

Contribution of Pt. Lakhmi Chand in India's most Ancient Folk Opera Theatre Swang

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ABSTRACT

Folk theatre is a precious element, who begins with the origin of the universe and its cultural boundaries spread with the extension of the world. In Indian culture and society Folk theatre has played a expressive and meaningful role. Folklore itself includes All forms of theatrical performances which entertain people with its miraculous performances. Swang, ragini, Humor have always been integral part of the Haryanvi folk opera Theatre Swang. The meaning of raginis directly connect with human nature, situation and social relations. Pt. Lakhmi Chand is the most renowned personality in Haryanvi folk Opera theatre Swang . He improved the ragini style of singing. He possessed a very rich, melodious voice and was also a successful composer. Lakhmi Chand presented the philosophy of life in his swangs, on the other hand, he polished and presented the musical, artistic and philosophical heritage of the world in folk language. The origin of swang is traced by Kisan Lal Bhatt, who laid the foundation of the present style of folk theatre .The stage was most elementary, the actors performed from a central place among the audience.

Keywords: - Culture, Folklore, Haryana, Lakhmi Chand, Opera, Swang

Indian Folklore (Swang) Swang comprises a mixture of songs and acts but the main attraction of swangs are its raginis. Raginis which 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 memorization. Swang can be considered as the most ancient folk opera theatre form of India. Swangs are centuries old and are addressing issues of contemporary issues. Musical swangs came up near 1800 around the regions of Hathras.

Humor, ragini and swang have always been integral part of the Haryanvi rural setup. The raginis of yore sing of human nature, its predicaments and social relations. Pt. Lakhmi Chand is the most celebrated name in Haryana. He improved the ragini style of singing. He possessed a very rich, melodious voice and was also a successful composer. Lakhmi Chand presented the philosophy of life in his swangs, on the other hand, he polished and presented the musical, artistic and philosophical heritage of the world in folk language

Pandit Lakhmi Chand was an Indian poet of Haryanvi language. He was given the title of 'Pandit'. He was also known as Kalidas of Haryana. He has been accorded the honor of the 'Surya Kavi' of Haryanvi Music genre Raagni and Saang. He is popularly referred to as 'Dada Lakhmi Chand' out of respect. His work in filled with songs containing message on moral values, which earned him respect in all corners of Haryana and was called ahead of his time.

The origin of swang is traced to Kisan Lal Bhatt, who laid the foundation of the present style of folk theatre. Another view gives credit for this to one Kavi Shankar Dass, a poet artist from Meerut. The stage was most elementary, the actors performed from a central place among the audience.

The beginning of 20th century proved to be the Shakespearean age of Haryanvi folk opera swang. The proponent of this era was Deep Chand. In Haryana the most celebrated name that of Deep Chand Brahman of village Sheri Khanda in Sonapat. He is still in public memor, Semiliterate, he had a spark, a touch of genius. He polished the style of Ali Bux and gave a new colour to this folk art. Dip Chand's style of performance incorporated elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, and ballad-recitation

After Deep came the name of Hardeva in the field of swang. He skillfully polished the 'chabola' style of Deep Chand and made some improvements in Haryanavi ragini. Heeramal-Jmaal, Dharmbir-Raghbir, Heer-Ranjha, BijaSorath are well known swangs of Hardeva. Baje Bhagat, a disciple of Hardeva, was a popular swangi before Lakhmi Chand. He beautifully mixed both the styles of folk music, thus creating a greater mass appeal. He made many improvements in stage-music. He brought polished artists of saarangi, Dholak, Nagaras and Harmonium on stage.

Pt. Lakhmi Chand is the next most celebrated name in Haryana after Deep Chand. He improved the ragni style of singing. He possessed a very rich, melodious voice and was also a successful composer.



Lakhmi Chand was born in Janti Kalan in a Haryanvi Gaur Brahmin family, a village located in Sonapat district of Haryana. His father was an ordinary farmer. He had to resist his family's opposition to enter the field of art. He is usually considered as illiterate yet a great poet of Haryanvi language.

He used to sing various stories with great morals in his 'Raagni' and basically gave a message to live a good lifestyle through skits called Saang. He also used to entertain people through his acts Saang in the native language. His widely popular work is 'Lakhmichand Ka Brahmgyaan' that has been sung by various Haryanvi artists after his death.

Pt. Lakhmi Chand sings: “Lena ek na dene do dildar bane hande se...mann mein ghundi rahe paap ki yaar banne haande se” (People who are absolutely unconcerned tend to behave kind-hearted and the treacherous and sinners pretend to be friendly). “Ek chidiya ke do bachhe the, duji chidi ne maar diye” is about a woman's concern for her children if her husband remarries after her death (Roop Basant). “Duji chidi” is allegorically used for the second wife, who mistreats and kills the kids born of the first wife.

Pt. Lakhmi Chand's famous ragni sings about social give-and-take relationship: “Le ke dede kar ke khale, us tae kon jabar ho se; Nugra manas aankh badal ja, samajhdar ki maer ho se” (If you work hard and honestly, pay back what you borrow from others, no one can be stronger than you. If an ungrateful liar turns hostile, it will be a tough time for the sane). It is a bitter satire on the present day infamous bank loan defaulters such as Vijay Mallya or Nirav Modi, who have become fugitives.

In Pt. Lakhmi Chand's “Kissa Chaap Singh”, Chap Singh is intrigued, in the Othello style, by his colleague soldier, Sher Khan. According to a bet passed between the two before the king, Chap Singh will be hanged if his wife, Somvati, is proved disloyal. Sher Khan gets to know about her secret body marks, especially a mole on her thigh, through a woman spy. Sore-hearted Chap Singh sings in the Hamlet's manner of “frailty, thy name is women”: “Bin aayi me marva de, nirbhag lugai ho se...apne jaame ne aape kha le, ya to saanp lugai ho se”. Later Somvati comes to his rescue, unfolding the conspiracy.

“Satyawani Savitri” reveals the saga of a devoted wife's struggle and fight with Yam (god of death) for her husband's protection and bringing him back to life even after his death. Savitri, a king's daughter, marries a woodcutter, Satyawani, whose life was predicted to be short. The ragni “Savitri mera ji ghabrava sar ghodya mein dharle” sings of a husband's desire to be near his wife and certain ceremonies she should perform after his death for peace to his soul. Interestingly, “Jaani Chor”, “Pooan Mal”, “Jaimal Fatta”, “Seth Tara Chand”, “Veer Vikarma Jeet”, “Narsi ka Bhaat”, “Chand Kiran”, “Leelo Chaman”, “Heer Ranjha”, “Sohni Mahiwal”, “Nal Damiyanti”, “Meera Bai”, “Padmavat”, “Raja Bhoj” and

“Roopkala” all call attention to diverse forms of life from birth to death, from love to lust and from devotion to deceitfulness. Though not entirely free from patriarchal nuances, these saangs are cathartic, entertaining and reformatory in nature, besides being timeless and unsurpassable in truth and wisdom.



Lakhmi Chand's Trinity (From Left to Right) Ustad Dhula, Ustad Tungal and Ustad Shubhan

Pandit Lakhmi Chand contained the whole gist of GEETA only in the two lines of a ragni in his swaang Padmavat:

“Lakhmi Chand chhoday sab phnd
Milega karam karey ka phal-dundh”.

(Lakhmi Chand says that leave all hypocrisy, deeds will be justified)

In the same way, he wrote in his swaang ‘Harishchander’ from the point of view of an ascetic:

“Lakhmi Chand karam ki chhint
Yaa jindagi roti par kaa tint”

(Duty is good where life is volatile and transient)

The artists sing some religious or other songs connected with the play. Then the “guru” appears and the artists touch his feet to evoke his blessing. The play opens with a dedicatory song in praise of the goddess of knowledge (Bhawani).

Ay re bhawani baas Kar maira ghat ka parda khol
Rasna par basa kru bhai shudh shabd much bol
(Oh Goddess Bhawani give me enlightenment)

In one of his ragni Lakhmi Chand sings:

“lena ek na dene do dildar bane hande se...
Man me ghundi paap ki yaar bane hande se”

(People who are absolutely unconcerned tend to behave kind-hearted and treacherous and sinners pretend to be friendly)

Lakhmi Chand’s songs, ragnis and his swangs were as solemn and vivid as the gajals of Mirza Ghalib. Mulk Raj Anand gave homage to Lakhmi Chand in following words: “you have expressed in your passionate words the vital human truths by which our people often deadened by oppression, have left a heritage which shines like other fiery words of the Haryana tongue by unknown bards and still inspires the eyes of your men and women to awaken from their sleep”.

The Haryana Government has proposed to set up Pt Lakhmi Chand Cultural University at Aterna village in Sonapat district. Pt Lakhmi Chand (1903-1948), known as 'Surya Kavi' of Haryana, is much adored for Haryanvi musical genres ragni and saang or swang and is regarded as the “Shakespeare of Haryana”.

Unfortunately, the gamut of life-songs as ragnis, kissa and saangs by Pt Lakhmi Chand, Baje Bhagat, Mange Ram, Dhanpat Saangi, Mehar Singh et al, are being fast replaced by seemingly vulgar pop songs that are far removed from the fundamental issues concerning life's complexities about which Dada Lakhmi Chand always dispassionately sang.

The Haryanvi swang has enriched itself by borrowing and adopting a variety of themes. It embraces romances like Sorath, Nihalade, Padmawat, Nautanki etc. There are historical and semi historical themes based on epics, such as Raja Rissalu, Kichak Badh, Draupadi Chir Haran, Amar Singh, Rathor, Sarwar Neer, Jaswant Singh, etc. themes of old literature, such as Gopi Chand, Bhartari Hari, Harishander, Raja Bhoj, etc. are also adopted. Mythological themes like Prahlad Bhagat, and Punjabi romances like Puran Bhagat, Heer Ranjha, etc. have become part of the vest and varied themes on which the Haryanavi rural theatre operates. Haryanavi land has cultivated a well known folk culture. Though today its folk culture and folk theatres lost all its charms and artistic talent, which were seen some 35-40 years ago. Some folk cultures have altered their shapes and forms and some are in a more critical situation

Hence, the folk cultural form, swang, which is representative of Haryanavi folk culture, is in a deteriorating or decaying position. In present era, swang culture which entertained people at nights on open platforms with the mythological, historical or love themes and performed with dancing, singing, music and acting. And through this swang culture, older generation passed its theatrical cultural heritage to the younger generation. After Pt. Lakhmi Chand his disciple Mange ram has lead his pranali and after Mange Ram now in these days Pt.Vishnu Dutt sharma is leading Lakhmi chand Pranali. But, now this folk system is gradually dying away Because laps of young folk artists . Now this beautiful folk art form need light the cultural value all causes for this decaying condition of folk opera Swang.

Today's consumerist culture is shadowing down acting, drama and folk theatre. In this culture only materialistic and physical thirst is being satisfied on the name of identity. New facets of human busyness are growing in this materialistic culture. The treasure of folk culture of man and society is gradually deteriorating. In this materialistic era, luxury and affluence has definitely increased. If there is something that has decayed, is the condition of swangs. The inflation and unemployment after World War 2 has badly affected the merry lives of public. This bitter and deceitful experience has diverted their attention from holy rituals and traditions, that is why, they are not interested in any kind of theatrical entertainment. Thus, we are required to sustain our happiness. Very charming plots on mythological, historical, religious and social themes have been presented in Indian cultures.

Even after this, we require new plots and new experiments, so that, work can be done for the betterment and regeneration of our folk opera swang. Cinema has also badly affected the folk opera swang and traditional culture and it has become a serious problem today.

A proper consideration must be given to it. Theatre should be organized by the government. Cultural institutions and theatre groups can do a very helpful work for swang.

Government must organise training camps for folk artists. In the past, folk opera swang, which is the representative of our theatrical genre, its performances continued for whole nights, but this characteristic of swang does not suit the present times, so, swang should be mould in such a way that their performances can be completed within three hours.

Today's, consumerist and materialist approach has made us passive towards our folk opera swang and traditional arts. But this attitude of ours is dangerous for us and our traditions and our folk artists also and this our duty to protect our tradition and traditional artists.

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