



# An Analytical Study Of Konangi Dance Drama By Saurashtrian People Of Salem

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## ABSTRACT

The origin of the folk dance is believed to evolve when people started to communicate their emotions among themselves. The folk dance can be enjoyed by all kinds of people because the movement of the step and lyrics of the songs are so simple and easy to learn. In India, we have festivals and celebrations vitally every day. This has added to the richness of Indian culture. Every festival is accompanied by celebration; folk dance is an integral part of it. The folk dance has a rural origin this is a common fact in this the folk dance is performed by very ordinary people. The villagers gather on special occasions to sing, and dance accompanied by a variety of folk instruments.

Gujarat is known as the Land of festivals. This state has been with a rich tradition of performing arts. Most of the art traditions in Gujarat have their origin in the living times of Lord *Krishna Saurashtra*, a Peninsula surrounded by the Gulf of Kutch on the Northern side. There is a mention of *Saurashtra* in *Ithihas* and *Puranas*. King *Thirumalai Naicker* who was ruling Madurai brought many *Saurashtrians* to wave silk clothes. This paper talks about the analytical study of *Konangi* a dance drama by the *Saurashtrian* people of Salem. The information furnished in this article and the further research is done based on the interview with the *Konangi* artist *Shri.Paneerselvam* during the dance performance done by their troops when '*Ramanavami*'.

## KEYWORDS

*Saurashtra*, Salem, folk dance, *Konangi*, *Vaishnavism*, silk thread weaving or *pattunoolkarar*, Gujarat, jester, *komali*, ethnic dance.

## INTRODUCTION

Folk dance plays an important role in retaining the significance of rural areas as they are representative of the rituals of village communities. These dances have their roots in religious and seasonal festivals. Folk dances can be located according to the religion of their origin. Every state has its own folk-dance form<sup>1</sup>. *Saurashtra* is one of the main regions in Gujarat. The king *Thirumalai Naicker* who was ruling Madurai brought many *Saurashtrians* to weave silk clothes in Madurai, and then they migrated to Trichy, Tanjore Salem, and all over the world. Most of the dance forms in *Saurashtra* are either connected with Lord *Krishna's* episodes of life or the *Sakthi* cult. There are many different cultures, heritage, traditions, and rituals in India that produce happiness among the people because dance music, and Theater are Part of the rituals in the temples. Similarly, *Konangi* is a Tamil Nadu *Saurashtrian* folk dance drama.

## ETYMOLOGY

The word *Konangi* means a comical dance form. It is performed by *Saurashtra* community people in and around Salem district Tamil Nadu. Etymologically the word *Konangi* is *Kon* + *angi*, which means bending + body. It is a type of dance using the whole body. For instance, regular entertainment according to the *Vajasangi Samhita* and the *Taittiriya Brahmin* is to be sacrificed to the deity of laughter *hasa*. Probably the intention was to dispatch an entertainer to heaven through the fire sacrifice to serve the theater heater-operated *yajna* ceremonies on two levels. First, its existence was felt through highly dramatized rituals, and secondly, it was fulfilling its primary obligation of entertaining people<sup>2</sup>, it is believed that during the 14th and 15th-century people had entertainment through *Konangi*. Today *Konangi* is performed as a part of rituals and ceremonies during the “*Ramanavami*” celebration. The central concept of *Konangi* dance is to convey the message to ordinary people in a comic manner. The exact date of *Konangi* is unknown but has been in practice for the last four hundred years.

## MYTHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF KONANGI

During the period of *Dwapara Yuga*, the Demon king *Kamsa* wanted to kill Lord *Krishna*. Although he sent lots of demons, no one was able to kill Lord *Krishna*; Therefore, he sent the demon *Dantavakra* to kill Him. *Dantavakra* and *Shishupala* are the incarnations of *Vijaya* and *Jaya*, who were the gatekeepers in *Vaikunta*. They were cursed to be born as Demons in each *yuga* in *Dwapara yuga*. They were born as *Dantavakra* and *Shishupala*. *Dantavakra* is the son of *Vrddhasarma*, who was the King of *Karusa* and *Srutadevi*. *Dantavakra* wanted to kill Lord *Krishna* to avenge his friends *Sisupala*, *Salva*, and *Paundaraka's* death. He was in high temper and nervous instead of weapons; he took the anger and his red eyes as his weapon and then took his club.

<sup>1</sup> Subramaniam, Padma, *Bharathas Natya Shastra Then And Now*, published by Nrityodaya

<sup>2</sup> Yaswant Junghare, Indira - *Topics in Pali Historical Phonology*, Published by Shakti Malik in Abhinav Publications, 1983, Printed at Hans Raj Gupta and sons P-6

When he met Lord *Krishna*, *Dantavakra* said, “I am so lucky to face you today, you have killed my friends, and now you want to kill me. But today, I will kill you and take revenge for my friend’s. Both started to fight with their clubs. When Lord *Krishna* attacked his *Sudarshan Chakra*, the demon caught *Sudarshan Chakra* with his teeth. If the demon opened his mouth, the chakra weapon on would cut his mouth Lord *Krishna* knew that the *Sudarshan Chakra*. Will kill the demon. So he started to play tricky and funny dance moves in front of the demon. By watching these dances, *Dhantavakra* started to laugh. The *Sudarshan Chakra* was released from the mouth of *Dhantavakra* and that chakra killed him.

The humorous and funny movement performed by Lord *Krishna* in front of *Dhantavakra* is the *Konangi* dance. In memory of this incident, dancing with humorous movement is performed for long time by *Konangi* artist during *Ramanavami* which is eleven days festival ending with *Vasanthautsavam*. After the *Ramanavami* celebration the artists meet again to celebrate Lord *Krishna* birthday. The same folk performance is enacted again during this day and celebrated with pot – breaking *Vittul* game<sup>3</sup>

## RITUALISTIC CEREMONIES

*Konangi* artist performs this dance during *Ramanavami*. It is a nine-day festival ending with *Vasanthautsavam* held to remember Lord *Rama* and praise him with *bhajan* songs. After doing the *pooja*, the *prasadam* is given to *Bhaktas*<sup>4</sup>. This *prasadam* is made with jaggery, black dhal, *vadagoju* and cucumber. The main *prasadam* is made with *kondakalla* because it is believed that this *prasadam* will give *gurupalan* in their *jadhakam*.

## HODI

On the ninth day, *Konangi bhagavathar* do *Hodi Bowrasa* to the *Bhakta*. Place a white cloth on the lap of the *Bhakta* along with coconut, banana, and *vethalai paku*. During this *hodi*, the *bhagavathar* sings *Thyagaraja swami* songs and dances comically. Then the *bhagavathar* also applies sandal paste to the *bhakta*. After these ceremonies, the *bhakta* will give *chenna* as *prasadam* to the *Bhakta Prajapati*.

***This song sung during Nalangu or Hodi***

***This song was composed by Thyagaraja Bhagavathar***

*Allo nere thollo sitha kalyanam puna*

*Jalavantha mama (allo)*

*Bhavana jastiti batra bavana saritra*

*Ravi somayutha Kendra rama nee katra(allo)*

*Bakta jana pari palana barata saritra*

<sup>3</sup> Narayana Bhaskar - Folk Dance Drama of Saurashtra speaking people \_ *Konangi* Published by Saurashtra angam P - 6

<sup>4</sup> D.K. Fine Arts Private Limited P-11

*Bakthi mukti lila bodevi bala (allo)2*

*Pamara sura bima pari poorna sangamatch*

*Shyama jaga pi Rama sageda tama (allo)*

*Paramasanuda gita pala jalathi dosa*

*Darani kula samajata tiaga rajanutha (allo)<sup>5</sup>*

After the ceremony of *Hodi*, the bhakta and their family members play flower ball and *Vittangi*. The tenth day is the *Vasantha Utsav*; during this day, the *Konangi* and *bhagavatar* come *vidhivula* among the *bhaktas* after *thia* they will play *manjal nirattu vizha*. On the eleventh day of celebration, they do pooja for Lord *Hanuman* in *Brahmamuhurtham* at 4.30 am. After this procession begins, followed by the *kottai kattudhal* and the *uttaithal* ceremony, they fixed the bamboo sticks in four directions. During this ceremony, the *bhagavatar* sang a song in the *virutham* pattern while building it up and destroying it. After this ceremony, the devotees receive *payasam* as prasadam.

## ACTUAL PERFORMANCE

Finishing all these ceremonies usually, the celebration begins at 8.00 pm with *bhajan* songs. During the *Konangi* dance performance, the *bhagavadhar* brings handle drive from the *pooja* room and places it at the center of the stage. The performance comes around the handle drive after doing the *Sabai vanadium*, and then they start to perform the dance moves. The performer is like monkey movements to make the audience happy and laugh. Hence the name of the dance is *Konangi*; the performer will perform this dance by bending his body while jumping like monkey songs. All Lord *Rama* life adventure and morals and one or two *Dandia* data are performed along the *Konangi* dance .in the story of *rama* especially, the boat riding of *Guha* on river *Ganga*, is a fantastic song. The dancers hang a miniature of the boat on a rope and move it to and fro. Dancers move along with the boat. The boat song describes sailing and how a human life goes towards God, the secret of *moksa*. Each theme dance has a song and humorous movement<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, it attracts all categories of people. All the songs describe one by one the incidents of the entire<sup>7</sup> *Ramayana*, the story of Lord *Rama*. Similarly, there is another story of the hunter and the snake. A hunter tries to catch the snake by playing *magudi* but cannot catch it. Instead of that, the snake bites the hunter. Then he undergoes some treatment and recovers from his death. This story describes how a man is punished by his *pavam* and *punyam*. To make this dance *Rama* enjoyable, the *bhagavatar* performs comic actions like jumping and rolling, and the dialogues are rendered comically. In between the play, *dandi* national to make *Konangi* more interesting.

<sup>5</sup> Bhagavatar, Kuppaswamy - Shri Rama Navami Keerthanai Thogupu, Published by Shri M. N. Rangachari P-29

<sup>6</sup> Interview are taken with the konangi artist Shri. Paneerselvam during the performance on the occasion of Ramanavami

## THE THEME OF KONANGI

*Konangi* dance drama is highly *Vaishnavite*. The theme of the *Konangi* has taken from two great epics, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the story of Lord *Krishna*<sup>8</sup>.

### The scenes from Ramayan taken are.

- Valmiki and Narad*
- Sita Kalyana*
- Guhan with lord rama crossing river ganga*
- Hanuman with lord rama*

### The scenes from Mahabharat are

- raslila*
- lilas of Krishna*
- gurukestra yudham*
- prahaladha charitram*

Finally, the serpent dance clearly explains the relationship between *jevathma* and *Paramatma*.

## COSTUMES

The costumes are moreover like *Arayersevai*. According to the tradition, they wore a cone-like cape known as “*Periyarkullai*”, two cymbals and sacred garlands like the lord of Sriranga. Their ‘*abhinaya*’ is like the “*srunganirutham*” taught by Lord *Narayana* to Lord *Brahma* and the “*Kaishiki vriti* of *Brihaspati*, the teacher of the devas. Like *Konangi*, they wear a red cone-shaped cap called *kulla*. The name is drawn in the centre of the cap to show *Vaishnavism*.

Then in the waist, they have *panchagajam*. And on the top, they are wearing flower garlands and crossly in the bare body with the sandal paste and *kumkumam*. On the forehead, they are apply *namam*. On the left side, the *bhagavadar* has the sacred thread, and on the top, the *panchakajamties* the red colour cloth. These are the costumes of *konangi*. In the beginning, the *konangi* did show much interest in the costume. They only wore *panchagajam* and were personal with *Thirunamam*. The rest of the things were added later to add beauty and create interest<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> [http:// www.sousevasangamam.org/art-culture/dance/](http://www.sousevasangamam.org/art-culture/dance/)

<sup>9</sup> Interview are taken with the *konangi* artist Shri. Paneerselvam during the performance on the occasion of Ramanavami

## MUSIC

The orchestra members are harmonium, jalra, and mridangam. The *bhagavatar* will have jalra while singing and dancing. The *Kol kuchi* is handled by dancing *bhagavatar*. This kuchi is made from a *poovarasam* tree. The songs are taken from Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Sometimes they perform the social issues by composing specific songs. The story of guhan songs is taken from Sama Veda. The languages used for songs are Tamil, Saurashtra, Telugu and Sanskrit.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, in this paper, we have seen a detailed description of *Konangi* dance drama. In the *Konangi* dance drama, we find that from beginning to end, the *Komali* or *vidusaka* or *Konangi* plays a vital role throughout the drama, which is very rare to see in the other type of dance drama. The main aim of human beings is to survive happily and peacefully. In this *kaliyuga* we are not spending our time living happily, all of them are running behind the money. If anybody enjoys their life we criticize them as looser. Smiling is very important for our life to survive healthily. Generally in drama, buffoons or *Konangi* are ill-treated by others which is very wrong. They are a vital role and backbone of the drama with wise knowledge. They might be in any situation but while performing they emote only *Hasya* rasa. They will make us smile and happy, but we people are making always a cry which should change....?

## NOTES OF REFERENCES

- 1) Bhagavatar, Kuppuswamy – shri Rama Navami Keerthanai thogupu, published by Shri M. N. Rangachari p - 29
- 2) Narayana Bhaskar – Folk Dance Drama Of Saurashtra Speaking People – Konangi, published by Saurashtra sangam p-6
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## WEB SITES

<http://www.sousevasangamam.org/art-culture/dance/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk\\_dances\\_of\\_Sourashtra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_dances_of_Sourashtra)