

Saang and Ragni in Cultural Haryana: Folk, Classical and Canonical

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Abstract

This paper explores how the notion of folk spontaneity has been engaged with, in relation to classical/textual refinement and technological intervention, in the case of two folk traditions of the Haryanvi-speaking population, Ragni and Saang. It poses the main question: How the relationship between lok (folk) and shastra (classical) is being negotiated in the Haryanvi folk performances, while also maintaining their cultural identity. Ragni and Saang not only revive traditional stories but, as the study suggests, they rework them in the local language and with a lived experience perspective and in an awareness of community that enable them to affirm and make culturally meaningful performances. An another question this study takes is whether these traditions gain or lose their folk qualities through technological mediation. Results indicate that digital platforms have facilitated greater visibility, preservation and accessibility of folk forms, but that too much scripting, commercialism and institutionalisation may lead to a loss of dimension of folk expression that is spontaneous and participatory. Yet another question that is asked is if folk traditions can, at the same time, contribute also to cultural diversity and cultural cohesion. Analysis shows that these are performances which retain regional identities, pass on collective memory and ethical values, adjust classical stories to the present and represent solutions to problems of homogenisation and exclusion. This paper concludes that the process of folk creativity, classical inheritance and digital technology is a continuous dialogue, adaptation, and negotiated co-existence, which endures the vitality and cultural relevance of Haryanvi ragni and saang in a dynamic society.

Keywords: Folk, Lok, Ragni, Saang, Intervention, Negotiation.

The most popular understanding of literature is in terms of s̄ahitya which has sahit as its root. In Indian aesthetics, literature or s̄ahitya is characterised by the harmony of word and meaning. It is a ‘boiling pot’ of words, emotions, characterizing the state of socio-cultural development and commensurate challenges. Acharya Bhamah in his book Kāvyaalankāra conceptualizes literature as Shabdathārthausahitaukāvyam. 10th century scholar Rājashekhara in his kāvyamimānshā describes literature as शब्दार्थयोः यथावत्सह भावेन विद्या साहित्य विद्या ‘shabdārthyor yathava tsahbhāvena vidyā s̄ahityavidyā.’ (Rashmiprabha) Literature mirrors our world. Indian literary theory views art as an integral part of human life. It believes that arts have divine origin, and those who involve in artistic pursuits are going to attain divinity. This sadhana was open to anyone who wished to follow this path. The classification of artistic forms is done as per the visual and auditory senses which are seen as media of aesthetic experience. Bharata Muni formulated a semantics of emotive communication and theorized

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the art expression analysing various emotions in terms of their physical manifestations – through gestures, colours, tones and language. Bharata adopts three frames of reference which include Dramaturge (playwright), Actor (it includes director), and Spectator (which he calls sahridaya).

The primary aim of literature is to raise an abundance of psychic energy in the consciousness of a sensitive reader which Bharata calls Rasa. Hence, a literary expression that leads to realisation of sentiments in the consciousness of a cultured audience is literature. This realisation of rasa is accepted as the central element of literature by scholars. It applies to all kinds of arts, whether folk or classic. Folk literary expression is the starting point and the basic testimonial of a social group. When its shared ideas, references, and lived experiences aspire to find a rhythmic expression, the folk/lok does so effortlessly, operating beyond the limits of the canons, classic aesthetics, and calls of the traditional philosophies. Thus, it breathes in the free flow of its personal tradition. Folk literary expression acquires and makes sense within its own tradition. This native intent and spirit is its soul, which I would like to term as deshiyata. However, its body is grossly visible in its various forms of circulation. The Regional character and colours mark the elemental unity of a folk literary expression.

The study focuses on the Haryanvi folk culture which practically goes beyond the present state of Haryana. Cultural Haryana (which includes NCR and border areas of Delhi as well) has a rich tradition of literature, both classical and folk. However, the structure of Dilli (literary, social, cultural) has undergone a noticeable transformation owing to the demands of globalisation, commercial compulsions and technology. Dilli Dehat (earlier gradually but now rapidly and aggressively) has been converting into Shahar. How Dilli's villages became a part of Dilli Shahar, Ekta Chauhan observes that "Several of these villages have become hipsterized with boutiques, restaurants, and galleries, and are regularly described in various articles as melting pots of culture and places worth exploring for their diversity and food." She further emphasizes that After independence, Delhi's urban area expended engulfing the agricultural area around it – the land was acquired and developed as planned colonies. (residential projects like Rohini and Dwarka) Dilli Dehat was 'Lal Dora Land¹', the inhabited part (abadi area) of a village marked in red, and Agricultural Land. "In 1963, these areas were exempted from acquisition and several building bye-laws. At the time, the exemptions applied to only 20 villages. By the time the municipal authorities clarified in 2009 that these exemptions no longer applied to urban villages, their number had grown to 227. More importantly, over four decades had passed. In that period, construction – both residential and commercial – had proliferated with little oversight. Today, Delhi has 357 urban villages, with the latest round of urbanisation taking place in May 2026, when 48 more villages were notified." (Chauhan)

Lok sensibility of Haryana is simple but full of life. As the living, here, has been full of hardships, it reflects in its culture and modes of its expressions. The main focus of the study is on lok sahitya (folk literature). Saangs and ragnis liberally adapt from classical texts by way of imagining the characters and narratives as per the lived realities of everyday life of Haryana; and this is the case with all lok traditions. In the context of the term folk art or folk literature (lok sahitya), the word lok signifies the “common people,” those who remain deeply rooted in their cultural soil and who carry forward inherited traditions, belief systems, and values through lived practice. Folk expression constitutes the collective sensibility of these communities and reflects the rhythms, concerns, and experiences of everyday life.

Lok in the dialectic of Formal-Spontaneous (Shastra being Formal)

In addition to ‘lok’ there is another stream of knowledge called as shastra. Shastra is canonical or classical. It is the style of expression which is theorised and scripted by scholars. It is bound in specific forms, techniques and firm principles. Classical is structured in formulaic rigidity with quite a little scope for change. Even variation or improvisation is possible only within the structure. On the other hand, lok is spontaneous. Its spontaneity is in imagination, simplicity, frankness, bluntness and warmth. Classical too has imagination, but it has steps to implement the imagination. When it comes to lok, the canonical boundaries are fudged. In lok shared ideas, references and lived experiences aspire to find creative impulse; a ‘rhythmic spontaneity’ as opposed to classical adhering to ‘rhythmic form’. This creative freedom is the unity of folk (lok) which sustains a free flow of the personal and organic tradition. The ‘meaning’ is dynamic and adaptable in folk art forms; and interpretations may shift with time, place, context and audience. Folk literary expression (lok sahitya) improvises on the canonical and, in the process, acquires semantic fluidity within its own conventional particularities and peculiarities. Thus, it incorporates new aspects while remaining culturally rooted maintaining stories, narratives, music and all other art-forms evolving and adapting to the emerging contexts and taste of the audience. Hence, it constantly remains dynamic and meaningful enabling the people to be ingrained in their tradition.

Place of Haryanvi Saang tradition within the definition of Lok- sahitya

Saang Parampara can be considered as lok-sahitya as it is old enough to be seen as a tradition which still throbs in the collective consciousness of Haryana. Saang started, developed and sustained in oral form from generation to generation. Of course, with the advancement in time, saangs were transcribed (scripted in Devnagri) and published for the later generations. Even if the subjects and content is taken from non-Haryanvi context, it is filtered and processed through Haryanvi eyes, ears, tongue, mind and consciousness. It means, the Vak is

Haryanvi – from Pashyanti to Vaikhari, and Vaikhari to Pashyanti. The expression is rooted in Haryanvi as it carries the socio-cultural markers of Haryana. It negotiates in performance operating through the dialectical variations of the collective culture. It has collective culture and communal significance. Despite having ‘known’ authorship, Saang qualifies to be lok-sahitya.

Sahitya means an expression of experiences, thoughts and emotions through words in the form of songs and/or narration. Saang uses both forms, songs and narration, in addition to dance and music to effectively communicate emotions and experiences. As a public performance, it is constantly open to interaction and participation of audience. There is immediate feedback from the viewers, hence, there is a constant scope for improvisation following the mood and demand of the audience. On this count saang qualifies to be ‘folk’ and lok-sahitya.

Folk as Formulaic Performance

Now the folk has been scripted. But in Hayana, in case of saang, there is a new thing with folk – it is first done as text, then it is structured, and then it is spoken/sung/performed. Folk seems to have developed a canon because of ‘script’. If it is the case, it indicates that ‘folk’ has lost its ‘folkness’. What is canonicity otherwise? – Bringing things under uniformity of ‘formula’. Canonisation obstructs the flow of life, the flow which is the soul of the folk, and delimits its folkness. Folk is known for its improvisation; two performances of the same performer would not be same/similar. One visible reason is with increasing homogenisation with a national language; and as a result, local dialects and shades of tongue are getting lost. With this loss, people are losing a whole of the local worldview which is otherwise, subtly transmitted through the cultural signatures ingrained in their traditional folk artistic expressions. In the wake of globalisation, language is losing its diversity, getting more and more uniform or becoming hybridized. The result is, the cultural or performative flow is getting lost as the possibility of improvisation is getting limited. The folk, in this logic, is getting canonised.

Saang and its ‘folkness’ – Bonsai of Folk

Saang is losing its organicity, its life, its spontaneity, or unmuktata, khullapan. Today’s Saang, performed in formal institutions like university and art centres in highly controlled, sterile and sanitized settings, seems more like a ‘bonsai’ of saang – grown in a pot and not allowed to grow to its normal size and character. What was (before the unprecedentedly rapid development of technology and academic attention) a crucial part of lok, is now ‘museumized’ in government or academically sponsored cultural festivals. What was meant for, and

sustained by common folk, is now 'preserved' by the elite of the society. What was once free-flowing and unfettered in folk, is now controlled by those who hardly have any organic connect with it. Saang is not performed in its natural flow, but is exhibited in an artificial ambience. In this way, saang is losing its 'spontaneity' and 'naturalness'; and, hence, its 'folkness'. It is becoming academic as its form is being fixed. It is being bound in a canon in the sense that it is being fixed in binaries: this is 'good' and this is 'bad', this is 'acceptable' and this is 'vulgar'. The spontaneity of performance is being sanitized so as to bring it within the limits of 'standard'.

Ragni is popular form of folksong sung for entertainment in Haryana. It is a vibrant and energetic style characterized by its rhythmic and forceful singing, accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as the dholak, harmonium, and sarangi. Regarding emergence and development of folk theatre and the format of ragni in Haryana, Dr. Subhash Chandra says that ragni developed through saang. In lok, story has been the medium of expression of pain, agony, joy, ambitions and aspirations of common people. The characters of the story can be deities, kings or figures from history or pauranik narratives, it tells of the dreams, desires and struggles of the common people i.e. lok. The narration may start anywhere, real trials of life and the ways of resolving these challenges is clearly visible in itself. Such way of storytelling is effective in small groups and gatherings. To expand beyond villages and localities, story collaborated with music. There was always an inherent possibility of dramatization in narratives, and folk employed it well, but its popularity relied mainly on music which led to various forms of folk-music (lokgeet). In this process, ragni proved to be the mainstay of saang. Arising from narratives, ragni developed as an independent form focussing on the common everyday contexts of life. Once freed from the larger format of saang, ragni developed several forms and variants. On the one hand it came out of the closet of the traditional narratives to connect with real life, on the other hand this liberation rendered it free to align with cheap and sensual presentation for popular entertainment. Chandra underlines that where boundaries of narration do not allow the performer to go astray, presence of children, young and old people in large number (sometimes women also), who belong to their own group, keep the artists within their moral and ethical limits.

There are several intervening factors which affect folk expression. The levels of intervention are 'cultural', 'local language' and 'folk world-view'. When an element comes from 'canonical' to 'folk', it comes through these interventions. There are other influences like 'the rationale and history', 'present compulsions' and 'technological interventions.' Ragni and Saang are woven around the socio-cultural consciousness of the lok, hence it engages with the socio-cultural values and the concerns of its everyday life making it more operative and therapeutic by the way of raising the level of awareness and shared involvement. As the

diction and idiom of the folk art is in alignment with the communicative environment (Vak) of the folk group, the new media technologies take its artistic expression to the people widely, making it more effective by circulating the performances. In addition to it, technology offers new opportunities to the local artists to showcase their talent and follow their passion.

Technical Interventions

It is quite obvious that a considerable number of performances are sung on the tunes of popular film songs. Ragnis are composed on new popular tunes using new musical instruments like Key Board, Multi Pad, Clapbox etc. in addition to the traditional instruments; and then these are uploaded and broadcasted on the media of YouTube, Instagram, Spotify etc. Almost every stage show is broadcasted/played live and uploaded to be played/watched repeatedly. This is a direct involvement of media. The compulsion of adopting new aspects of technology and media is that it is considered a sure way to secure an easy reach to the youth today, and that it would make it far more attractive and relevant to the audience who is already drifting away to the 'Pop'. There is no doubt that it does it by bringing in variety and innovation to the traditional artforms making them interesting and more engaging. Every folk has its 'Pop' which serves as connecting road between folk and 'standard'. In this context 'standard' is 'filmi'. However, film music has drawn a lot from the folk forms of the country. Such interventions are helpful in maintaining the traditional arts in collective memory of the masses keeping these songs and narratives relevant to the young generation.

There is a visible Interplay between Folk Spontaneity and Classical/Literary Refinement in Haryanvi Ragni and Saang.

A comparison can be drawn between Ragnis or Kissas – between the same kissa composed by different singers, and between a kissa in folk and its original in a standard text like 'Shiv and Sati' in folk and 'Shiv and Sati' in Puranas – to see how they travel from canonical to folk/lok, and how the transition is negotiated from standard cultural form of a canonised text to the cultural pockets of folk. A ragni or kissa carries the culture specific 'agenda' and 'perspectives' of the lok in which it is operative. It carries the 'agenda' and 'perspective' of the author who, in a way, represents his lok. When Lakhmichand sings, he takes a perspective; and when Baje Bhagat sings the same thing, the 'look' and the 'feel' of the narrative changes because of the difference in their personal exposures. The perspective changes widely with Mehar Singh because of his exposure to the army life. It's interesting to note that Lakhmichand was unlettered, hence, a lot of his work is not available for not being transcribed. Dr. Rup Narayan Sharma writes in the preface of Puran Chand Sharma's book Pt. Lakhmi Chand Granthawali that in several ragnis of Lakhmi Chand similarity of sentiments is quite apparent but words

vary during different performances. The ragnis could not be written. That is why there was no uniformity in his 'language'. These are the interventions on the individual level owing to the difference of the phenomenal field and psychic-energy of the practitioners.

Lok may have reflections of shastra, but it doesn't depend on shastra for its subsistence. Lok hardly limits itself in the strict boundaries of shastra (textual authority) or classical rules. Hence, formulating strict rules for art and expression in lok will be more of an ornamental value. However, minimal formulaic structures will be helpful to the practitioners and patrons to some extent. The final touchstone will remain 'its practice' as the practitioners keep experimenting according to the mood and taste of the audience. Subhash Chandra observes in this context that it is the result of experimentation that the audience enjoy the performance for hours together without having had enough of it. Due care has to be taken to keep a balance and consistency of the ragni and its context. Chandra underlines that Dhanpat Singh was, primarily, a poet-singer of 'heroic' or veer-rasa; and the sentiment is sustained even in his romantic ragnis. That is why his ragnis maintain the movement of a horse; like a horse moves with confident steps. Lakhmichand's flavour of shrngar tells him apart from the others. In Mange Ram's ragnis, his craft plays a definite role in bringing out humility of a devotee as well as helplessness of a have-not, and in fostering their self-esteem. A ragni has to create the spectacle corresponding to the context in order to reach the intendment; and folk-idiom is an integral part of folk art, whether the context is populist or classical.

Discussion

During interaction with local performers, I met Sh. Ram Mehar ji, an 85 year old veteran folk performer, from village Urlana Kalan near Panipat, who has been keeping the tradition of ragni alive in its organic form untouched by the effects of technology. He introduced me to the works (ragnis) of his guru Pandit Ram Kanwar ji. Pandit ji composed ragnis with reference to shastras/ classical texts like Itihasa and Puranas. For the purpose of discussion, we can take the example of representation of 'Shiv-Sati' and 'Shiv-Parvati' marriage in ragni tradition of Haryanvi lok literature. The context is drawn from two Puranas from the canon – Shiv Purana and Skand Purana. Two ragnis by Pandit Ram Kanwar can be considered for analysis to illustrate how 'canonical' becomes 'lok'. The 'lok' intervenes and reflects itself loudly while firmly holding on to the Pauranic narratives.

Ragni 1 शिव विवाह (पंडित राम कंवार जी द्वारा रचित)

सच्चे मन से याद करो शिव भोले भंडारी नै

Bring your consciousness with pure heart to Shiva who is pure and unassuming.

जग भर के पाप कटेंगे, सुनो रचना प्यारी नै।

All sins will get dissolved comprehensively as you listen to this lovely composition.



Sh. Ram Mehar ji during a performance

ब्रह्मा के बेटे दक्ष की लडकी सती शिवजी के परणाई

The daughter of Daksha, son of Brahma, was married to Shiva.

ब्रह्मा की सभा में परजापती नै शिव से बहस लगाई

Daksha Prajapati got into argument with Shiva in the court of Brahma.

कनखल जा के यज्ञ रच्या, वा सती नहीं बुलाई

Daksha went to Kankhal and organised a yagya, but he didn't invite his daughter Sati.

वा हठ कर के नै नखेल (दुख माना) हुई, फिर आ कर नै पछताई

Still she came to the yagya to her utter dismay, for which she repented.

हवन कुंड में जल के मरगी, शिर काट्या त्रिपुरारी नै।

Sati jumped into the holi fire of yagya, and Shiva cut her into pieces in fury.

शिव के हुकुम से वीरभद्र ने दक्ष का शिर काट दिया

Following Shiva's command, Veerbhadra beheaded Daksha.

ब्रह्मा जी ने करी कुसामद शिव की दया से दक्ष जिया

On Brahma's request, Shiva showed kindness and brought Daksha back to life.

सती का सत ठीक जाण कै बिसनू नै खंड खेल किया

Considering Sati's righteousness, Vishnu created a maya.

हुए दिगम्बर शंकर जी, गुफा में जप तप धार लिया

Shiva (Shankar ji), leaving all attachments away, started a tapa in a remote cave.

फेर इंद्र पुरी में बी शोर माचग्या, वे घेरे सेना भारी नै।

There was a great anxiety in Indra's camp, as he was challenged by a huge enemy.

तारकासुर की भारी सेना देख इंद्र घबरागे

Indra got frightened seeing the army of demon Tarakasur.

फेर सारे देवता डर के मारे ब्रह्मा की शरण में आगे

All devata's went to Brahma's refuge

तारकासुर कैसे मारया जा, ब्रह्मा तै पूछण लागे

They asked him the way of killing Tarakasur.

शिवजी कै कोई लडका हो, जब तारकासुर मारे जांगे

Brahma ji suggested that if Shiva has a boy, he can kill Tarakasur.

शिव के ब्याह का उपाय करो, वो काट्टै थारी बिमारी नै।

So, find a way of Shiva's marriage in order to solve your crisis.

शिवजी की करी अस्तुती, ये ध्यान चरणों मै लाया है

I have sung praises of Shiva and bowed to his feet.

पारवती और शिव विवाह, ये शिव पुराण में आया है

Marriage of Parvati and Shiva is mentioned in Shiva Purana.

स्कंध पुराण में छियालिसवें सफे में आया है

Forty-sixth page of the Skandha Puarana is the reference.

राम कुंवार परमाण देख कै शिव का विवाह गाया है

Ram Kunwar has sung Shiva's marriage with proper citation.

कोई संख्या (संशय) हो तो आओ *सिवाह में, ओ मेटै भूल बेमारी नै। * (सिवाह कवि पंडित राम कुंवार जी के गांव का नाम है।)

If you have any doubts, come to Sivah (Name of the poet's village), he will clear all queries.

Ragni 2 शिव और सती संवाद (पंडित राम कुंवार जी द्वारा रचित)

मेरे पिता नै यग (यज्ञ) रच राकख्या, साच्ची बात बताऊं

Let me tell you that my father has organised yagya (a vedic ritual).

मेरे सजन इजाजत देदे, मैं पीहर जाणा चाहूं।

My dear husband, allow me to visit my parental home.

इंदर और इंदराणी नै या खबर खूब सुणाई सै

Indra and Indrani have informed me well.

मनै घणे दिन होग्ये आई नै, न्यूं याद पीहर की आई सै

I miss my parents' house since it's been quite long since I haven't visited Parents.

पीहर सासरा और मामा कै, ये जगह बीर की ढाई सैं

Parents' home, husband's home and maternal uncle's home are the two and a half places where a married woman can go any time she feels like. (First two places are the primary and maternal uncle's place is considered as half in Haryanvi folk world-view.)

पता नहीं मेरे पिता नै या गलती क्युकर खाई सै

I am not sure why my father has made this mistake (of not inviting you to the yagya).

कुछ तै भेद खुलैगा बात का, मैं बेरा ले कै आऊं।

Let me go and find out the reason (of not inviting you to the yagya).

पिता, पती, गुरु के घर पै, बिना बुलाया बी जाणा हो

One doesn't need an invitation to go to the house of the father, the husband and the guru/teacher.

मान अपमान का फिकर नहीं जब अपना फरज पुगणा हो

Honour or insult doesn't matter when it comes to the fulfilment of one's duty.

पिता, पती, गुरु की ठोकर लाग कै नै स्याणा हो

A person emerges better and wise after the hard treatment by the father, the husband and the guru/teacher.

चाहे मारो, चाहे पुचकारो, पर शीश निवाणा हो

Whether they are hard or soft, one is supposed to be humble/respectful to them.

वो मेरा बाप मैं उसकी बेटी, बेटी का फरज निभाऊं।

He is my father and I am his daughter; I'll follow my duty.

भोगणा पडै जिसा हो भाग बेटी कै

A daughter has to bear what is written in the destiny.

सब चाहवें अटल हो सुहाग बेटी कै

All want that their daughter remains suhagan (ever blessed with her husband alive).

होणा चाहिए कोन्या दवेस (द्वेष) राग बेटी कै

She should not harbour any ill will,

दोनों कुळ की लागै जुम्मे लाग बेटी कै

she carries the responsibility of honour of both families (of parents and in-laws).

मन्नै दोन्नू घर बराबर चहिणं, मैं क्युकर मुंह खुपाऊं।

I wish both families to prosper, how can I shirk it.

देवी, देवता यज्ञ में मुनी विदवान आ रहे होंगे

There will be gods, goddesses, sheers and learned people in the yagya.

राज्जे राणी सगे प्यारे इनसान आ रहे होंगे

There will be kings, queens and other near and dear ones.

बहण, बहणोइया, मामा और फूफा, महमान आ रहे होंगे

There will be sisters, brother-in-laws, uncles and other distinguished people.

श्री *लखमीचंद, गुरु *मांगेराम गुणगान गा रहे होंगे

Reverend Lakhmi chand, my guide Mange Ram will be singing praises of god there.

कहै राम कुंवार मैं तावळी आज्यां घणे दिन कोन्या लाऊं।

Says Ram Kunwar, I will not spend much time there and come back soon.

*(पंडित राम कुंवार जी के गुरु पंडित मांगे राम जी थे। पंडित मांगे राम जी के गुरु पंडित लखमीचंद जी थे।)

Folk brings the personalities of the characters, discourse, emotions, and social context closer to the realities of its life. In the context of Mahabharata, the dishonour of Draupadi ceases to be merely a Pauranik reference; it talks like a local issue concerning the dignity of women. In “Cheer Parva” Saang created by Pt. Lakhmichand, Pandavas have lost everything including Draupadi to Duryodhana in the game of Dice, and she is brought to the open gathering to be disrobed. Draupadi rents using local idiom and images.

मैं के एक बीर दुनिया मैं तुम सब बहू बेटियां आळे हो।।

I'M not the alone woman in this world, you all have females in your families.

बांस की ज्यूं मने तिडते दीखें, आपस मैं मने लडते दीखें।

I visualise you all fighting with each other like bamboos colliding in jungle.

कोए दिन मैं मने भिडते दीखें, इस हस्तनापुर कै ताळे हो।।

I can foresee the complete destruction of this Hastinapur of yours.

थारी पंचां मै नाक कटेगी, द्रोपदी हर का नाम रटेगी।

You will get publicly disgraced, and Draupadi will remember the Creator.

दादसरे तेरी पैड मिटैगी, तनै मेर बान्धकै पाळे हो॥

My Great-grand-in-law, your name will be wiped out, you have been biased.

(Here, she is complaining to Bhishm for not taking honest position.)

यो बाम्बी नाग बडै सै, देख ल्यो दूणी राड छडै सै।

The serpent is creeping into the hole; see it's fuelling quarrel two folds.

उन राज्यां का राज कडै सै, जिनके कहै मन्तरी साळे हो॥

Their empire ultimately collapses who keep brothers-in-law (Wife's brothers)2 as chief advisors.

लखमीचन्द जग के लोग हसैंगे, आपस के म्हं बांस खसैंगे।

Lakhmichand says that people will laugh at you, and there is going to be a war.

इस हस्तनापुर मैं गिद्ध बसैंगे, कोए दिन मैं कव्वे काळे हो॥

There will be scavengers and vultures all around Hastanapur, it's a matter of some days.

(Sharma P C, P 388)

In another Saang "Viraat Parva" too created by Pt. Lakhmichand, Pandavas live incognito in the reign of Viraat serving the royal palace. There also the brother-in-law of the king lustfully advances towards Draupadi, and she tries to save herself by persuading the royal man reminding him of his kingly status and duties. (Sharma P C, P 397)

राजा नै प्रजा तकणी चाहिए, धर्म का खाता करकै,

King must treat his subjects according to the prescribed noble duties/code.

मैं रैय्यत बणकै शरमाऊं तेरा बाप का नाता करकै॥

I, your humble subject, implore taking you as my kind father figure.

खलक के रचने वाला ईश्वर सब का खालिक हो सै,

Ishvar is the creator of all worldly creation.

उस तै नीचै प्रजा के ऊपर राज का पालिक हो सै,

After him, it's the king whose duty is to look after the subjects.

राजा नै अख्तयार हुक्म जो जिसके मुतालिक हो सै,

King has the right to command the subjects accordingly.

राम तै नीचे प्रजा के उपर सबका मालक हो सै,

Despite his own family, the king is the guardian of his subjects.

जैसे कंवल की जड़ पाणी में, फल से ऊपर पाता करकै।

He is like the roots of lotus which keeps the leaf and flower safe above the water.

Similarly, references from the Shiva Purana, Skand Purana and Vaidik literature have enriched the Haryanvi folk traditions. Episodes such as Shiva-Vivah, Sati's self-immolation in Havan-kund and Shiva's subsequent wrath, 'Parvati's Tapasya' (Parvati's Penance), etc. have been frequently referred to in saangs and ragnis. folk theatre. Reference to the story of Daksha Prajapati's Yagya, in particular, offers an opportunity to reflect on themes of social arrogance, familial relationships, and the power of bhakti. In this story, Daksha's arrogance and Sati's self-respect become human issues with which rural society can identify. Saangi Pt. Mange Ram refers to it in the saang of "Maaldev Ka Aarta". In this story, Jai Mal, the protagonist, cautions his wife Shishbadani against any ill will that might result considering the situation and tempers would be high; she may be insulted and can take some extreme position. The poet refers to the similar situation when Sati was furious over her insult. "Don't do as Sati did in the house of her father Daksha (Sat killed herself)." (Jangid P. 617)

'Shiva Vivah' is a good example of the synthesis between lok and shastra. It is imagined entirely as it has happened in a local neighbourhood. Mahadev's baraat is represented in a manner that mirrors Haryanvi wedding customs. The humorous portrayal of Shiva's Ganas, the wedding songs, and local rituals make the narrative resonate with the common people, making the classical tale becomes an integral part of the folk experience. Parvati's penance too presents a symbol of a woman's patience, resolve, passion and spiritual discipline. It is presented not merely as a pauranik reference, but as an inspiring story of the struggle of life and the attainment of a goal. Here, the classical narrative becomes a vehicle for folk morality. This relationship between the folk tradition and classical texts is mutual. Lok geet, ragni,

Saang and other performances and practices make the shastra an integral part of the lok.



An open performance of Saang

Ragni and Saang serve as a bridge between 'text' and 'performance' infusing new meanings in every rendition. A pauranik tale can be presented in diverse forms by different performers. This fluidity is the creative power and unity of folk culture which proves that the relationship between folk spontaneity and classical refinement in Haryanvi Ragni and Saang is not one of conflict, but of dialogue. While these performances give expression to the naturalness of everyday life, oral traditions, and collective experiences, they simultaneously preserve the cultural memories, dharmik narratives, moral values and ethical principles of the Indian classical tradition; and, hence, became a channel for cultural continuity, collective memory, and the transmission of knowledge. Lok adapts the shastra to create a vibrant cultural heritage through mutual dialogue.

How does culture produce cultural heterogeneity or homogeneity at macro-level? It means whether this intervention brings culture as a homogeneous unit, or it projects it as a pluri-culture. Is there a confluence of the various tongues of Haryana taking place here? Of course, the inflexions of cultural location of the performer will be visible in the performance. It means, there will be visible variations in tone, rhythm, stress, and scale. Ragni and Saang are not only medium of entertainment but also carriers of collective memory, cultural values, and social consciousness. At the macro-level, folk performances influence both processes of

cultural diversity as well as homogeneity. Cherishing cultural diversity, their themes encompass local history, regional folklore, religious narratives, social conflicts, agricultural life, and the experiences of various communities. The performances reflect the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Haryana's various cultural regions such as Ahirwal, Bagar, and Bangar and Mewat. As a result, ragni and Saang serve to preserve and promote regional identity and cultural diversity. Through them, local knowledge, traditions, and perspectives on life are passed down from generation to generation.



An open performance of Saang

These performances also foster cultural cohesion disseminating socially accepted moral ideals, social values, and collective principles promoting values such as modesty, valour, diligence, family responsibility, social justice, community cooperation, and dignity. Collective performance of ragnis and saangs at public events, fairs, and festivals nourishes a shared cultural consciousness and collective identity among audiences, strengthening social unity. In today's context, electronic and digital media have expanded the reach of ragni and saang beyond local boundaries. As a result, these folk forms not only represent Haryanvi cultural identity but also serve as a medium for the dissemination of shared cultural values and experiences in the broader landscape. Despite the observation that these performances play

an important role in creating cultural diversity and homogeneity, certain aspects play an unsettling role.

While highlighting the experiences of certain castes, classes, or communities and neglecting the voices of other groups, folk performance becomes exclusionary rather than inclusive. Stereotypes about women, caste etc. too, used repeatedly during the public performances, can lead to legitimization of social inequalities. However, these get challenged at places too. Under the influence of modern media and the entertainment industry, ragnis and saangs sometimes lose their cultural depth in pursuit of popularity and economic gain. As a result, superficial entertainment can replace the diversity and social concerns of folk culture. When certain popular artists or styles gain excessive prominence, other regional forms, dialects, and folk expressions of Haryana can be marginalized leading to a flattened genre; and finally resulting in erosion of cultural diversity.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, Haryanvi Ragni, and Saang tradition viewed in the framework of Folk spontaneity, Classical/Textual refinement, and Technological/digital Intervention, reflect that, on one hand, they reflect the simplicity of rural life, local dialects, communal experiences, and spontaneous performance; on the other, they express cultural memories drawn from the shastra and pauranik texts. Lok does not present the shastra verbatim but adapts it to suit the local social contexts. In this process a continuous course of negotiation, dialogue, and re-creation persists, in which neither does shastra lose its essence, nor does lok surrender its autonomy. Culture is neither merely the preservation of the past nor solely a celebration of novelty; it is, rather, a continuous dialogue between the past and the present. Folk spontaneity, classical/textual refinement, and technological/digital media have a trilateral cultural interaction. In the context of Haryanvi folk practices, these three elements influence, enrich and, at times, challenge one another. Their mutual obligations can be observed as follows. Folk spontaneity breathes life into culture, classical refinement lends it historical depth and conceptual structure, while digital media facilitates its widespread dissemination and long-term preservation. These elements share a relationship of dialogue, preservation, re-creation, dissemination, and mutual influence. There are mutual obligations and the relationship becomes a kind of negotiated coexistence; the association is neither entirely harmonious nor entirely adversarial.

Notes and References

Notes

1 The Lal Dora system dates back to the British era, when red lines were drawn on village maps to demarcate agricultural land from non-agricultural residential areas within villages. Properties falling within these red boundaries were exempt from certain land regulations and municipal taxes.” <https://www.deendayalplot.com/news/haryana-government-to-assign-property-ids-to-lal-dora-plots-a-major-step-towards-planned-development>

2 There is a common saying that ‘keeping wife’s brother in your home’, ‘cataract in eye’ and ‘hollow spot in a wall’ will eat the home away. (घर में साला, आंख में जाला और दीवार में आला घर को खोखला कर देते हैं) The same idiom is used by another well known saangi Chandralal Badi in his famous saang “Keechak Vadh” when the courtiers sense the wrong attitude of Keechak, the queen’s brother who enjoys royal immunity and resorts to inappropriate behaviour with a female servant of the queen who happens to be Draupadi spending her agyaatvaas (secret dwelling in exile) disguised as Sairandhri.

नहीं काम की भीत रहे जिस भीत में नौ दस आळे हों।

That wall which has nine-ten (several) hollow spots in it, is no more useful.

खैर नहीं उस राजा की जिस राजा के मन्त्री साळे हों ॥

No one can save the king who keeps brothers-in-law (Wife’s brothers) as chief advisors. (Badgujar 715)

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