

NATYASHASTRA: ETHEREAL FOUNDATION TO INDIAN ART AND LITERARY TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The benefaction of the Indian tradition of erudition is immeasurable in almost all fields of intellectual inquiry. Natyashastra, an ancient Sanskrit compendium on theatrics composed by Bharatamuni, has influenced all forms of art expressions for centuries. This paper aims to explore the unique ethereal aspects manifested while appreciating the elaborate and exclusive theory of performing arts on the Indian Subcontinent. It reiterates the divinity of Indian art forms. The Rasa theory promulgated by Bharata remains the base of all Indian art forms. The importance of this ancient work lies in providing a lasting framework for Indian Music, Drama, Dance, and Literature. Medieval Scholars have often cited this work as an assertion of a deep correlation between spirituality and art.

Keywords: Natyashastra, Bharatamuni, Indian Literary tradition, Indian Knowledge tradition

I Indian Knowledge Tradition

India is epitomized as a knowledge civilization. The Vedas are deemed to be the basis of what has come to be known as the Indian Knowledge Tradition. The sages in India shaped the chants through their divine powers. The Vedic mantras are known as *nitya* and *apaurusheya* because they were and are always there- unaltered beyond the horizon of our ordinary world of change. The Indian Knowledge Tradition has contributed significantly to practically every academic research discipline. In *Sushruta Samhita* (600 BCE), physician Sushruta mentions about Rhinoplasty as a surgical technique and procedure (Britannica). Indian mathematicians were at least a thousand years ahead of the Europeans in mastering the basic mathematical algorithms of addition, subtraction, and division. The attributes of Indian Knowledge Tradition, according to (Kumar) include–

- The Indian Knowledge Tradition blends perceptions of the oneness of all existence in the entire cosmos with relativism and truism.
- Rather than categorically rejecting and denying one or the other, this tradition focuses on the diversity of viewpoints.
- It is based on a cross-disciplinary conceptual framework. It spawned a variety of schools of thought. *Vaishesika, Nyaya, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimansa, and Vedanta* or *Uttara Mimansa* are the six schools of philosophy in our tradition.
- It encourages the believers of this tradition and the rest of the world to conserve, maintain, and promote the plurality of tradition, culture, and opinion.

II *Natyashastra*

Bharata's *Natyashastra* is the most important treatise of theatrical theory in classical India, covering dance and music. It was written between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. ("Natya Shastra"). Its authorship is assigned to Sage Bharata. The work is written in Sanskrit and is divided into thirty-six chapters with six thousand sutras. The *Natyashastra* results from several centuries of hereditary performers passing down their heritage verbally from generation to generation. It is a form of a conversation between Bharata and a group of sages who approach him to learn about the *Natyaveda* ("Natya Shastra").

The *Natyashastra* covers a wide range of topics, including literary issues, the structure of the stage, a detailed exploration of musical gauges and gestures, and an examination of dance forms that ponders upon numerous categories of body movements and their influence on the audience. Drama developed due to social skirmishes that arose when the world moved out from the golden age of harmony (O'Toole et al. 43). Hence, a play always reflects a struggle and its conclusion. In Bharata's philosophy of theatre, *bhavas* refer to the performers' emotional impersonations and the *rasas* or emotional responses that they provoke in the audience. The eight primary *bhavas* or emotions are love, humor, energy, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and amazement. The spectator experiences eight main reactions, or *rasas*, when seeing and picturing these emotions: love, pity, rage, contempt, heroism, wonder, horror, and humor. Although it primarily deals with Stagecraft, it has impacted the entire Indian art scenario. As a result, the *Natyashastra* is regarded as the basis of Indian fine arts.

III The Ethereal Facets of *Natyashastra*

a. The divine origin of *Natyashastra*

Natyashastra is the first ancient text which mentions the divine origin of art forms. Bharata testifies that all this knowledge is due to Brahma ("Natya Shastra"). Bharata thoroughly examines the numerous perspectives of drama, including its essence, provenance, philosophies, techniques, architectural styles, and other elements such as speech, dresses, and psychological bent of the performers. The text claims that there is no knowledge, skill, lore, art, technique, or activity that is not found in *Natyashastra* (Das 137). Theatre arts became significant because the drama was considered the most comprehensive form of art expression in ancient India. The *Natyashastra*, according to Rameshwor Singh (91), is, in brief, made up of the following elements:

1. Pathya or (readable) text from the Rig Veda, including the art of recitation and rendering in performance;
2. Sangeet or songs from the Sama Veda, including instrumental music.
3. Abhinaya, or acting, from the Yajur Veda, is a technique for conveying the lyrical meaning of a text and imparting it to the audience.
4. The Atharva Veda's *rasa*, or aesthetic experience.
5. Its spirituality is evident in the *anukarana* or 'redoing' of the *triloka* or triple cosmos and existence in general. Its rendition is based on the *anukirtana* of *bhava*, i.e., 're-telling' of emotional experiences to create a new world of 'imagination.'

6. Although the *Natyashastra* refers to the theatre, it covers all kinds of artistic expressions.

The idea of attainment of spiritual emancipation through the pursuit of arts both for the Performer and the *Sahridaya* (Audience).

Furthermore, when *Natyashastra* was molded, the arts of poetry, dance, music, and theatre, as well as painting, sculpture, and architecture, were not seen as distinct and explicit kinds of creative forms. Instead, it was a multifaceted, comprehensive concept of art. Through the refining of senses and sense perceptions, all creative manifestations were considered as propagating beauty while also delivering pleasure and instruction. So then, the goal of the theatre was to show people the appropriate way to live, an ideal way to live and conduct, so that they may become even better humans and achieve *moksha* or salvation. Drama restores the human potential, man's journey of "delight at a higher level of consciousness," and a life that is enlightened (Meyer-Dinkgrafe 155).

A poet can effectively interact with a reader who shares the poet's sensibilities. As a result, to appreciate a piece of art, the reader must possess *rasikatva*, and only such an individual may enjoy aesthetic pleasure. The term *prekshaka* is used by Bharata for a spectator. According to him, only a responsive and sympathetic audience can observe the dramatic performance with all senses undistracted, is pure and honest, is experienced in weighing the pros and drawbacks. It is such an audience that can overlook a flaw and sincerely enjoy the worth of the performance (Devy 12). The ancient Hindu scripts, such as the *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, believe that all forms of art are sacred., with the ability to guide one to *moksha* by enhancing the focus of the mind for Self-liberation. These disciplines are provided as other pathways with power comparable to the wisdom of Vedas and Upanishads. Various medieval scholars explain that *Natyashastra* and Bharata interrelated arts with spirituality. The *Natyashastra* declares that beautiful harmonies are revered, and performing arts are celestial. The ultimate purpose of performance art is to allow the audience to experience its own awareness, analyze and feel the spiritual values intrinsic in it, and ultimately climb to a higher level of consciousness. The dramatist, performers, and director all want to take the audience to an artistic experience within, to everlasting universals, to emancipate the audience from the commonplace and give creative freedom.

b. Rasa theory- the foundation of all art forms

The *Natyashastra* lays out a thorough philosophy of play akin to Aristotle's Poetics. Drama's objective is to amuse the audience. The performers intentionally use particular acting methods to instil joy and peace in the audience. Bharata describes the performers' emotional impersonations and the emotional responses they provoke in the audience. Love, humour, energy, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and amazement are the eight primary *bhavas* (emotions). These are depicted through their causes and effects rather than being directly communicated to the audience. The spectator experiences eight main reactions, or *rasas*, when seeing and picturing these emotions: love, pity, rage, contempt, heroism, wonder, horror, and humour. Bharata recommends that while plays should have a range of *rasas*, only one should be dominant. The performance primarily entertains the audience, but they are also educated by

watching both good and negative behaviours and the reasons that drive them. Each rasa that the audience encounters is linked to a particular *bhava* depicted on stage. For example, the writer, performers, and musicians collaborate to represent the *bhava* termed *rati* for the audience to feel the *sringara rasa*. The "rasa theory" of *Natyashastra* presumes that bliss is intrinsic and innate in man; it exists in oneself that manifests non-materially through spiritual and personally subjective means (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 102).

Literature

The nine *rasas* in Sanskrit Literature are echoed in Indian *Puranas*. For example, readers of the Ramayana will never forget the scene where Rama first sees Sita. It was love at first sight. Sita, who had been amidst her sisters, was captivated by Rama's charisma and made enough movement to gain Rama's notice. This condition is known as *sringara*, and it also affects our daily lives.

Dance forms

Dancing is closely entwined with the theatre, and it, too, illustrates the eight emotions. Drama uses mostly words and motions, whereas dance uses music and movements. Thirteen positions of the head, thirty-six positions of the eyes, nine positions of the neck, thirty-seven positions of the hand, and ten locations of the body are classified by the *Natyashastra*. The *Natyashastra* is still followed by modern Indian dancers. When it's acceptable, group or solo dances might be incorporated into a drama. For example, Parvati created the *lasya*, a solo dance that portrayed a tale, or part of a plot, in a drama. The movements of dance and expression in the *Natyashastra* are found carved on the pillars, walls, and gateways of 1st-millennium Hindu temples (Brown 192).

Music

The *Natyashastra* is the first vital literature to deal with music in depth, following the Samaveda, which dealt with Vedic ritual utterances. This compendium was a significant guide to Indian classical music until the thirteenth century. It concentrates primarily on musical instruments, and it also highlights many theoretical topics that have remained vital to Indian music. It covers a wide range of information related to musical performance, including vocal, instrumental, and symphonic compositions. It also covers the *rasas* and *bhavas* that music might inspire.

IV Significant Contribution of *Natyashastra*

The *Natyashastra* has influenced new texts on drama and local theatre traditions for thousands of years. For many years, the *Natyashastra* was an essential work in fine arts, defining much of the lexicon and edifice of Indian classical music and Indian classical dance. Many interpretations have enlarged the scope of the *Natyashastra*, such as Matanga's *Brihaddesi*, Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabharati*, and Sharngadeva's *Sangita Ratnakara*. In later ages, the study of body frame and gestures impacted sculpture and other arts. The music patterns established in the *Natyashastra* continue to have an impression today, as evidenced by Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande's essential book *Hindustani Sangeetha Padhathi*, written in

the early twentieth century. In Kerala, *Kutiyattam* is an existent Sanskrit form that absorbed and extended *Natyashastra's* theory and practice. The substance of *Natyashastra* is broad and varied. It has been a struggle for theorizers for millennia to develop new ideas about Indian aesthetics and dramaturgy that transcend Bharata's.

Nevertheless, it provides an all-inclusive and unique picture of theatrical performance that accesses the Indian subcontinent. Bharata's concept of how theatre affects spectators, based on the Sanskrit terms *bhava* and *rasa*, is faintly similar to Aristotle's *Poetics* of Greek theatre and continues to educate and challenge our understanding of what theatrical performances can achieve (Singh 94). However, it cannot reduce the significance of this great work, its merit, or its wisdom. The *Natyashastra*, an ancient book on Indian dramaturgy, is widely acknowledged as providing a stable basis and framework for developing performing arts, both theory and practice in India. Bharata's *Natyashastra* has standardized the traditional form of play, much as Panini standardized the classical form of the Sanskrit language (Singh 94). Thus, indeed the divinity and grandeur of *Natyashastra* are incomparable and mesmerizing even today.

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