

**Haryana’s Saang and Bengal’s Jatra: A Comparative Study**

**Chetna Arya,**

Ph.D Scholar

BPSMV, Khanpur Kalan, Sonipat

[chetna.arya94@gmail.com](mailto:chetna.arya94@gmail.com)

**Abstract:**

Each area has its own history, rituals, traditions, cultural notions and geographical background that play a major role in shaping and nourishing its folklore. On the other hand, there are few notions which bind them together and one of them is literature. Among all the genres of literature, the paper shall focus on the importance of folk theatre and compare two folk theatres- Haryana’s Saang and West Bengal’s Jatra.

**Keywords:** comparative study, jatra, saang, folk theatre.

India has a long and rich history of the tradition of folk theatre dating back to at least five thousand years. Bharat Muni’s *Natyashastra* is the most famous and earliest treatise on dramaturgy in the world which also gives the most detailed description of the divine origin of Indian theatre. Theatre in India started with narrative form with recitation, singing and dancing. Gradually, these elements became an integral part of theatre; it mixed and encompassed all the other forms of literature and art and called “natya”. Although, there are different perspectives regarding the origin of folk drama as some scholars believe that folk theatre existed in ancient India along with a rich classical Sanskrit theatre. Gradually, the Sanskrit theatre ran down whereas folk theatre flourished.

In Indian culture, folk theatre has played a very lively and large role. In present times also it has a deeper significance on people lives. It has not only been a source of entertainment but also proved a tool for a change in the society. In India, folk theatre incorporates singing, dancing, acting and many other activities of everyday life. It is a kind of an “all inclusive pack” which mirrors the society perfectly with an aim to improvise it. In his book *Rethinking Folk Drama*, Steve Tills says that “folk drama can teach us something not only about particular cultures, but about humanity at large”. (pg.11)

Broadly, Indian folk theatre can be divided into two categories - religious and the secular theatre. The religious theatre gave rise to ritual theatre

whereas, the latter gave rise to the theatre of entertainment; both flourishing and influencing each other mutually. These are also considered as folk theatre traditions. Each state in India has its own folk theatre and most of them are vocal and narrative in nature. Some of the popular Indian folk dramas are listed below along with the name of the states these forms belong to-

FOLK DRAMA	STATE
BhandPather	Jammu & Kashmir
Swang (Saang)	Haryana, Rajasthan, UP and Malwa
Nautanki	Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab
Raasleela	Uttar Pradesh
Maach	Madhya Pradesh
Ramman	Uttarakhand
Jatra	Bengal
Tamasha	Maharashtra
Yakshagana	Karnataka
Bhaona	Assam
Bhavai	Northern Gujarat
Dashavtar	Goa and Konkan
Krishnattam, Mudi yettu, Theyyam and Koodiyattam	Kerala
Theukoothu	Tamil Nadu
Veedhi Natakam	Andhra Pradesh

(<http://www.gktoday.in/folk-theatre-in-india/>)

Amongst all these folk theatres of India, this research paper shall compare the two folk theatre traditions- Haryana’s Saang and West Bengal’s Jatra.

The two different states carry different identity; each one is famous for its own beauty and specialty. The former is known for its chivalry and agriculture, while the latter is known for its art and culture. With the passage of time, society grows and these things become an integral part of the folk theatres. Thus, these two theatres have also flourished in the same way.

### Saang

Saangs has always been an integral part of Haryanvi society. In earlier times it was known by some other names like 'swang', 'sangitak', 'saurath' and many others. Initially, it was called 'natya'. The word 'saang' means imitation or to copy. These are the metrical plays or can also be called dramatic poetry rather than plays as most of the performance takes place in verse form. Whereas, the prose form is used as a tool for creating a connection amongst audience and the artists; it also gives an interesting and decisive turn to the main plot of the story.

Originally, the saangs are performed on an open stage sitting audience all around it. The stage is not much decorated but just a square wooden platform of around three and a half meters length and breadth. As the word 'saang' suggests imitation, the male actors perform all the roles and disguise themselves as women for female roles which also add a humor to the performance. The performer does not need a mike to perform because saang is performed in high pitch where the performer puts one of his hands on his ear and the other towards the sky. There is variety of themes combined in a saang like mythology, historical, love, religious, heroic, and many others. A saang always starts with an invocation of god and the artist's guru.

Kishan Lal Bhatt is said to be the originator of saang, as it he who laid the foundation of moden folk theatre. Ali Baksh, Pandit Deep Chand, Baje Bhagat, Pandit Lakhmi Chand, foji Meher Singh, are some other celebrated names in the history of Haryanvi saang. Some of the most famous saang are *Notanki*, *Raja Harishchandra*, *Meerabai*, *Amar Singh Rathor*, *Nihalde*, *Puran Bhagat*, *Heer- Ranjha*, *Cheer Haran*, etc.

### Types of Saang:

At its introductory stage, saang were classified into two categories.

1. A type of hymns which later modified into *Ramleela* and *Rasleela*.
2. The saang representing themes of everyday life. It included all type of folk theatres like mythological, heroic, love, historical and every other form.

Whereas, Shankar Lal Yadav in his book *Haryana Ka Loksahitya* mentions two kind of styles *Hathras* and *Rohtaki*.

### Jatra

The folk theatre of West Bengal is known as Jatra which has its origin from the Sanskrit word *yatra* meaning journey or procession. There are different opinions about the origin of jatra but the rise of jatra is being credited to Sri Chaitnya Mahaprabhu in bhakti Movement. This folk theatre is not only performed in Bengal but in also states like Orissa, Tripura, Assam and even Bangladesh. It draws its plot from Hindu mythological tales, epics and popular legends. There are different kinds of jatra- *Krishna jatra*, *shakti jatra*, *shitala jatra*, *vidyasundar jatra*, *nath jatra*, *geetavinoy jatra*, *bhanr jatra*, *swadesi jatra*.

The thematic categorization of jatra can be done as-  
**Mythological jatra-** it draws it theme from the Hindu mythology. Most of these stories are drawn upon the great epics like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* or the *Puranas*.

**Social Jatra** - In contemporary times, social jatra is the most popular jatra. It creates social awareness and draws its theme from current social issues like unemployment, dowry, women empowerment and many others.

**Biographical Jatra-** it shows the life of great people. For example, representations of life of great personalities like Rabindranath Tagore. It overlaps with the themes of mythology, social, history and others.

**Historical Jatra** - It included the stories from history. It mostly included the great incidents of history or lives of great kings like Akbar, Maharana Pratap, etc

**Political Jatra** - It included the plays performed for political awareness.

**Imaginary jatra-** it includes the plays based on imaginative stories. It included fictional stories. Brajendra Kumar De is known as the father of this kind of jatra.

*Jatra* is a musical theater form in which trained artists perform while moving from one place to another. It is usually a four to five hour long performance. It is an amalgamation of music, dance, dialogues and acting. Usually, the stage is open from all sides and has minimal props and furniture. The artists are predominantly male, who also performs the female role. Some famous *jatra* personalities are Shri Chaitanya Dev, Sridam, Parmananda Das, Motilal Roy, Utpal Dutt. apart from all these, there are also some other aspects of *jatra*'s music and dance like *juri*, *vivek*, *balok* and many other things.

**Salient features of *Jatra***

1. It is an open air theatre.
2. It is more religious in nature.
3. Mass entertainment is the goal.
4. The performance is interspersed with music, dance and drama.
5. The ongoing procession of *jatra* offers a wider aspect of life and society.
6. It is a long play.

**Similarities between Saang and *Jatra*:**

- Both the dramas begin with invocation of God and guru. It is always an important part of both the theatrical performances.
- Music and dance are the most important part of both the theatres.
- An element of humor and satire remains an integral part of both the theatres.
- Generally, both the performances start with the play of musical instruments.
- Minimal use of props and decoration on the stage is used in both the theatres.
- The audience sits all around the stage.
- In both the theatres, artists are respected and well trained.
- Both the performances are performed in open –air.
- Both the theatres draw its episodes from the great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

**Dissimilarities between Saang and *Jatra*:**

- One can easily trace the words of urdu, Arabic, Sanskrit, English, and Haryanvi in saang but the *jatra* does not include the words of these language. They are generally in Bengali language.
- The costume in saang does not play much role but there is a heavy makeup and costumes in *jatra* performances.
- There is a season of *jatra* performances but saang can be played in any marriage or any occasion.
- Sitting arrangement is never hierarchical in a saang but in *jatra* it is according to the ticket.

After studying *Jatra* and *Saang* in detail, one fully agrees with the view that the folklore of one area is different from the other area because of different geographical differences and identities but they also share some similarities with the other. It is understandable because each area has its own distinct history, traditions, rituals, cultural notions and geographical backgrounds that play its own role in shaping and nourishing its folklore but on the other hand, literature binds them all together.

**Works Cited**

1. Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 9th ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.
2. Brandon, James R. and Martin Banham, editors. "Jatra." The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 89-91.
3. Jadhav, Kishore. *Folklore and its Motifs in Modern Literature*. New Delhi: Manas Publications, 1990.
4. Sen, Jashodhara. *Conscience on Stage: Revising Jatra in Bengal as a Tool for Representation, Restoration, and Revolution*. 2020.
5. Yadav, Shankar Lal. *Haryana Pradesh Ka Lok Sahitya*. Page 387, Allahabad: Hindustani Academi, 2000.