The Ethnography of *Sāng*, A North Indian Folk Opera

By
VED PRAKASH VATUK and SYLVIA VATUK

India has a dramatic tradition, both literary and folk, of many centuries duration. Bharata Muni discusses the art of the drama in his *Nāṭyashāstra*, a work supposedly composed in the second century B.C. when some of the best Sanskrit plays were already in existence. Speaking of the origins of the dramatic art, he asserts that drama represents the *pañchama veda* (Fifth Veda), created by God himself in order to impart instruction in religious behavior to the members of the lower classes who were not allowed access to the other Vedas.[1] This myth of the deliberate, divine creation of the drama would suggest that in fact the Sanskrit drama as a literary form must have developed out of a prior folk dramatic tradition. As Keith has pointed out, the Sanskrit drama was so polished in its conventions, so linguistically refined, that the mass of the people could not have enjoyed it,[2] and it is therefore likely that throughout history the two traditions, folk and literary, developed side by side, mutually influencing one another.

Throughout traditional Indian literature, in Sanskrit, Prākrit, Apabhramsha and modern Hindi, the words *svāng*, *suāng*, and *sāng* recur frequently with various referents, generally to some form of drama. We cannot completely identify the modern *sāng* of our title with the dramatic forms thus referred to in the past. However, the etymological relationship of these words to the modern *sāng* and the fact that their use doubtless reflects the

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1. Bharata Muni, *Nāṭyashāstra*, Ch. I. 11-22.
2. A. Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, Oxford, 1924, p. 31.

existence of a folk dramatic tradition persisting throughout Indian history, justifies their brief mention here.[3]

In *Vikramorvashi,* a play of Kālīdās written in the 5th century A.D., folk meters have been used in conversations with birds, animals, and forest folk.[4] Kālidās also mentions the word *sāng* and suggests that the folk tradition had at that time developed a kind of drama oriented toward experimentation. It was musical in character, a kind of poetic opera, and several instruments were used in accompaniment.[5]

The existencce of a folk dramatic tradition is revealed in the remarks of writers of a later period as well. In the 9th century Kaṇhappā has mentioned *sāng* in his poems.[6] Kabir, in

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3. The words *sāng, suāng,* and *svāng* seem to be derived from the Sanskrit *svānga,* meaning "disguise". In the dialects of this area, Bāngrū and Kauravī (Nāgarī) of Western Hindi, another word is used for *sāng* when it is in a written form, that is, *sāngīt.* Gupta (and Yādav also, quoting Gupta without attribution) has suggested that both *sāng* and *sāngīt* may be derived from the Sanskrit *sangīta* ("music"), since music plays such a prominent role in this form of drama. This etymology does not seem to fit the linguistic development of the dialects in question. As far as the word *sāng* is concerned, since it has been demonstrably used for centuries with the meaning "disguise", "acting", or "drama", it does not appear likely that the more recent dialectical word *sāng* should have come from *sangīt.* It is possible that the word *sāngīt* could be derived from the Sanskrit *sāngīta* ("musical"), an adjectival form of *sangīta.* However, we would suggest the possibility that, since *sāngīt* is only used for the written form of *sāng* (a distribution not maintained by the authorities), it is a compound word from *sāng* and *gīt* (Sanskrit *gīta,* "song"), which according to the morphophonemic rules of these dialects would produce *sāngīt,* with the meaning *"sāng* songs" or "songs of *sāng".* *Cf.* Somnāth Gupta, *Hindī Nāṭak Sāhitya kā Itihās,* Jālandhar and Allahabād, 1958, 4th ed., p. 14. Also, Shankarlāl Yādav, *Hariānā Prādesh kā Loksāhitya,* Allahabād, 1960, p. 383.

4. Sītārām Chaturvedī, ed., *Kālidāsa Granthāvalī,* Aligarh, 1962. *Vikramorvashī,* Act IV, pp. 212-216. For readers of this paper, particular attention should be drawn to verse 8, which is the earliest documented use of *dohā* meter, so popular in folk and literary styles of the Hindi speaking area. *Cf.* S. H. Kellogg, *A Grammar of the Hindi Language,* London, reprinted 1955, p. 575.

5. *Mālavikāgnimitra,* Act I. In Chaturvedī, *op. cit.* p. 262. See also Gopīnāth Tivārī, *Bhāratendukālīn Nāṭak Sāhitya,* Jālandhar and Allahabād, 1959, pp. 72-78.

6. Quoted from a manuscript poem by R. C. Shukla, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās,* Kāshī, 1955, p. 10.

the 15th century, complains of the people's interest in *svāng* to the neglect of devotion toward God.[7] Jāyasī, in the 16th century, mentions female prostitutes, called *suāngīs,* who disguise themselves as *yogīs,* male ascetics.[8]

In modern India, each region can be found to have its own characteristic forms of folk drama. Prominent, for example, are the *khyāl* of Rajasthan, *bhavāī* of Gujarat, *sāngīt* or *tamāshā* of Maharashtra, and *bhagvat mel* of Andhra.[9] Many others have been discussed in the literature. In most cases, several distinct forms of folk drama co-exist in a single area. Uttar Pradesh has *rās, nakal, nautankī, bhāṇḍ, rām līlā, sāng,* and others.[10] These are all different in many respects. However, all have some common features. The stories they portray are derived for the most part from the same myths, tales, and epics, and from the lives of Indian religious and folk heroes. Most use poetry, and where prose is employed, poetic elements such as rhyming, and elaborate figurative speech are prominent. All use music and song as an integral part of the performance, so that it is appropriate to call them folk opera. Yet despite this underlying similarity in content and technique, it must be stressed that all Indian folk opera is not identical. It is unfortunate that in the available literature, both in English and in Indian languages, there has been a tendency to confuse various forms of the folk opera. This appears to result from heavy and indiscriminate reliance on written sources rather than on personal field research, and from the assumption that phenomena similar or identical in name, but occurring in different regions, are also similar or identical in form. The work of Satyā Gupta, one of the few writers who has worked on the folklore of the area of Western Uttar Pradesh

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7. Ayodhyā Singh Upadhyāya, *Kabīr Vachnāvalī,* 9th ed., Kāshī, 1946, p. 216.

8. Rāj Nāth Sharmā, ed., *Jāyasī Granthāvalī: Padmāvat Ādi,* Agra, 1962, p. 951.

9. See, for example, Balwant Gargī, *Theatre in India,* New York, 1962, pp. 82-95. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, *Indian Drama,* Delhi, 1956, *passim.* Shrīkrishna Dās, *Hamārī Nāṭya Parampara,* Allahabād, 1956, pp. 163-448. Dhirendra Varmā, *et al., Hindī Sāhitya Kosh,* Banāras, 1958, *passim.*

10. Varmā, *op. cit., passim.* Gargī, *op. cit.,* pp. 96-103. Dās, *op. cit.,* pp. 163-180, 191-200. Yādav, *op. cit.,* pp. 379-408. Chandra Prakāsh Singh, *Hindī Nāṭya Sāhitya aur Rangmanch kī Mīmānsā,* Delhi, 1964, pp. 24-153. Norvin Hein, "The Ram Lila", *Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. 71, 1958, pp. 279-304.

with which we are here concerned, unfortunately suffers from this defect. In her chapter on the local folk drama, Gupta supports the assertion of numerous general writers on Hindi literature that *sāng, nautankī* and *bhagat* are identical. Actual attendance at performances, or even a fairly superficial reading of the individual descriptions of these in her quoted sources would readily demonstrate the faultiness of this generalization.[11] She has further confused the issue of Uttar Pradesh's folk drama by including in her general statement of identity an all-female skit, the *khoria,* performed by amateurs in connection with the marriage ceremony.[12]

In the part of western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Panjab with which we are dealing here, several types of folk drama and folk dramatic troupes are to be found at the present time. One of the best known folk dramas is the *rām līlā,* a performance of about fourteen days duration in which the important episodes in the life of Lord Ram, as related in the *Ramāyana* and in the improvisations of local writers, are recited and acted out. Under the term *rām līlā* are included two kinds of performances. The local *rām līlā* is performed yearly during September or October at the festival of Dashahara and is organized by a committee in each city. Another *rām līlā* is performed by independent professional troupes, without regard for the season.[13] Skits and short plays of another kind are performed by hereditary troupes of *bhānḍs* and *natnīs,* and by the *hijṛās.* Typical of this area is the one-man surprise skit of the *bahurūpiā,* in which the actor does an impersonation, in a real-life situation, with the purpose of actually deceiving his audience. At the close of his performance he reveals his true identity and is given money by onlookers. Also common in this area are several types of narrative performances which are sung but not acted out. Among the performers of these the most important are *ālhā* groups, *holī* groups and *bhajan mandalīs,* about which more will be said later.

Here we are specifically concerned with a particular type of folk performance, the *sāng.* Our research has been confined

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11. Satyā Guptā, *Kharṛibolī kā Lok-Sāhitya,* Allahabād, 1965, p. 307. *Cf.* Varmā, p. 426, which she is quoting without attribution, and pp. 425, 878. Dashrath Ojhā, *Hindī Nāṭak, Udbhav aur Vikās,* Delhi, 1956, pp. 34-38. Arvind Kulshrestha, "Bhagat, The Folk Drama of Agra", *Folklore,* Vol. II, 1961, pp. 322-328.

12. Satyā Gupta, *op. cit.,* pp. 315-316.

13. Hein, *op. cit.* Gargi, *op. cit.,* pp. 96-100.

essentially to Meerut District, in the eastern part of the region under consideration, but we have established the existence of *sāng* throughout the whole area of western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Panjab.[14] One of us has been familiar with *sāng* for many years, but it was not until the summer of 1965 that we were able to attempt a serious investigation of this local folk opera. It was possible to interview several *sāngīs* about their backgrounds, training and professional lives and to follow up some ideas that had occurred to us while still at a distance, about the social functions of the *sāng* performance, the social setting in which it is found, and the effects of today's economic and social changes upon the popularity of *sāng* and even upon the form and content of the *sāng* performance itself. We were particularly interested in viewing *sāng* as an instrument of communication in the rural setting and in comparing its message content with that of other competing agents in the same field. In Singer's terms, we sought to study the role of the *sāngi* as a "cultural specialist",[15] or in Wolf's terms as a "cultural broker"[16] in this area of North India.

The *sāng* troupe, called *khāṛā,* usually consists of nine to twelve members. Of these, approximately four are instrumentalists who provide the musical accompaniment to the actor-singers on the *tablā* (a small double set of drums), *nagāṛā* (or *nakkāṛā,* kettle-drum), *sārangī* (a large stringed instrument), and sometimes a harmonium and/or cymbals. With the *khāṛā*, a cook (of Brahman caste) and a man to prepare the *hukka,* or water pipe (traditionally a man of the *Nāī* or barber caste), generally travel.

All *sāngīs* are male. Although the troupe may travel as much as 100 miles for a performance, and may be in demand for much of the year, the performers are not truly nomadic. All

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14. See, for example, Yādav, *op. cit.*, 379-408. Satyā Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-327. Krishna Chandra Sharmā 'Chandra', "Kauravī Loksāhitya", in Rāhul Sānkrityāyan and Krishnadev Upāphyāya, *Hindī Sāhitya kā Vrihad Itihās,* Kāshī, 1960, pp. 505-509. Sharmā has listed the names of 17 "*svāng* writer-poets" of the area. However, of these only four are actual *sāngīs,* the rest being *bhajnopdeshaks* (see below) or Holi writers, some of them active opponents of *sāng. Cf.* p. 506.

15. Milton Singer ,"The Great Tradition of Hinduism in the City of Madras", *Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. 71, No. 281, 1958.

16. Eric R. Wolf, "Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico", *American Anthropologist,* Vol. 58, 1956, pp. 1065-1078.

maintain a home and family in their own village, to which they return between tours.

Recruitment to the *sāng khāṛā* does not follow hereditary or caste lines, as it does in some of the other types of traveling dramatic troupes in this area. Members are chosen on the basis of interest and ability. The *khāṛās* we contacted all contain members of several different castes and included Hindus and Muslims. The latter are generally instrumentalists rather than actor-singers. This may be because the basis for most *sāng* plays lies in the Hindu religious and epic literature and inculcates Hindu values, and perhaps also because Islamic doctrine forbids dramatic impersonation. However, no categorical statement about this can be made, since at least one well-known *sāngī* and *sāng* composer in this area is a Muslim. Leadership of the *sāng* troupe is, like membership, open to members of all castes. We found as leaders in this district Brahmans, Rāyā Rājpūts, Jāts, Luhārs (blacksmith caste), Kasāī (Muslim butchers) and others. Except in the case of Brahman leaders, some members of all the troupes were of castes higher in status than their leader. It is clear that the *sāng khāṛā* provides an arena of achieved status, wherein the caste hierarchy is subordinated to a hierarchy of skill. This must be placed within the framework of the generally low prestige traditionally accorded by Indian society to the dramatic performer, and, for reasons that will be explained in more detail below, particularly to the performer of the type of plays usually presented by the *sāng* troupe. However, the opprobrium incurred by a high-caste performer because of his profession, although certainly felt, is evidently not sufficient to restrict the performance of *sāng* to persons of low caste, nor to seriously discourage a talented high-caste singer from assuming the role of *sāngī*, a role which at least in the past has been economically very rewarding.

The *sāngīs* interviewed had begun singing on their own as young men, and had gradually achieved a local reputation singing in the men's groups which specialize in performing at the annual village Holī festival. They had then either been approached by or had themselves approached a *sāng* troupe in the area, and had begun their professional career. There seemed to be no tendency for this profession to be passed from father to son.

Most of the older *sāngīs* had belonged to at least two different troupes during their career, having left after some years the

troupe with which they had originally been affiliated. A *sāng* troupe may retain a stable membership for as long as twenty years. In any case, a core of members generally remains together for decades, while other members are replaced due to death or other unavoidable contingencies, or because they have left to join another troupe or to form new troupes of their own. Such fission may be the result of disputes within the troupe, but is frequently the result of amicable mutual agreement. Furthermore, troupes frequently lend and borrow singers and instrumentalists from one another to fill in when a regular member is unable to perform. This mutual aid between *khāṛās* is not, however, incompatible with considerable jealousy and pride of membership on the part of each *khāṛā*. As one of our informants stated, "this is a business in which even the teacher is jealous of his own pupil."

Within the *khāṛā*, highest esteem and authority is accorded the leader or *khāṛeband*. The *khāṛeband* is regarded as the *gurū* or spiritual teacher of the other members of the troupe. The master-disciple relationship thus established is a persisting one, and is remembered on the occasion of each performance. The name of the leader of the original group to which a *sāngī* has belonged is recited in the opening lines of a performance, even by the oldest *sāng* leaders, who are themselves *gurū* to many younger performers.

The *khāṛeband* is responsible for the recruitment of members, the booking of engagements, the practical arrangements for travel and housing while on tour, as well as for the training of young actors, direction of the performance, staging, makeup and costumes. He acts and sings in the opera himself, often taking one of the leading roles and serving as narrator for those parts of the story not acted out in full. In addition, the *khāṛeband* is author-composer of the play itself. Using for inspiration the traditional Sanskrit literature, the great epics, Mahābhārata and Ramāyana, and local folk tales and heroic legends, he composes the dialogue in the form of songs, called *rāginīs* for most of the plays presented by his troupe. He may on occasion draw also on the composing skills of other members of the *khāṛā*, or he may use plays composed by other *sāngīs* which he has seen performed or has read in the booklets printed by them for local distribution.

The troupe generally performs by invitation, with the possible exception of occasional informal performances in the home

village of the *khāṛeband,* or performances given in order to fulfill certain of his kinship obligations which would otherwise be fulfilled by a cash gift. The troupe is invited by prominent landlords or other wealthy persons to perform during the celebration of a daughter's marriage or to accompany the wedding party of a son. An invitation may be made on the occasion of an important yearly festival, or in order to celebrate an event of personal rejoicing, such as the birth of a son. Another type of occasion on which an invitation may be tendered is when a temple, village resthouse (*dharamshālā*), or school is to be built, or a well dug. Here the *sāng* troupe will be asked to give a benefit performance. In either case, the question of compensation is settled beforehand. The initial transaction, during which the date is agreed upon, a price is set, and a nominal advance of 1, 11, 21, 51, or 101 rupees is delivered, is known as *sāhī denā.* This formerly took place six months or even one year before the performance, due to the great demand for the services of the better-known *sāngīs.*

When invited by a private person, the *sāng* troupe asks a flat rate per day and is also housed and fed at the expense of the host. Since each performance lasts a week, during which a serial story or a number of short stories are acted out on succeeding afternoons and evenings, this last item is a considerable one. During the actual performance, donations of money and clothing are given by members of the audience, and these are also retained by the troupe. For a benefit performance, either a similar arrangement is made, with the fee deduced from the audience donations, or an agreement is reached to accept a certain percentage of the take, the rest going toward the building fund. At such a performance the donations are of course much greater than at a privately sponsored performance, since the audience is aware that by their gifts they are supporting a religious or social cause and are not merely tipping the performers as they would do at a private performance. Nowadays, the arrangers of a benefit performance generally prefer the percentage arrangement because of the expense of feeding a twelve-man troupe and because, with the declining popularity of *sāng,* the sponsors cannot be sure of receiving sufficient profits to assure the flat fee.

Within the troupe, receipts are divided into equal shares, of a number somewhat more than the number of members. One and a half shares then goes to the star, who plays the role of

the female heroine, and perhaps one and a half shares go to the male leader and to the leading instrumentalist. The *khāṛeband* himself takes one and a half or two shares, and a share is retained for the expenses of the *khāṛā*. All other members receive a single share.

Training of new members and rehearsals with the *sāng khāṛā* are informal. New members are instructed in their parts before a performance, but since the stories are for the most part well-known and since the newcomer must have often watched performances of the troupe before taking part himself and may already know the more popular songs by heart, he is not difficult to train. After a time he knows the entire play so well that he can substitute for any of the other actors when they are unable to perform.

The stage for a *sāng* performance is usually set under a large tree near the village boundary, in an open space accomodating ten thousand persons or more. Occasionally it may be staged on the open platform surrounding the village *caupāl* or public meeting house. The stage is simple. Six or more high wooden cots are set up side by side and covered by a heavy cloth or rug. People sit around it, on three sides. Some climb nearby trees for a bird's eye view. Women sit separately, many watching from the roofs of nearby houses. Little space is left between the audience and the players; what space there is used when the action of the play requires that traveling be portrayed. A corner of the stage is set aside for the instrumentalists. Actors may sit here while waiting for their turn on stage, and important village dignitaries may also be seated here.

The performance takes place either in the afternoon or late at night. Before it begins, the *nagāṛā* is played to inform villagers that the *sāng* is about to start. People arrive in groups from nearby villages, adults and children also, carrying with them a *chāddar*, a large shawl, which can be used as a turban for protection from the sun, as a seat in case of dirt or hard ground, or even as a raincoat in case of a downpour.

The *sāng* begins with the recitation of one or more couplets in the *doha* meter.[17] The most common version, which consists

17. *Dohā* is a verse, divided first into two equal parts, each containing 24 *mātrās* (morae or instants). Each part is further subdivided into two *padas* (lit. "feet") of 13 and 11 *mātrās*. The last three *mātrās* of each of the two parts must consist of one long and one short syllable, and must rhyme. See notation in the text.

of three couplets, is as follows:

Om(a) nām(a) sab(a) tai baḍā	The name of Om is the greatest.
Ustai baḍā na koy(a)	No one is greater than He.
Jo uskā sumiraṇ(a) karai	One who remembers Om,
Suddha āt(a)mā hoy(a)	His soul is purified.
Ā ri Bhavānī bās(a) kar(a)	Oh Bhavānī, come live in me,
Ghaṭ(a) ke par(a)de khol(a)	Open the gates of my heart.
Ras(a)nā par(a) bāsā karo	Stay on my tongue, oh Mother
[Māī] suddha saḅad(a) mukh(a) bol(a)	And speak the correct words through my mouth.
[Manai] sumar(a) liye jag(a) dīs(a)	I remember the Lord.
—— sat(a)guru mile	—— is my *gurū*.
[Kahū] charan(a) ni vākai sīs(a)	I bow to his feet and pray.

Following directly upon this is the so-called *bheṭ*, or offering, sung in turn by each member of the cast.[18] The *bheṭ* is in the form of a hymn to the Goddess Durgā, known also as Kālī or Bhavānī. In some cases the name of Shārdā (Sarasvatī, Goddess of Wisdom) is identified with Durgā also. The *bheṭ* asks the Goddess for good voice, appropriate thoughts, originality and poetic inspiration. It is a four-stanza *rāginī*, standardized in meter, style and theme.[19] The jester sings his *bheṭ* first,

18. This is comparable to the *nāndī* of Sanskrit drama.

19. The general structure of the *bheṭ*, as well as of the other *rāginīs* which make up the *sāng*, may be summarized as follows. The basic unit is a stanza of four lines. Each verse of the *rāginī* (there are usually four verses) consists of three parts: *ṭek* ("refrain"), *kalī* (the main verse), and *toṛ* (a line or lines rhyming with the *ṭek*). There are three main structural sub-types commonly used in *sāng*:

(I)
ṭek—1/2 stanza, AB (generally each line containing 22-32 *mātrās*.)
kalī—1 stanza, CDEF (of the same meter as *ṭek*)
toṛ—1/4 stanza, G (of the same meter as *ṭek*)
Rhyming pattern: ABG, CDEF.

(II)
ṭek—1 stanza, ABCD (generally with lines ABC containing 16 *mātrās*, while D contains anywhere from 10 to 16)
kalī—1/2 stanza, EF (of the same meter as AB of *ṭek*)

(*Continued*) Footnote 19

toṛ—1/2 stanza, GH (of the same meter as CD of *ṭek*)
Rhyming pattern: ABC, EFG, DH.

(III)
ṭek—as in Type I (but generally reduced to one line) A or AB
kalī—as in Type II, EF
toṛ—as in Type II, GH (of the same meter as A, when both lines GH are taken together).
Rhyming pattern: A/ABH, EFG.

The following examples will illustrate:

Type I:

ṭek:

do din(a) kī jind(a)gānni jagat(a) māī, kar(a) bānde jo
30 kar(a)nā rai.
30 pher(a) budhāppā bairī āvai, kāsṭ(a) paraigā bhar(a)nā rai.

kalī:

is(a)var(a) bhag(a)tī dhyān(a) karyā kar(a), is(a)māī ke
30 nuk(a)sān(a) terā.
kām(a) karyā kar(a) sreṣṭ(a) jagat(a) māī, ho jāgā
30 kalyānā terā.
30 sam(a)jhāne kā merā pharaj(a) hai, āggai bhāī dhyān(a) terā.
guru laṭūr(a) sing(a) tai jā kaido, acchā hai byākkhyān(a)
30 terā.

toṛ:

phūl(a) kahai ek(a) din(a) tajai bī, paṛ(a) jāgā bai
30 mar(a)nā rai.

Oh man, you are given two days of life on earth, do what you can.
Soon the enemy, old age, will come, and you will have to suffer.
Meditate and worship God, what can you lose by that?
Do good deeds in the world, and you will get salvation.
My duty is only to tell you, it is then up to you.
Go and tell gurū Latūr Singh, he preaches well.
So says Phūl, that one day you too will have to die.

followed by the other actors. Finally the *khāṛeband* sings his *bheṭ* and begins the *sāng* proper with several couplets, also in *dohā* meter, in which the chief characters are introduced and the scene is set.

Sāng, as our translation "folk opera" implies, is a musical play, and as such the greater part of the dialogue as well as the connecting narratives are poetic in form and musical in expression. Even the rare prose portions are musical in tone and tend to rhyme. Each actor sings his dialogue in the form of a *rāginī* called *javāb.* This is usually preceded by one or two *dohās* as introduction.

The soul of the *rāginī* is in the rhythm. The meters used are centuries old, utilized by generations of non-Sanskrit folk poets. The *sāngī* does not pay close attention to the weight of the metrical line, but composes intuitively, according to the way he knows from experience the rhythm should sound. He

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(*Continued*) Footnote 19

Type II:

ṭek:

16	arī ājā ri merī devā.	Oh my Goddess, come.
16	jan(a)nī rī baṇī nahī sevā.	I have not served you well.
16	herī jan(a)nī merā khevā.	Oh Mother, make my fleet cross
12	mātā kar(a) diye pār(a).	[the ocean of the world].

kalī:

	āj(a) mai sum(a)ru	Today I invoke the Goddess of
16	par(a)bat(a) āḷī.	the mountain.
	tere mandar(a) kī kaṭ(a)	Your temple is carved in open-
16	mā jāḷī.	work.

toṛ:

	lyāyā hār(a) gũtha(a) kai	The gardener has braided a garland
16	māḷī.	[for you].
12	gaḷe bic(a) dīnā dār(a).	And has placed it around your neck.

frequently lets extra syllables slip in when necessary to express his meaning, and of course he exercises the traditional prerogative of the poet to pronounce long syllables as short, or *vice versa,* in order to fit his words to the chosen meter.

The refrain (*ṭek*) begins the *rāginī,* and it is sung first by the actor and perhaps repeated by the chorus of all the instrumentalists. At each repetition of the refrain the instrumentalists then join in, and this is considered the high point of the *rāginī.* The atmosphere created by it leaves a profound and lasting impression on the audience. Besides the *rāginī* of this type, there is another called *duchasmī,* which literally means "two-eyed". Here two singers are facing one another. They are full of romantic thoughts, some beautiful, some verging on vulgarity, as they express the desire of the lover for the beloved. Needless to say, *duchasmī rāginīs* are highly favoured by the *sāng* audience.

When a portion of the story is not to be acted out and no dialogue in the above form is to be presented, the *khāṛeband,* in

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(*Continued*) Footnote 19

Type III:

ṭek:

32 gobindī mahārāj(a) rākh(a) le, āj(a) sabhā mẽ/lāj(a) merī.
guṇ(a) gyān(a) tai ri saccī kar(a)de, buddhī bin(a) beandāj(a)
32 merī.

kalī:

16 jai shankar(a) bhag(a)vān(a) tuhī hai.
16 sab(a)kā mintar(a) mān(a) tuhī hai.

toṛ:

32 binā gyān(a) kā gyān(a) tuhī hai, buddhī ri bin(a) guṇ(a)
āj(a) merī.

Divine Goddess, protect my prestige before this audience today.
Fill me with virtue, wisdom, and the sense of proportion I lack.
You are the victorious Lord Shankar himself.
You are the friend and honor of everyone.
You are the knowledge for those who lack knowledge, virtueless is my mind today.

his role as *rangāchār* (director) or *kavi* (poet) narrates the linking passage. This narrative is called *javāb rangāchār kā*, or *javāb kavi kā*. If recited in prose, rather than in the normal poetic form, it is called *vārtā*. Under the influence of films, passages of prose dialogue, known by the English term (*dāilog*), have been introduced into some *sāng* performances. These are used for humor and are spoken by the actor who plays the part of the jester and by the actor who plays his wife.

The particular story selected for a *sāng* performance depends to a certain extent upon the occasion. If it is a benefit, for a social or religious cause, the subject is a religious one, and the story is taken from the Purānas, from the Ramāyana or the Mahābhārata. It may be one in which are described the trials of a devotee of God, who goes through many hardships to prove his faith. His hardships are set up by God to test his devotion, with no intention of actually harming him, and in the end the hero is granted eternal bliss in heaven, or some similar reward. Other stories considered suitable for this type of performance concern true devotees who are in a difficult situation, but who are saved by God at the eleventh hour. In these stories, the nice guys suffer, but they always win. Even the bad guys are in a sense agents of God, for they act either at His command so that He may test the hero, or they act in order to force His intervention. It is interesting that salvation or *moksh* is never presented as the ideal goal in these plays. The hero's aim is rather to win an audience (*darshan*) with God, or to reach heaven.

On occasions such as a marriage or a celebration for the birth of a son, the *sāng* troupe generally perform a love story. There are many of these, but all of them portray the trials and suffering of lovers. Usually, but not always, love ultimately triumphs over all impediments. These *sāngs* are the most popular, for they give the poet and the audience the opportunity to explore and enjoy, albeit vicariously, all the ramifications of a romantic love which is denied practical expression, outside of marriage, in Indian society. *Sāngs* of this type include dancing, and their language often borders on the obscene. The action on stage, however, is chaste by Western standards, the lovers never so much as touching one another even at the height of their passionate outbursts. Our oldest informant, who has fifty years of *sāng* experience behind him, listed as the most popular *sāng* stories, Soraṭh, Hira Rāñjhā, and Sodāgar. All are stories

of a great lover and the most beautiful girl of his time. They are full of romantic as well as hair-raising episodes. Two have happy endings after many travails, but Hira Rāñjhā, a famous folk tale of the Panjab, ends tragically.

Among spiritual plays, the stories of Nāla Damyantī, Harishchandra, Gopichand, Mordhajj, and Bhartrihari are famous.[20] The Ramāyana and Mahābhārata have always served as important sources of inspiration for folk literature in general. The Mahābhārata is utilized more fully than the Ramāyana by *sāngis* simply because the latter has provided the theme for the Rām Līlā. The Mahābhārata is particularly suited to the needs of the *sāng* composer because it is a long and complicated story, providing material for many days' performances. Its advantages were explained by a young *sāngī* who specializes in Mahābhārata *sāngs*; it is so long that there is no problem of selecting material, and furthermore, plays based on it are suitable entertainment for the whole family.

It has been noted that the stories of all these *sāngs* are well-known to the public and the better songs are extensively memorized. Therefore, the main appeal of a particular performance is in the voice, the style of singing, the dancing ability, and the personality of the performer. Interaction between the *sāngī* and his audience is direct and intense. The audience responds immediately to the action on stage, literally crying, laughing, admiring the hero and the beauty of the song by shouting expressions like: *kādh diyā dharti kā bal* ("you have brought out the strength of the earth!"), or *vāh pyāre* ("bravo, beloved!"). The public and the actors are one at the height of a performance. When the listeners cannot contain their enthusiasm, they interrupt the program by offering money. Women may offer feminine

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20. The stories, briefly, are: (1) *Nala Damayantī,* a famous tale of love and devotion between King Nala and Queen Damayantī, related in *Mahābhārata, Vanaparva,* Ch. 53-58. (2) *Harishchandra* tells of a truthful king, who preferred to give up his kingdom, his wife and his son, rather than to tell a lie. Related in *Markandeya Purāna,* 7-8. (3) *Mordhajj* tells of a test of devotion,, in which King Mordhajj and his wife saw their son in half in order to feed Lord Krishna's lion. Ultimately the son is restored to life. A version of this story appears in *Jaiminī Ashvamedha,* 41-46. (4) Gopichand and Bhartrihari were kings of the 13th century who renounced the world to become wandering ascetics. Ballads on their lives are sung by beggar Jogis, who travel from place to place, singing to the accompaniment of the *sārangī.*

clothing and shawls. These gifts are announced by the *sāngīs* in the following manner:

—— *nagar ke bīch māī*	In the city of —— there is a
—— *hāī bhāgvān*	fortunate man named ——.
—— *jinke lāḍle*	His honorable son is ——, who
kiyā —— *rupaye kā dān*	has donated —— rupees.

If the donor has given more money than other admirers, the *sāngī* sings further, thus:

jug jug jīvo, kare kartār	May God give you a long life.
haryā bharyā ho kutan parvār	May God make you prosperous.
dās betō se sukhi ho nār	May God give your wife ten children,
lamb khajūr sī potō kī lār	And may the line of your grandchildren be as long as a palm tree.

This incites others to give money, and a wish to be sung about in public impels them to top the previous donations. In this way, a show may be stopped for more than a half an hour at a time.

When the *sāng* has continued for about five hours, evening falls or dawn breaks, and the *khāṛeband* announces the end of the day's performance. This is called *jai bolnā,* to call for the victory of Lord Rām or Lord Krishna, in the words: *bol siyābar rām chandra kī jai,* or *bol kanhaiyalāl kī jai.* Then he announces the program for the following day.

The *sāng* performance of the mythical or religious type serves an obvious function in emphasizing and buttressing the traditional values of Hindu culture. In this it is consistent with the views of the ancient dramaturgists, who saw the drama as a way of instructing the masses in those matters about which the sacred texts instructed the elite. The value of singleminded devotion to God and a determination to uphold certain moral and ethical standards is reiterated constantly in these plays. The ancient conventional restraints on showing violence or love-making on the stage have also been maintained, even in those plays whose message is not primarily spiritual. The former is always carried on behind a curtain held by two actors, and the latter is limited to words rather than deeds. However, the romantic *sāngs* serve still another function, and this is as an out-

let for forbidden feelings in a society which still observes the *pardā* system, and rigidly separates men and women outside of the marital union.

From the viewpoint of the host to a *sāng* troupe, the performance serves as a means of enhancing prestige in the community.[21] The performance, drawing the attention of the entire village and surrounding villages as well, is a testimony to the inviter's wealth and social position. Thus a *sāng* performance sometimes provides an arena for the playing out of factional rivalries and mutual jockeying for social position, when two troupes are invited by opposing village leaders to perform simultaneously. The victor in this test of prestige is considered to be that sponsor whose *sāng* performance has attracted the greater audience, and even if such a victory is short-lived, it provides much food for talk. The ends of factional leaders in such a contest are served also by the inherent rivalry between the *sāngīs* themselves, on the basis of their technical and artistic excellence. One of our informants described the many occasions on which he had "faced" other prominent *sāngīs* in repeated encounters of this kind, always in the context of intra-village competition between wealthy sponsors. Such encounters, although termed "facing" a rival, do not actually involve face to face competition. The competing performances are held at the same time, but in different parts of the village.

It has been mentioned that in recent years *sāng* has been losing some of its popularity, and cannot be counted on to draw the large crowds and munificent donations of former years. There are probably several reasons for this. With rising economic and educational level in the villages, value systems are changing to some extent and in the sphere of entertainment, the films are attracting much of the following that formerly belonged to *sāng*. The notion that films are modern and smart, while *sāng* is old-fashioned and rustic, accounts for much of the latter's decline in popularity among the young people. Furthermore, the films

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21. Satyā Gupta has recorded a song which describes what India's independence means to a peasant. Among many other things, the peasant woman of the song dreams of having enough money to invite a famous *sāngī* to perform. *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

are much freer in structure and need not draw only upon the traditional literature and folk stories for their themes. They can therefore fulfill the function of an outlet for culturally devalued beliefs and emotions much more fully than can *sāng*, while in a greater variety of ways they can also show the value of culturally approved ideas and behavior.

The wider radio audience in this part of rural India, and the attractions of the so-called "village programs", have also assuaged some of the craving for entertainment which was present in the heydays of *sāng*. Some *sāng* composers have begun to fight the competition of these new media by adopting film music and themes, and in this way are able to hold certain urban-oriented segments of their audience. On the other hand, however, these changes cause them to lose the allegiance of those who are still enthusiasts of the traditional folk opera.

These influences from the modern mass media of communications are perhaps inevitable in the setting of a changing India, and their effect on *sāng* is incidental, although severe. However, there are other forces which for decades have been deliberately attempting to undermine *sāng* in this area, and these provide a most interesting commentary on the social setting of this folk art form.

We have mentioned that the status of the dramatic performer has traditionally been low in Indian society, and although the elite have frequently hailed the drama as the highest form of literary art, certain segments of orthodox Hinduism have consistently attacked the drama for several reasons.[22] It has been felt that actors are immoral by the very nature of their work, in that the life of a wandering performer cannot be compatible with the maintenance of the norms of approved family and social relationships. "Respectable" people are assumed to be unwilling either to associate closely with actors or to live the type of life which their career demands. If a woman is prepared to act on the stage in front of strangers and to dance in public, she must

22. E.g. *Nāṭyashāstra,* Ch. 36; *Manusmriti,* VIII. 362; *Rg Veda,* X. 99.7 (in which Nahush, the royal patron of actors, is described as the arch enemy of Lord Indra).

be a prostitute.[23] On the other hand, if a troupe bars women, and men play their parts, dressing in feminine clothes and engaging in romantic dialogue, they must be homosexual. There is also the notion, apparently not considered contradictory, that such men are a threat to virtuous womanhood and are likely to seduce and abduct innocent women if given the slightest opportunity. If the plays performed are not romantic but spiritual in theme, it is felt that one has a spectacle of persons of low social esteem and personal worth pretending to be gods and goddesses or devotees of the same. Therefore, orthodox opinion has held that dramatic performances can only have a deleterious effect on their audience.

In the particular locality with which we are dealing here, even more vocal and active opposition to *sāng* has come from the Ārya Samāj, a religious reform sect founded by Dayāhand Sarasyatī in the late 19th century. This sect seeks to purge popular Hinduism of non-Vedic accretions, and to return to what it believes to be the pure and enlightened form of religious worship of the Vedic period. On the religious side, it opposes idol worship, belief in spirits, in magic, and other features of the folk religion. It wishes to abolish caste distinctions in worship and open the priesthood to all, on the basis of spiritual worth and knowledge, rather than on the basis of caste membership. In the social sphere, the Ārya Samāj opposes the seclusion of women, child marriage, and the practice of untouchability, and encourages the remarriage of youthful widows. However, the sect is also strongly opposed to certain Westernizing influences in India, particularly those which threaten traditional values concerning relationships within the family and between the sexes, and, like orthodox Hinduism, it prohibits the eating of meat and the use of tobacco and alcohol. It is a proselytizing movement, which preaches through the agency of the *bhajan*

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23. The general disapproval of dancing is illustrated in a popular children's rhyme of this area:

chāchchī rī chāchchī	Auntie, oh Auntie
chullhe pichchai nāchchī	You danced behind the stove
āyā chāchchā	Uncle came
mār gayā lāt	Gave you a kick
batā de ri chāchchī	Tell me, oh Auntie
kal kī bāt	What happened yesterday!

mandalī and its leader, the *bhajnopdeshak*. *Bhajan* means devotional song, but the word is also used in this area to refer to any song written in the traditional style used for such devotional songs, regardless of the actual subject matter. The *bhajan mandalī* is a traveling troupe of singers, as is the *sāng khāṛā*, but its message is a very different one. Its songs celebrate the virtues of bravery, sacrifice, celibacy and the like, romance is totally excluded, and no acting or dancing is involved. Some of the songs are on topical rather than religious subjects; they are nationalistic and patriotic in spirit, and through them the *bhajnopdeshak* becomes an unsolicited agent of the Indian government's propaganda efforts on behalf of programs like birth control, the five-year plans, women's education, and so on. Not fully in accord with the government on all issues, however, he also attacks corruption, Westernization, and the government's alleged neglect of national defense needs. At the time of the China-India friction, literally thousands of songs were produced and promulgated by the *bhajan mandalīs* on this theme. Working with true missionary zeal, the *bhajnopdeshaks* consider themselves a vital agency of change in their society. In reading or listening to their songs of the last thirty years, one gets a glimpse of the course of Indian history, something completely absent in the songs of *sāngī* composers writing during the same period. These *bhajnopdeshaks* are the chief writers of what Greenway would call the "protest songs" of this part of India.

One of the principal targets of their protest on the local scene has been *sāng*. In accord with orthodox Hinduism, the Ārya Samāj opposes *sāng* primarily on moral grounds. It feels that *sāng* undermines the values of celibacy and chastity so basic to the Hindu value system, and that in portraying scenes of love and desire and in disguising men as women, it encourages similar behavior in those who watch it. The Ārya Samāj also shares with orthodox Hinduism its condemnation of the impersonation of great human beings and deities by actors, which underlies the opposition even to mythical and spiritual *sāng* plays. The movement's founder, Dayānand, was quite explicit in his writings about the evils of dramatic performances, and feelings on this score run so high that recently a highly inspirational play based on his life, performed by respectable non-actors, and including no feminine roles, was prevented from continuing a successful run of several months by pickets representing that faction of the Ārya Samāj which insisted strongly on strict

adherence to Dayānand's teachings.[24] This was the case even though the performances had been designed as a means of raising money for an orphanage, a highly approved cause for the members of this socially-conscious sect.

Some quotations from the songs of the *bhajnopdeshaks* will illustrate their views regarding *sāng*:

Bhārat mā ne āj tumhārī vīro māng kī.	Today Mother India has called you, oh brave ones!
Tumhē bīmarī lagī sinemā thyeṭar sāng kī.[25]	But you are sick with the sickness of films, theater, and *sāng*.

To show that this is not an isolated, personal opinion, we quote a similar passage from another *bhajnopdeshak*:

Desh kī durdashā ūpar inko kucch afsos nahī.	They feel no sorrow over the misery of the nation,
Svāng vo sinemā sehi milnā bilkul hosh nahī.	They are so engrossed in *sāng* and films.
Ya inke dimāg mē dhun faishan kī savār hai.[26]	They are overcome by a craving for fashion.

The following shows the moral aspects of Ārya Samāj opposition to *sāng*:

Sāngiyõ kī ḍholak jab ke mohalle me bāj gai.	Since the drums of the *sāngīs* have been played in the street,
bahan bhāī bāp beṭī būā ki lihāj gaī.	All shame between father and daughter, sister and brother is gone.
Sāngiyõ ke sāth bahut bahu beṭī bhāj gaī.[27]	Many wives and daughters have run away with the *sāngīs*.

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24. We are indebted to Rām Nivās Vidyārthī and Svāmī Dhruvānand for this information. The latter participated in this protest. See also, Sevānand Sarasvatī, *Ārya Samāj kī Vedī par Nāṭak Kyõ?* Dhamora, 1956 (leaflet), 4 pp.

25. Shobhā Rām 'Premī', *Khūn kā badlā khūn,* Meerut, 1961, p. 3.

26. Begrāj Singh Bansalā, *Prayāṇa Gīta Bhartīya Sainik,* Meerut, 1963, p. 19.

27. Prithvī Singh 'Bedharak', *Dhol kī pol,* Meerut, 1963, p. 29.

In another song from the same singer:

Rām krishṇa bhagvān kī sab ṭūṭ gaī maryād rī.	All the standards of Lord Rām Krishna have been broken.
Kal sāng dekhne bahū gaī āī do din ke bād rī.[28]	The wife went to see *sāng* and came back home two days later.

A further objection to *sāng* is that the rural people are swayed by the *sāngīs* into giving them money which could better be spent in productive ways:

Gādhī māī to Dinnā luṭṭai.	In Gādhī Dinnā is looting.
Jānṭī ke māī Lakhmī khāggaṛ kuṭṭai.	In Janṭī the scoundrel Lakhmi is pounding.
Khekṛe kā Nāī kā,	The son of the butcher of khekṛā,
Sūp kā kasāī kā	The son of the butcher in Sūp,
Yā Bullī kī badkārī	And the roguery of Bullī
Ghar luṭṭai hai kisaṇ kā[29]	Is looting the home of the peasant.

Basically, the message of the *bhajan mandalī* is one of devotion to duty, conformity to the positive values of Hinduism, and active participation in social reform. In implementing these it finds itself in direct opposition to *sāng*. Entertainment for its own sake is definitely disapproved, and while entertainment is certainly one element in the appeal of the *bhajan mandalī*, it is regarded by the *bhajnopdeshak* only as a means to an end. This end is, of course, that of inspiring the audience to positive action. Even the names of the *bhajnopdeshaks* illustrate this. Whereas *sāngīs* are known by nicknames, derived from their given names, as are most people in the villages, the *bhajnopdeshaks* take pseudonyms which convey their missionary zeal. Some examples are Bedhaṛak ("fearless"), Dhanurdhar ("archer"), Brahmachārī ("celibate"), Musāfir ("wayfarer"). In the words of one of them:

> It is the duty of every man to serve the nation with all the talent he possesses. All the *bhajnopdeshaks* are fulfilling their duty. As the Ārya Samāj has never lagged behind in its service to and sacrifice for the nation during her trying period, so are they awakening the country with their *bhajans* and fiery speeches.[30]

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28. Ibid., p. 42.

29. From an informant. The names are of *sāngis* famous in the area.

30. Bansalā, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

The message of *sāng* is very different. Its manifest function is entertainment, and because of this, and particularly because of the form the entertainment takes, it clashes with orthodox Hinduism as well as with the Ārya Samāj movement. *Sāng* plays do buttress certain of the values of Hindu society, but they do so in a manner unacceptable to orthodox believers and religious reformers alike, although in a manner traditionally regarded as appropriate for the instruction of the folk. The orthodox opposition to *sāng* and to the drama in general has of course been of long standing, but it did not coalesce into an active moment to abolish *sāng* in this area. Ārya Samāj disapproval of the drama has had this result, which is indicative of a general tendency to broaden the applicability of certain Hindu precepts that were originally regarded by most people as appropriate primarily for the elite and for the exceptional individual, but not for the common man.