak. Tradition credits KishanLalBhaat for laying the foundation of the present style of Swang about two hundred years ago. During Mughal period and specifically at the time of Aurangzeb women were strictly banned from public performances. Since women did not participate in the dance-drama form, men have traditionally enacted their roles. Later on different performers changed the style according to the socio-political situations.

It is possible to have differences on lingual levels as languages has slight variations according to regions but the zest and morals at a large remains the same. Its following is larger as compare to the written literature of that area and it appeals easily to everyone as it uses the local language of that area.

Local language is not bound to the grammatical rules but it has its own beauty of metre and other literary devices. It has ability to appeal to the cores of people with intensity as it arises from the social conditions and situations of that area and saangs are one of the strongest mediums to convey those sentiments by using that very local language. Saangs are written by the people, for the people and they develop according to the need and time of that area. Saang have voices of history in them and if a graph is drawn with help of saang culture it will indicate the transformation of cultural values and morals accordingly. Thus saang help in maintaining the values of the society.

Haryanvi saangs are very impactful and representative atistical form. It represents morals, rituals, thoughts, culture and tradition of the state. There can hardly be a field associated with the lifestyle of Haryana that is left untouched by these saangs. Saangs comprises a mixture of songs and acts but the main attraction of saangs are its raginis. Raginis can be described as long narrative poems. They can tell about bravery, love or narrate a comic event and they are able to bind the audience with their power of mesmerisation.

Saangs are present traditionally in various parts of north and western regions of India with variations in their presentation. Saangs are still popular in Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh etc. they are still popular among masses in rural areas with dialects of that region in them. Popular themes in these saangs include Raasleela, Ramleela, Nautanki, Disguise (Behroopiya) saang etc.

Saangs are centuries old and are addressing issues of contemporary issues. In 1971 a saang named *Jai Bangla Desh* was played. Musical saangs came up near 1800 around the regions of Hathras and Rohtak. Amroha styled saangs were popular in Braj region these are known for their music and verse forms. Important areas for saang are muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bijnor, Saharanpur, Aligarh, Dehradun and Haryana. These places were famous for their saang tradition. Among various saang writers like Deepchand, Jhumman, Hardeva, Ram GarebChaube etc. Pandit Lakhmi Chand was the most popular saangi. He is also known as the father of Ragini. Saangs further developed under various saangis, some remarkable among those are Ramjanwald Diluba, Ramsahay Shah, Chandan Bhagwana, Ramsingh, Raghuvir-Lakhma, Bundu Meer, Suresh, Umesh, Maansing, Nakli, Hoshiyara, Dhanpat Singh, Balwant-Kulwant, Musaddi, Chota, Mangal-Kundan, Laalu, Sagwasingh, Dinna, Luhar, Chandar Badi, Bulli, Sadique, Nasrumeer, Raghuvir, Abdul Dom, Baaje Bhagat, Banwari Lal, Kachya Sham, Shareef Meer etc.

Saangs are based on ancient, religious, social and historical stories such as the Mahabharata, Puranas, Vedas, Ramayana, Folk Tales etc. there are some saang based on love stories too such as Laila-Majnu, Ratan Sain- Padmavati, Nal- Damyanti, Roop- Basant, Leelo- Chaman, Heer- Ranja etc. Santwati Devi, Pooranmal, Jani Chor, Keechak Vadh (murder), Jaimal Fatte, Shahi, Lakadhara, Seth Tarachand, Draupadi Cheer, Abhimanyu, Meerabai, Sundarbai, Harishchander, Moordhwaj, Chabdrahaas, Chandrakiran, Raja Bharthari, Pingla, Saudagar Bacha, Madanpal, Chandraprabha, Dushant-Shakuntla, Maya Devi, Prithvisingh-Kiranmayi, Nau-Bahar, Risipal-Chatra, Nihalde, Navalde, Gopichand, Amar Sing

Rathore, Samrat Ashok are known as some of the well known saang.

Along with entertainment saang educate the masses too. In saang usually males are responsible for playing both genders. Stage presentation is considered more important than costumes and hence good music and strong performances are valued over flamboyancy in dressing. Saang starts with prayers. Thereafter the protagonist declares the name of the saang and tell audience about the introduction of the saang to be presented on the stage. Along with the protagonist there is one another character known as Vidushak or Jamura or Nakkal who adds comic elements to the stage during the play. He is spontaneous and witty. Saang symbolically and with help of idioms warn the audience about various vices. To save saang from boring stretches audience are presented with dances or songs to lighten or energise the environment. If any luminary attends the saang while the saang is still going on, the crew of saang welcomes him and make audience aware of his arrival. At end the crew of saang is presented with money, grains, clothes etc.

Saang keep a critical eye on contemporary situations of the society and warn or inform audience through Ragini, joke or a scene. Saangs generally have happy endings and they are presented either on festivals like Holi or on some special occasions like marriage or Birth celebrations. They are also used to gather people and to collect donations for some social causes like building or renovating temples, pond or community buildings like Dharamshalas. In saangs good triumphs.

Saangs play an informative and educative purpose in the society. After watching saang it was expected that people don't only get entertained but also received morality lessons from those saangs. Along with teaching virtues to its audience saang also gives people a break from their daily routine and stress thus rejuvenating.

When we trace the origin of Saang or any such cultural art form, questions like who started it does arise, which indeed is a controversial subject. Some critic does believe that it originated about 250 years ago as could be guessed by one of the Raginis of Pandit Mange Ram,

“Haryanikikahani sun luya do so saalki,
Kai kismkihawachalinayichaalki”

But it is also a popular belief that in the 23rd century a poet named Shadullah was born on the land of Haryana who composed many folktales and Natak, giving away to further compositions of such works. These arts forms like natak in Haryanavi are later termed as Saangs. This art of Saang was also got popular in north India and Middle India with different names like ‘Khayal’ in Punjab, Turra Kalagi in Rajasthan, Bhagat in Bihar and with some other names at different place.

If we go by the belief propounded by Swami Ramkishan Byas, the origin of Saang dates back to 1206 years. Another belief says that Saang was started for the very first time by a Gujarati Brahmin Bhiharilal, it was the time when these Saangis roam from one place to another with a sarangi and a dhol. By cross dressing they impersonate as women wearing a ghaghra and an aangi and presented beautiful dances. According to those who attempted to compose a history of Haryanvi folk culture it is believed that Aurangzeb banned Saangs in 1658, Mujra and many other art forms. The

court poet of Aurengzeb wrote in one his poems about the Saangs performed in those times in his autobiography 'Naurage-Ishq',

“Basharemashavrasidature jam aa,
Sharer parwanahai par gardeshyamhai
Makkallapesh we tarzonandaaz
Mushvidasiratanbanazme-saaz
Be-ilmrakas be nagmosaaz
Be-ilmrakam-o-takleedustaad”

(Today some strange people were observed in the city who by a unique style present an incredible dance form in form of mimicry with music. They were indeed experts in mimicry and dance. They had sweet voice and they impersonate women, man and children)

Saang recommenced in 1709 after the death of Aurengzeb. In those times the source of entertainment for rich and poor does varied, for instance rich men entertained themselves with Mujra performed by courtesans (who generally were prostitutes), while the poor's could not afford to watch such expensive arts, they occasionally listened to Bhajanis and Biaraagis who roamed from place to place playing their iktara and singing songs. Gradually these limitations of the entertainment attracted their attention towards Saangs. However every art form takes time to grow and gain respect. Initially it was considered to be low, undignified, cheap and an amateur art form where people are been mocked and laughed at. Thus the high class and rich rejected it saying it provokes mockery and insult and make the commoners get an opportunity to laugh at them.

The Age of Kishan Bhatt and Saangs (1730-1900)

Kishan Bhatt is known as the father of Haryanvi Saang because it is in his times when saangs were at its original form and at peak. It was the time when he established his SaangMandali which was an amalgamation of some dance steps from Mujra and Mimicry and was in thus feared competition from both Mujra and Nakal. Thus he added discourse to dance and mimicry giving it a new form altogether. Although Mujra was also considered to be a derogatory art form performed by women and enjoyed by rich young men labeled as immoral and extravagant but yet Saang was even considered to be further inferior even without any involvement of women and the Saangis are not even allowed to roam freely in the village during the day time. However at night while performances the chaupaals (as there were no stages) were filled with young men and children. Women were not allowed to sit between men and watch Saang and thus their entry was restricted. Their popularity started to grow when saangis fixed their fees and people started to raise money by inviting them to perform. People were informed a few days ago about the place and timing of the saang and also announced their purpose for raising funds like building of dharamshalas, hospitals, schools etc while no money could be kept by the convener of Mujra and the money collected was distributed by the prostitutes amongst themselves.

BansilSaangi

However the Saang style and structure set by Kishanlal went on as same for the next 170 years and later it was modified and improvised by SaangiBansilal. It is also been said that the first saang during this time was performed in

1819 written by Amba Ram who was from Gujarat. During this time Rewari was the hub of Saang performances. Even today whenever any Haryanvi ragni singer goes to Rewari they pay a homage to Alibaksh's tomb. Although Ali Baksh was uneducated, his saangs were of highest quality in its authenticity and creativity. He introduced himself like this.,

Rajput huntikaawatmeraalibakshhainaam
Nagar mundawar subahshbasiyonhaimeradham
Rewaribanarahengulzartamashakiya beech bazaar.

Balakram, Gouvrddhan, Yogeshwar, Krishna Swami, Shankar Lal and Ahmedbaksh are his contemporaries. Ahmedbaksh belonged to Thanesar of kurukshetra where he is still regarded as a renounced poet and saangi.

PanditNetram

PanditNeta Ram was the disciple of Pt. Shankar Lalhias first Saang was SjielaSethani which brought acclaim and praise. But his guru Pt. Shankar Lal was against his disciple doing Saang as it was still not viewed in good light. By the civilized society.

RamlalaKhatik

He belonged to sonipat and was a very eminent story teller. But he too got inclined towards Saang following some accident in his life.

Pt. Swaroop Chand

He belonged to khediroinRohtak. He too played a very important role in the development and popularity of saang.

Today this art form is in danger and in constant conflict with the emerging arts and other kinds of entertainment like cinema, Radio, Modern Drama, Literature

Towards the end of the 19th century, all-women *Swaang* troupes performed in western Uttar Pradesh and the adjoining *Khaaddar* area of Haryana. All parts in these troupes were played by women. Sardari of Kalayat (Jind), Natni of Gangaru, and Bali of Indri (Karnal) were some of the leaders of such troupes. In 1998, The Government of India has honored this renowned poet by the award from RohtakAakashwani for his incredible support to the rise of Haryanvi LokSahityaHis younger son, SatyanarayanShastri is also continuing their task to rise the Haryanvi LokSahitya by his writing. SatyanarayanShastri is a renowned singer of 'Ragnis' at Aakashwani since 1983. Pandit Lakhmi Chand of Jatti Kalan (Sonipat) is known as *Surya Kavi* (Sun Poet) in Haryanvi Raagnis. Important Swang staged by him included Nal Damyanti, Meera Bai, SatyavanSavitri, Poorjan, Seth Tara Chand, PuranBhagat and Shashi Lakarhara. Pt. Tuleram, son of Pt Lakhmi Chand continued the tradition of performance and after him his son Vishnu is still performing in the remote villages of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Today we could sense a decline in the popularity of not just Saangs but also other art forms originated from it. Folk has been replaced by Pop. However even today a few glimpses of saang could also be seen and performed in cultural programmes but in a very distorted form. It is not wrong in saying that it has lost its relevance in even the state which valued it the most and where Saangs are awaited by the rural people. There is a long way to go for the folk culture to get back its popularity and gain its lost position which it actually deserves.