

# SAANG TRADITION IN HARYANA: A CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC EXPLORATION OF PANDIT LAKHMICHAND'S PERFORMANCE

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**Abstract:** *The research provides a concise overview of its focus and objectives, centered around acknowledging Pandit Lakhmichand's significant contributions to Haryana's folk music tradition known as "Saang." It highlights Saang as a vibrant reflection of Haryana's culture, utilizing historical and mythological stories, theatrical elements, and societal values to enrich its musical expressions. The present work specifically emphasizes Pandit Lakhmichand's role as a spontaneous poet who infused Saangs with captivating romantic and religious themes, thereby adding depth and richness to the tradition. Moreover, the research's scope includes shedding light on Pandit Lakhmichand's artistic journey, influences, and commitment to social reform activities. It also mentions the examination of Saang performances' characteristics and elements, such as stage setup, lighting, musical instruments, costumes, and makeup, which are integral to understanding the essence of Saang. Overall, the research sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the Saang tradition in Haryana, with a specific focus on Pandit Lakhmichand's contributions and the unique elements that define Saang performances. It promises to offer valuable insights into the cultural, social, and religious aspects of Haryana's folk music landscape.*

**Keywords:** *Saang tradition, Haryana folk music, Cultural exploration, Performance elements*

## INTRODUCTION

Haryana's vibrant culture and tradition are vividly portrayed through the art form known as 'Saang' (Attri, 2023). The form of Saang that is seen today has a rich history hidden behind it, going back many years (Kumar, 2010). Haryana's Saang tradition is influenced by various folk theater styles from neighboring regions, such as the Bhandra Pathar of Kashmir, Nakkal of Punjab, Khyal of Rajasthan, Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh, and Ras of Bihar and Bengal. Haryanvi songs are primarily based on the principles of melody and emphasize the essence of music. These are pure form of folk theater with strong connections to ordinary people. The stories available in history, mythology, or legends are presented to the audience in their respective style, language, and manner. It is for people of all ages and social backgrounds and represents a powerful tool for social commentary and education (Bhan, 1996).

Nowadays, Saang can be considered a complete form of Bhakti or Nautanki. The exact origin of the word 'Saang' is not certain, but it is believed to be derived from 'Swang.' The common meaning of Swang is to imitate the behavior, emotions, etc., of someone or something. Songs are the lifeline of Haryanvi Saangs. The intricacies of Saangs are woven with the art of musical instruments. It is the magic of ragas that makes them come alive. In Haryana's religious songs, one can immediately see the essence of religious and moral values. Such songs inspire people to engage in virtuous deeds, leaving behind sinful actions. 'Sang' was respected in society. Along with musicians, during the time of saints and ascetics, it also became known by other names like 'swang' or 'sangit.' Through sāngs, one can understand the social, economic, religious, and cultural aspects of any community using it. Sāng provides insights into society's beliefs, customs, traditions, culture, and social values (Gupta, 2005).

## METHODOLOGY

The research gives a deep look into the music and folk culture of contemporary Haryana. Many different sources of information are utilized to understand the research thoroughly with various data analysis, interview social studies during the field visit. Primary data sources of the study was questionnaire, interview and field observation and live performance of the Saang during the period of field visit in Umbala, Zind, Kurukshetra and other places of Haryana. Secondary sources of the data were extracted from archive of Akashvani, YouTube, Blogs, Websites, Books and Library. The research work also presents the author's comprehension of folk music and music studies. The research is built on a solid knowledge base to analyze and study the subject more effectively and precisely. The Methodology used in the research was historical method, descriptive method and field visit and survey method. Methodology of data analysis was based on both qualitative and quantitative method.

## ARTISTIC EXPLORATION OF PANDIT LAKHMICHAND

### A. LIFE AND LEGACY

Pandit Lakhmichand was a spontaneous poet. Whenever he sang a particular Saang, he never sang it in the same way twice. Each time he sang, it was in a new form. He added such a unique flavor of romance to the art of Saang that people compared it to the nectar, prompting them to savor its taste like honeybees. Dividing Pandit Lakhmichand's songs into different categories is challenging because there is no Saang by him where romantic and religious sentiments do not intermingle seamlessly.

His songs often blend heroic and humorous rasas (emotions) elements and feature instances of wit and humor, making it difficult to compartmentalize them into distinct categories. To learn the art of acting, he resided for a few days with Shri Chand Saangi, a resident of Hadipur, Haryana, who had a Saang troupe. For six months, he served his guru with unwavering dedication and reverence, and following this continuous practice, he returned home as proficient in the art of singing. The sweetness of his voice captivated young Lakhmichand's heart in such a way that upon their first meeting, he immediately considered Shri Manasinh as his guru (Sharma, 2006).

In 1924, when Pandit Lakhmichand created his Saang, the songs that the public had previously witnessed were the ones they saw again with remarkable transformations in Lakhmichand's Saang. This led them to appreciate his artistry anew. In the sāng 'Puranmal,' composed by Pandit Lakhmichand and Pandit Vyas Ji, the main goal of both poets is to depict the practice of polyandry in society. Their close friend once said about them, 'The one who understands Lakhmichand only as a singer is truly wise.' Their perspective was always directed towards social reform activities. They directed the earnings from their songs towards charitable work. In Saangs, dance and acting are the primary means of expression. The nuances of Saang performances are enhanced through the expressions and movements of dance. The gestures and postures of dance make Saang's performances more attractive and emotionally resonant. In Saangs, there is also a subtle touch of humor, and its representation is carried out by the comedian, known as the 'Nakli' in the Saang tradition. During religious and social festivals, whether in temple courtyards, village gatherings, or

small open stages, this style has been an essential means of entertainment for generations. These performances not only included love stories but also depicted contemporary social characters and behaviors. The credit for taking Saang to the pinnacle of popularity is attributed to Pandit Lakhmichand. He endeavored to embed Saang in the hearts of the Haryanvi people. Therefore, his contribution will always be remembered (Kumar, 2002).

## B. MUSICAL CONTRIBUTION

In Haryana, the practice of 'Saang Bharna' is widely prevalent, which means dressing up as characters or creating appearances. In reality, 'Swang' is called when, despite one's best efforts, the true character is not concealed, and there is a distortion in the character. It is also the most ancient form. 'Sang' is a performative folk theater in Haryana, which means portraying through actions. The term 'sang' began to be used around 825 AD, and before that, similar performances were either called 'swang' or 'khayāl,' with 'khayāl' later becoming the more common term for such art forms or the primary usage for such performances (Gupta, 2005).

The origin of music, Saang, Swang, and Sangit, can be understood as follows: what is poetic and musical in Swang is perceived as Sangit. Music, Saang, or Swang can be referred to as Haryana's short drama. The term 'Swang' means dressing up, assuming a character, or impersonating. 'Sang' held significance in society, and its importance was tied to social and cultural prestige. This art form was not only associated with musicians but also gained popularity during the time of saints and ascetics. 'Swang,' or 'sang,' is a traditional form of theater in Haryana, which involves storytelling through songs, music, and acting on an open stage. Here, any performance in which a narrative is presented on an open stage with songs, music, and acting is called 'sang.' Most of their songs were prevalent in the Rewari region. It is said that no singer ascends Ali Baksh's platform in Rewari, and whenever a singer from the 'sāngī' tradition comes to Rewari, they pay their respects at his memorial. Swang or Saang, alongside music, had become prevalent during the times of the Siddhas and Nathas.

Saang is a form of entertainment in Haryana, where Ragini (Padm) plays a prominent role. The beauty of music, song, and dance is harmoniously blended in Saang performances. The stage for Saang is very simple, with no elaborate decorations. The analysis clearly shows that Saang, music, Swang, or music-based performances have been prevalent in India since ancient times. Shri Devi Shankar Prabhakar's statement that this folk tradition is quite old is accurate. It beautifully combines music, drama, and dance. This style was also present during the era of Sanskrit dramas. Even in the Mahakavi Kalidas's play 'Malavikagnimitram,' there is a mention of 'Swang' - 'ननु स्वांग सौष्ठवाभिनयमनुभयोदृष्टवती भगवती' ('Nanu swanga saushtavabhinayamanubhayodrishtavati bhagavati.'), it means The divine being, displaying graceful and eloquent expressions through movements, like a witness (Goel, 2006)

## C. DELVING INTO SAANG: A TRADITIONAL HARYANVI FOLK ART

The tradition of Haryanvi sāng has been flowing continuously from ancient times to modern times, much like a river flowing through the region. Sāng, being closer to 'lok' (folk) rather than classical

Natya Shastra, has always been known as 'Haryana's folk stage.' In reality, sāng is Haryana's folk stage, which has entertained people for over two and a half centuries.

Sāng, not having a place in Natya Shastra, is much closer to 'lok' (folk) and, therefore, has always been 'Haryana's folk stage.' Indeed, the actual folk stage of Haryana has always been sāng, entertaining people for over two and a half centuries. It is essential to focus on its etymology to understand its meaning. For example, 'Sa + Ang' means 'Saang,' and 'Saang + Geet' becomes 'Saangeet.' According to Dr. Purnachand, Saang can be considered Haryana's traditional folk drama. It represents stories, myths, or legends found in history, mythology, or epics, presented to the audience in their own style, language, and manner (Bhan, 1996).

Even changing attire or adopting a different appearance, such as assuming the form of a deity, is also called 'Swang.' In the Bhakti era, the term 'Bhagat' was also used for Saang or Swang performers. In the masnavi 'Naurange Ishq' composed in 1685 AD by Maulana Ganimat, those who filled colors in Swangs were called 'Bhagat-Baaj.'

Saang is a performative poetic drama. In the words of Dr. Shankarlal Yadav, 'Saang' is a form of drama or allegory in which poetry takes precedence. It is known as a metrical play or poetic drama in English. In this form, the verses are called 'Varta'. Saangs are primarily divided into four categories based on their narrative content. First, there are Pauranik Saangs (Mythological Saang), which draw their narratives from Puranas, ancient Hindu scriptures. These Saangs vividly depict stories and characters from these Puranic texts, an example being the Saangs that narrate the tale of Satyawana and Savitri. Second, Aitihāsik Saangs (Historical Saang) are rooted in historical events or figures, drawing inspiration from historical accounts. Saangs like Pingala-Bharbhari fall under this category.

In contrast, Kalpanik Saangs (Imaginary Saang) are purely products of imagination, where the Saangi, or singer, crafts stories based on their creative faculties. Shahi-Lakadahara Saangs exemplify this imaginative category. Lastly, Lok-Kathao Par Aadharit Saangs (Folklore-based Saang) are firmly grounded in local folklore and legends. Here, the poet or Saangi has the flexibility to adapt the narrative content according to their preferences and the interests of the local audience (Sudiksha, 2006). This categorization underscores the rich diversity and versatility of Saang performances, offering a captivating blend of mythology, history, imagination, and local tradition.

Each category of Saang has its unique characteristics and allows for a diverse range of storytelling and artistic expression in the traditional folk art of Haryana. During its initial days, Saang was similar to Mujra and Nakkal, and due to the prevalence of Mujra in Saang, ordinary people often associated it with obscenity. Saang, a captivating folk theater form, boasts distinctive characteristics that define its essence. The stage setup for Saang performances occurs in an open ground, with the audience surrounding it. The stage itself is typically a raised platform, often featuring thrones or seats for the actors. In rural settings, traditional charpoys or cots may be used to set the scene. Lighting arrangements have evolved over time; while torches were initially

employed, gas lighting later became prevalent. Today, electric lighting is the norm, though gas lamps remain as backups.

An intriguing aspect of Saang is its seating arrangement. Unlike conventional theaters, there is no separate green room or gallery for the audience. All the performers, including musicians and actors, sit together on the stage. They move to their designated spots when it's their turn, and the guru of the Saang troupe also holds a prominent position on the stage. To accommodate the large crowds drawn to Saang performances, thousands of spectators sit together on the ground, with a flexible seating arrangement that doesn't categorize the audience based on class or social status.

Musical instruments play a vital role in enhancing the Saang experience. While the sarangi and dhol are the primary instruments, a variety of others such as Manohar, Chimto, Dhap, Harmonium, Ektara, Baijnath, Jhanjh, Manjeera, Ghada, and Dand contribute to the musical richness of Saang. Costumes and jewelry in Saang performances are carefully chosen to suit the social context, with typical attire including dhotis, kurtas, safas (turbans), bandis, and chadris. Distinctions among characters like rajahs, ranis, and bandis are made through dialogue rather than attire.

Saang's approach to makeup is understated, with an emphasis on natural appearances. Performers may use kajal, geru (red earth), khadia, safeda (white powder), cream, powder, lipstick, and a range of jewelry such as haars, jhumkas, borlas, kanthis, malas, and ghungroos on their feet. The stage arrangement of Saang is unique, typically reserved for special occasions. The conduct of the Saang troupe is overseen by the guru of the akhara (wrestling club), signifying its transformation from a traditional art form into a professional entertainment business. These distinct elements collectively contribute to the vibrant and culturally rich world of Saang. Saang performers enter the stage with the guru's blessings, and the stage is marked by a raised platform where the guru sits. Saang, with its unique characteristics and rich cultural significance, continues to thrive as a form of cultural and artistic expression in Haryana, preserving its heritage and traditions (Rani, 2003).

#### **D. STANDOUT CONTRIBUTION**

Pandit Lakhmichand's biography is filled with his unique talent as a spontaneous poet. His songs, known as Saang, were never the same twice, always bringing a fresh flavor of romance. However, he gave us a new term called 'Sorath'. Sorath is possibly named after the Sorath Raga, which is sung in the middle of the night. Since Saang performances often occur at night, the name 'Sorath' may have been associated with it due to Pandit Lakhmichand's practice routine during nighttime. Another reason for using the term 'Sorath' as a synonym for Saang is the assumption that the renowned Haryanvi singer Deepchand composed a successful Sorath song, which depicted a character named Sundari. This song became extremely popular among the public, and over time, songs composed and performed in this style began to be referred to as Sorath (Kumar, 2002).

#### **CONCLUSION**

Pandit Lakhmichand was a remarkable and spontaneous poet who brought a unique flavor of romance to the art of Saang, leaving an indelible mark on Haryana's cultural heritage. His songs seamlessly blended romantic and religious sentiments, making them difficult to categorize. He dedicated himself to learning the art of acting and singing under the guidance of Shri Manasinh and

Shri Chand Saangi, emerging as a proficient artist. Pandit Lakhmichand's Saangs brought fresh and remarkable transformations to existing songs, earning him appreciation and recognition (Jaimini & Raghav, 2022). His perspective was always directed towards social reform, and he used the earnings from his songs for charitable purposes. Saang, with its blend of music, dance, and humor, became a vital form of entertainment during religious and social festivals.

In the realm of music and folk life, Saang has been a continuous tradition in Haryana, entertaining people for centuries. Its roots can be traced back to ancient times, and it remains a significant folk stage in the region. Saang is characterized by its unique narrative content, stage setup, lighting, seating arrangements, musical instruments, costumes, and makeup, all contributing to its rich cultural significance.

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