

Bharata's *Natyashastra*: Fundamentals of Dramatics and Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

Natyashastra has been a classic on dramatics and aesthetics which has been commonly attributed to Bharata, the sage for its authorship. It has been founded on human psychology prevailing under conditions of India's cultural system with a focus on stage performance. *Rasa* theory is at the centre of the *Natyashastra*. *Natyashastra* is an analytical text of dramatic performance that categorically characterizes fundamentals such as *Natya*, *Vithi*, *Bhav*, *Vyabhichari Bhav*, *Satvik Bhav*, *Vibhav*, *Anubhav*, *Rasa*, *Rasa Sutra*, *Nishpatti*, Model Spectator, and highly spiritual concept of *Shantih*. The significance of the text lies in its applied relevance for both creative and critical aspects. It displays philosophically as a classic as well as contemporary text. Bharata defines each *Sutra* offers us in terms of determinants, consequence and *Vyabhichari Bhav* establishing his authority in understanding the insight of human nature with an ability of analytical expression and dramatic representation for ultimate *Nishpatti* of desired *Rasas* for pleasure and delight of the audience. The tradition of Sanskrit scholarship regards *Natyashastra* as an additional *Ved* and is a compendium of performing arts, drama, music, dance, and fine arts. *Bharata* leaves deep influence on the subsequent Sanskrit critiques like Abhinav Gupta, Manmohan or Vishwanath in India aesthetics. It is possible that on the basis of practical experience of *Rasas* the art can find bedrock for art and fine arts.

Bharat *Muni* writes *Natyashastra* possibly at his age of 48. He is committed to single discipline of art and fine art and is not an octogenarian like Aristotle. His reflection on *Natyashastra* finds root in psychology of man under prevailing conditions of cultural system of India with a focus shift towards performance. Education, culture, art and fine art in the Indian context influence his findings in the discipline of *Natyashastra*. Bharat *Muni* as a sage has grown as a noble personality in establishing himself s perfect in the discipline of knowledge and art.

Natyashastra projects features such as *Natya*, *Vithi*, model spectator, *Bhav*, *vyabhichari bhav*, *Sattvik bhav*, *Vibhav*, *Anubhav*, *Rasa*, *Rasa sutra*, *Nishpatti* and a perpetual debate over the status of *Shantih*, establishing itself as a permanent source of understanding new insights and new directions and artistic trajectories in his sentimental work on art and fine art with a special shift towards dramatic performance. His major contribution in the tradition of *Sanskrit* scholarship has been acknowledged for the *Rasa* theory which is practically useful as a guide not only for creative artist but also for audience or readers.

Bharata defines each sutra of a *Rasa* in terms of determinants, consequents and *Vyabhichari bhav* establishing his authority in understanding and insight of a human nature but an ability of analytical expression and dramatic representation for ultimate *Nishpatti* of desired *Rasas* for pleasure and delight of the audience.

The tradition of *Sanskrit* scholarship regards *Natyashastra* as an additional Veda. The date is generally referred to the third century A.D. The authorship is ascribed to Bharata the sage. The definite and reliable information about Bharata and authorship is not known. *Natyashastra* is a compendium of performed arts, drama, music and dance i.e. art and fine art.

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Bharata is remembered as the exponent of the *Rasa* theory. *Natyashastra* provides an insight into the psychology of aesthetic reception and has been acknowledged as the scientific exposition of *Rasa* theory making a distinctive contribution in the form of *Natya*, *Rasas* and Compendium based on scientific application of reason to human nature and experience. It is possible that on the basis of practical experience of *Rasas* the art can find bedrock for aesthetics of art and fine art.

Manmohan Ghosh's rendering is widely referred for translations, though no rendering of *Natyashastra* is satisfactory including that of Manmohan Ghosh. G.K. Bhatta produced a *Bharat Natya Manjiri* (1975), a digest which is very useful for undergraduates of *Sanskrit* poetics based on Manmohan Ghosh's translation.

Natya

Natyashastra is a depiction and communication pertaining to emotions of the entire triple world including variety, sport, wealth, peace of mind, laughter, fighting, sexual passion, and slaughter all activities of life.

According to Bharata, *Natyashastra* imitates the conduct of the world. *Natyashastra* will be the instrument of instruction for the world in addition to entertainment and pleasure. *Natyashastra* includes all knowledge, craft, art, lore, fine art, design, emotions, and acts of life. *Natyashastra* is an indication of the happenings in the life of gods, demons, kings, family, men and sages who have spiritual knowledge. In fact the nature and behavior of the world intimately connected with happiness and misery, as rendered by physical and other forms of acting, to be called *Natyashastra*. Bharata says that the entire nature of human beings as connected with the experience of happiness and misery, joy and sorrow presented through the process of histrionics (*Abhinaya*) is called *Natya*.

Vithi

Vithi should have one act. It has the character of all the sentiments and comprises of thirteen aspects. It is to be acted by one or two characters. It may include three kinds of dramatic *prakriti*, high, middling and low.

Model spectator

A person who watches a dramatic performance with full concentration and makes a judgment on the basis of merit ignoring artistic faults can be judged as a model spectator. All these qualities cannot be expected in a single person.

Compendium

It gives an account of rhetorical sentiments (*Rasas*), emotional states (*Bhava*), ascribing mental conditions (*Sthayi Bhava*), transient mental states (*Vyabhichari bhav*), psycho physical conditions (*Satvik Bhav*), the four kinds of *Abhinay*, (histrionic representation), the *Dharma* (the mode of dramatic representation), the success of *Natya*, musical notes, and instruments, songs, the size, and shape of theatre in detail.

Bhava

Bhava and *Rasa* are related mutually. Our view is that *Rasa* arises from mutual contact of *Bhava* and *Rasa*. The other view is that *Rasa* arises from the emotional states alone and not vice versa. During the process of histrionic representation, the two (*Bhava and Rasa*) accomplish their status and function by dual interaction.

The *Bhava* produces poetic contents through words, gestures, and movements, and psycho-physical representation. 'Bhav' is a root that denotes compassion. *Bhava* is produced by *Vibhav* (stimulants) and functions as awareness to the spectator (*Anubhav*), and the acting modes of words and gestures (*Sattva-abhinaya*).

Vyabhichari Bhava

Vyabhichari Bhavas are more prominent towards creating the sentiments in a variety of ways. They move the spectators to the poetic sentiments in actual dramatic performance. They are thirty three in number.

Sattvik Bhava

Sattvik Bhava is something that originates in the mind. *Sattva* is produced when the mind is in perfect concentration on state of equipoise. The *Sattvik bhavas* are essential for histrionic representation of human nature. They are eight in number.

Vibhav

Vibhav has the sense of cause or stimulant, instrument of intention. *Vibhav* determines words, gestures, psycho-physical acts. *Vibhav* is the determinant or stimulant of *Bhava*. Actor determines words, gestures and psycho-physical acts on the basis of *Vibhav* and also the spectator determines out of actor's representation of words , gestures and psychophysical acts.

Anubhav

Anubhav is dramatic experience i.e. consequence of physical reaction to acting through words and gestures.

Rasa

Rasa has a twofold significance. It means both aesthetic content and aesthetic relish. *Rasa* arises from a proper combination of the stimulants (*vibhav*), the physical consequence (*Anubhav*), and the transient emotional state (*Vyabhichari Bhav*). It is called *Rasa* because it is capable of being tested or relished.

Now *Rasas* arise from a proper combination of the stimulants (*Vibhav*), the physical consequents (*Anubhav*) and the transient emotional states (*Vyabhichari Bhav*) (Bharat, *Natyashastra* trans. G.N. Devy 2002:6).

Illustration

“Just as by a proper combination of different spicy food stuffs (*Vyanjana*), leafy vegetable (*Aushadhi*), and other articles of food (*Dravya*), there is a flavor and taste produced in the same way when different emotional states come together, aesthetic flavor and relish are produced” (Ibid:6).

The spectators in the right frame of mind taste the permanent mental conditions suggested (*Vyarijita*) by the representation (*Abhinaya*) of emotional states the *Abhinaya* carried out by speech delivery (*Vac*), physical gestures, movements (*Anga*), the physical acting of physical impacts (*Sattva*), and obtain pleasure and satisfaction.

Rasa Sutra

Bharata defines *rasa sutra* as “*Vibhav-Anubhav-Vyabhichari-Samyogat-Rasa nishpatti*”. He observes eight *Rasas* namely, *shringar*, *hasya*, *veer*, *adbhut*, *roudra*, *karuna*, *bhibhatsa*, and *bhayanak*. *Bhava* brings about the inner idea of the poet. It then pervades the mind of the spectator.

Emotional states and Rasa

The permanent emotional states alone are said to obtain the status of the *Rasa*. They are eight in number of which four are primary and four are secondary. The primary *Rasa* produces the respective secondary *Rasa* in the following manner:

1. Erotic (*Shringar*) to Comic (*Hasya*);
2. Heroic (*Veer*) to Marvellous (*Adbhut*);
3. Furious (*Roudra*) to Pathetic (*Karun*);
4. Odious (*Bibhatsa*) to terrible (*Bhayanak*);

The erotic, comic, heroic, and marvelous are positive traits of mind, however the furious, pathetic, odious, and terrible are negative.

The Erotic (*Shringar*) *Rasa* is derived from the dominant state of love and has its basis in shining and brighter aspects of the world such as white, pure, and beautiful.

The Comic (*Hasya*) *Rasa* has its basis in the dominant emotion of laughter. It is derived from showing unseemly dress or ornament, impudence, greediness, quarrel or defective limb.

The Heroic (*Veer*) *Rasa* has its basis in the superior type of persons, grandeur, greatness, goodness, strength and energy. It displays concentration of mind, perseverance, diplomacy, discipline, military strength, aggressiveness, reputation of might, and frightening capacity etc.

The Marvellous (*Adbhut*) *Rasa* finds its basis in the dominant state of astonishment. It is derived from the determinants such as sight of heavenly being or events, attainment of desired object, entrance into superior mansion, temple, audience hall, seeing illusory and magical acts etc.

The Furious (*Roudra*) *Rasa* finds its basis in the dominant state of anger. It is derived from the determinant such as anger, rape, abuse, insult, untruth, allegation, jealousy and the like. The *Rakshasas*, *Danavas*, and haughty men are its sources.

The Pathetic (*Karun*) *Rasa* is rooted in the dominant state of sorrow, misery, and suffering. It is derived from determinants such as afflictions due to separation from dear ones, divorce, loss of wealth, person, death, accident or plight and captivity.

The Odious (*Bibhatsa*) *Rasa* has the dominant state of disgust. It is derived from determinants such as hearing of unpleasant, offensive, impure, harmful things or seeing and discussing them. On the stage it can be represented by consequents such as stopping the movement of all limbs, narrowing down the mouth and the like.

The Terrible (*Bhayanak*) *Rasa* is rooted in the dominant state of fear. It is derived from the determinants such as hideous noise, sight of ghost, panic, anxiety, or voices of jackals and owls, an empty house, dense forest, sight of murder or death of hearing and discussion of such events and also horripilation, change of color and loss of voice etc.

The wise should know that the *Vibhav* and the *Anubhav* are such matters in the art of acting as are actually created by human nature, and as closely follow the ways of human nature and worldly conduct” (Ibid:10).

‘*Lokatraya*’ has been the core content of the art. The human nature and conduct of the world being the guiding principle. Bharata identifies specific colors and deities for the *Rasas* as shown in the table.

Rasa	Colours	Deities
Erotic	Light Green	Vishnu
Comic	White	Pramuthus
Furious	Red	Rudra
Pathetic	Ash-colour	Yama
Odious	Blue	Siva-muhukala
Terrible	Black	Kala
Heroic	Light-orange	Indra
Marvellous	Yellow	Brahma

Nishpatti

According to Bharata, “*Nishpatti* is a manifestation (*Abhivyakti*) of what was already latent.” Abhinav says,

“All *Rasas* are dominated by pleasure, because of being the manifest and uninterrupted form of tasting ones own consciousness” (Ghosh M.M. 1950:8)

Debate over Shantih: Is it a *Rasa*?

Abhinav Gupta considers *Shantih* (peace) as the ninth *Rasa*. This is the point of debate over its status of *Rasa* in the tradition of Sanskrit scholarship in art and literature. The debate provides new directions and insights in exploring the nature of man and the nature of art from the point of view of dramatic performance and aesthetic realization of both entertainment and instruction for proper education and culture.

In the context of art and literature of India, it is interesting to quote Max Muller,

“If I am asked which nation had been advanced in the ancient world in aspect of education and culture then I would say it was India” (Ibid: 44).

The absence of *Shantih* as *Rasa* in Bharata’s *Natyashastra* is question of debate and discussion in the philosophical systems in the East and the West as we do find *Shantih* being artistically used in the classic work by T.S. eLiot in *The Waste Land*. The structural changes in Bharata’s theatre have undergone through different phases over the centuries.

Rasas are the direct product of dependent co-production of determinants, consequents and the transitory mental sttes. However, *Shantih* is the ultimate peace and tranquility which is a state of perfection of mind and absolute unconditioning from the law of dependent co-production (Buddha). Peace is free from either pleasure or pain. It is a state of ‘oneness’. It is possible that one may remember either ‘*Nirgun*’ of Krishna or ‘*Nirvana*’ of Buddha. It is not emptiness rather it is a state of ‘fullness’ (paradox). Therefore, the state of fullness, perfection, and oneness stand to be evidence for

unconditioning of dependent co-production. The Indian tradition lead by Krishna, Buddha, Mahavir, Nanak nd others can be cited as illustration in support of the view that *Shantih* is not a *Rasa*. *Shantih* is beyond *Rasa* – a field of absolute knowledge ND INFINITY (*Anant*). The issue debated needs to be seriously researched to discover the truth of *Shantih*. The experience of *Rasas* of transient nature may lead one beyond the transitariness for ultimate peace i.e. permanent achievement. The taste of the *Rasas* of the human nature with binary appositions provides a catalyst to an individual for a take off from the state of unrest to the state of peace. The dramatic experience can be an opportunity for pleasures as well as instructions into insight and tranquility and peace.

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