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**BHARATA MUNI'S NATYASHASTRA: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The *Natyashastra* is a notable ancient encyclopaedic treatise on arts which has influenced dance, music and literary traditions in India. According to Susan L. Schwartz, 'Natyashastra praises dramatic arts as a comprehensive aid to the learning of virtue, proper behaviour, ethical and moral fortitude, courage, love and adoration of the divine.' The text extends its reach into asking and understanding the goals of performance arts, the nature of the playwrights, the artists and the spectators, their intimate relationship during the performance. The text integrates its aesthetics, axiology and description of arts with mythologies associated with Hindu gods and goddesses. The general approach of the text is to treat entertainment as an effect, but not the primary goal of arts. The primary goal is to lift and transport the spectators into the expression of ultimate reality and transcendent values. It is notable for its aesthetic 'Rasa' theory, which asserts that entertainment is a desired effect of performance arts and it transports the individual in the audience into another parallel reality, full of wonder, where he experiences the essence of his own consciousness and reflects on spiritual and moral questions. The present paper is an attempt to re-assess and simplify the complex text so that the common readers may easily comprehend its nuances.

Key words: *Natyashastra*, literary tradition, performance arts, entertainment, rasa theory.

**Historical Roots:**

*The Natyashastra* is the oldest surviving ancient Indian work on performance arts. The roots of the text extend at least as far back as the *Natasutras*, dated to around the mid 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. The *Natasutras* are mentioned in the text of Panini, the sage who wrote the classic on Sanskrit grammar, and who is dated to about 500 BC. This performance arts related Sutra text is mentioned in other late Vedic texts, as are two scholars named *Shilalin* and *Krishashva*, credited to be pioneers in the studies of ancient drama, singing, dance and Sanskrit compositions for these arts. *The Natyashastra* refers to drama performers as *Shailalinas*, likely because they were so known at the time the text was written, a name derived from the legacy of the Vedic sage Silalin, credited with *Natasutras*. Richmond et al estimate the *Natasutras* to have been composed around 600 BC.

According to Lewis Rowell, a professor of Music specializing on classical Indian music, the earliest Indian artistic thought included three arts: (i) syllabic recital (*vadya*), (ii) melos (*gita*) and dance (*nritta*), as well as two musical genre, *Gandharva* (formal, composed, ceremonial music) and *Gana* (informal, improvised, entertainment music). The *Gandharva* sub-genre also implied celestial, divine associations, while the *Gana* was free from art and including singing. The Sanskrit musical tradition spread widely in the Indian sub-continent during the late 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, and the ancient Tamil classics make it “abundantly clear that a cultivated musical tradition existed in South India as early as the last few pre-Christian centuries”.

The art schools of *Shilalin* and *Krishashva*, mentioned in both the *Brahmanas* and the *Kalpasutras* and *Srautasutra*, may have been associated with the performance of Vedic rituals, which involved story-telling with embedded ethical values. The *Vedanga* texts such as verse 1.4.29 of Panini Sutras mentioned these as well. The roots of *Natyashastra*, thus, likely can be traced to the more ancient Vedic traditions of integrating ritual recitation, dialogue and song in a dramatic representation of spiritual themes.

#### **Structure of *Natyashastra*:**

The most studied version of the text, consisting of about 6000 poetic verses, is structured into 36 chapters. The tradition believes that the text originally had 12,000 verses. Somewhat different versions of the manuscripts exist, and these contain 37 or 38 chapters. Predominant number of its verses are in precise *Anustubh meter* (4x8, or exactly 32 syllables in every *sloka*), some verses are in *Arya meter* (a morae-based Sanskrit meter), and text has some part that is in prose particularly in chapters 6, 7 and 28. The structure of the text harmoniously compiles aspects of the theatrical arts into separate chapters. The text opens with the mythical genesis and history of drama, mentions the role of the different Hindu deities in various aspects of the arts, and recommended Puja (consecration ceremony) of a stage for performance arts. The text then describes the theory of *Tandava dance* (Shiva), the theory of *rasa*, of *bhava*, expression, gestures, acting techniques, basic steps, standing postures.

Chapters 6 and 7 of *The Natyashastra* present the *rasa* theory on aesthetics in performance arts, while chapters 8 to 13 are dedicated to the art of acting. Stage instruments such as methods for holding accessories, weapons, relative movement of actors and actresses, scene formulation, stage zones, conventions and customs are included in chapters 10 to 13 of the text. The chapters 14 to 20 are dedicated to plot and structure of underlying text behind the performance art. These sections include the theory of Sanskrit parody, musical meters and the language of expression. Chapter 17 presents the attributes of poetry and figures of speech, while chapter 18 presents the art of speech and delivery in the performance arts. The text lists ten kinds of play, presents its theory of plot, costumes, and make-up. The text dedicates several chapters exclusively to women in performance arts, with chapter 24 on female theatre. The training of actors is presented in chapter 26 and 35 of the text. The theory of music, techniques for singing, and music instruments are discussed over chapters 28 to 34. The text in its final chapters describes the various types of dramatic characters, their roles and need for team work, what constitutes an ideal troupe, closing out the text with its comments of the importance of performance arts on culture.

#### **Contents of *Natyashastra*:**

The contents of the *Natyashastra* are in part theatrical manual, part philosophy of aesthetics, part mythological history and part theology. It is the oldest surviving encyclopaedic treatise on dramaturgy from India, with sections on the theory and practice of various performance arts. The text extends its reach into asking and understanding the goals of performance arts, the nature of the playwright, the artists and the spectators, their intimate relationship during the performance. *Natya* topics as envisioned in this text include what in western performing arts would include drama, dance, theatre, poetry and music. The text integrates its aesthetics, axiology and description of arts with mythologies associated with Hindu *Devas* and *Devis*. Performance arts, states *Natyashastra*, are a form of Vedic ritual ceremony (*yajna*). The general approach of the text is to treat entertainment as an effect, but not the primary goal of arts. The primary goal is to lift and transport the spectators unto the expression of ultimate reality and transcendent values. According to

Schwartz, "The text allows the artists 'enormous innovation' as they connect the playwright and the spectators, through their performance, to *Rasa* (the essence, juice)."

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. Performance arts aim to empower man to experience this rasa or re-experience it. Actors aim to journey the spectator to this aesthetic experience within him. Rasa is prepared through a creative synthesis and expression of *vibhava* (determinants), *anubhava* (consequents) and *vyabhicharibhava* (transitory states). In the process of emotionally engaging the individual in the audience, the text outlines the use of eight sentiments: erotic, comic, pathetic, terrible, furious, odious, heroic and marvellous.

The text discusses a variety of performance arts as well as the design of the stage like:

#### 1. Drama:

The *Natyashastra* defines drama in verse 6.10 as an art which aesthetically arouses joy in the spectator, through the medium of actor's art of communication, that helps connect and transport the individual into a super sensual inner state of being. The *Natya* connects through *abhinaya*, i.e. applying body-speech-mind and scene, wherein the actors use two practices of dharma (performance), in four styles and four regional variations, accompanied by song and music in a playhouse carefully designed to achieve *siddhi* (success in production). Drama in this ancient Sanskrit text is, therefore, an art to engage every aspect of life, in order to glorify and gift a state of joyful consciousness. The text discusses the universal and inner principles of drama that it asserts successfully affects and journeys the audience to a super-sensual state of discovery and understanding. The stories and plots were provided by the *itihisas* (epics), *Puranas* and the *Kathas* genre of Hindu literature.

The text states that the playwright should know the *bhavas* (inner state of being) of all characters in the story, and it is these *bhavas* that the audience of that drama connects with. The hero is shown to be similar to everyone in some ways, trying to achieve the four goals of human life in Hindu philosophy. Then the *vastu* (plot) emerges through the representation of three worlds – the divine, the human and the demonic. Drama has dharma, it has *artha*; it has karma; it has humour, fighting and killing. The best drama shows the good and the bad, actions and feelings, of each character, whether God or man. Sally Banes and Andre Lepeck stated that according to *Natyashastra* drama is that art which accepts human beings are in different inner states when they arrive as audience, then through the art performed, it provides enjoyment to those wanting pleasure, solace to those in grief, calmness to those who are worried, energy to those who are brave, courage to those who are cowards, eroticism to those who want company, enjoyment to those who are rich, knowledge to those who are uneducated, wisdom to those who are educated. Drama represents the truths about life and worlds, through emotions and circumstances, to deliver entertainment, but more importantly ethos, questions, peace and happiness.

The function of drama and the art of theatre, as envisioned in *Natyashastra*, is to restore the human potential, man's journey of 'delight at a higher level of consciousness' and a life that is enlightened. The text goes into specifics to explain the means available within dramatic arts to achieve its goals. The text describes four means of communication between the actors and the audience – words, gestures, dresses and *aharya* (make ups, cosmetics), all of which should be harmonious with the temperament envisioned in the drama. The text describes the stage for performance arts as the sacred place for artists, and discusses the specifics of stage design, positioning the actors, the relative locations, movement on stage, entrance and exit, change in background, transition, objects displayed on the stage, architectural features of a theatre. It asserts that these aspects help the audience get absorbed in the drama as well as understand the message and the meaning being communicated.

#### 2. Song and dance in arts:

The *Natyashastra* discusses Vedic songs, and also dedicates over 130 verses to non-Vedic songs. Chapter 17 of the text is entirely dedicated to poetry and the structure of a song, which it states is also the template for

composing plays. Its chapter 31 assets that there are seven types of songs: *Mandraka*, *Aparantaka*, *Rovindaka*, *Prakari*, *Ullopyaka*, *Ovedaka* and *Uttara*. These are melodic tools of art for any song, and they are essential. Without these melodic intonations a song becomes like “a night without the moon, a river without water, a creeper without a flower and a woman without an ornament”. A song also has four basic architectural *varna* to empower its meaning, and these tone patterns are ascending line, steady line, descending line and the unsteady line. The ideal poem produces bliss in the reader, or listener. It transports the audience into an imaginative world, transforms his inner state, and delivers him to a higher level of consciousness. Great songs do not instruct, or lecture; they delight and liberate from within to a state of godlike ecstasy. According to Susan Schwartz, these sentiments and ideas of *Natyashastra* likely influenced the devotional songs and musical trends of the Bhakti movement that emerged in Hinduism.

### 3. Music and musical instruments:

*The Natyashastra* systematically treats ‘the theory and instruments of Indian music’. Music has been an integral part of performance arts in the Hindu tradition since its Vedic times. The theories of music found in the *Natyashastra* are also found in many Puranas, such as the *Markandeya Purana*. Before the *Natyashastra* was finalized, the ancient Indian tradition classified musical instruments into four groups based on their acoustic principle (how they work, rather than the material they are made of). The *Natyashastra* accepts these four categories as given, and dedicates four separate chapters to them, one each on stringed instruments (chordophones), hollow instruments (aerophones), solid instruments (idiophones), and covered instruments (membranophones).

Chapters 15 and 16 of the text discuss Sanskrit prosody in a manner similar to those found in more ancient *Vedanga* texts such as the *Pingala* Sutras. Chapter 28 discusses the harmonic scale, calling the unit of tonal measurement or audible unit as *Sruti*, with verse 28.21 introducing the musical scale ‘*Sa RiGa Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa*’. The music theory in the *Natyashastra* centres around three themes – sound, rhythm and prosody applied to musical texts. The text discusses *gramas* (scales) and *murchanas* (modes), mentioning three scales of seven modes (21 in total), some of which are the same as the Greek modes. The text also discusses which scales are best for different forms of performance arts.

The *Natyashastra* describes from chapter 28 onwards, four types of regular musical instruments, grouping them as stringed giving the example of *veena*, covered giving the example of *drums*, solid giving the example of *cymbals*, and hollow giving the example of *flute*. Chapter 33 asserts team for performance, calling it *kutapa* (orchestra) which it states to have one male and one female singer with nine to eleven musical instruments accompanied by players.

### 4. Male and female actors:

The *Natyashastra* enshrines the male and female actors in any performance art to be the most important. The brightness of performance, or its lack, impacts everything. A great play that is poorly performed confuses and loses the audience, while a play that is inferior in significance or meaning becomes beautiful to the audience when brilliantly performed, states *Natyashastra*. A performance art of any form needs auditors and director, whose role is to work together with the actors from the perspective of the audience and the significance or meaning the playwright of the art work, is attempting to convey. The text dedicates significant number of verses on actor training, as did the Indian dramaturgy literature that arose in its wake. The ideal actor training encourages self-improvement within the actor and raises the actor’s level of consciousness, which in turn empowers him or her to express ideas from that higher state of consciousness. Acting is more than physical techniques or rote recitation; it is communication through emotions and expression of embedded meaning and levels of consciousness in the underlying text. Specific training on gestures and movements for actors, their performance and significance are discussed in chapter 8 through 12 of the *Natyashastra*. Chapter 24 is dedicated to females in performance arts. However, other chapters on actor training include numerous verses that mention women along with men.

## 5. The goals of art: spiritual values:

The *Natyashastra* and other ancient Hindu texts such as the *YajnavalkyaSmriti* assert that arts and music are spiritual, with the power to guide one to *moksha*, through empowering the concentration of mind for liberation of the Self (soul, or *atma*). These arts are offered as alternate paths (*marga* or *yoga*), in strength similar to the knowledge of the *Srutis* (Vedas and Upanishads). Various medieval scholars, such as the 12<sup>th</sup> century *Mitaksara* and *Apararka*, cite *Natyashastra* and Bharata in linking arts to spirituality, while the text itself asserts that beautiful songs are sacred and performance arts are holy. The goal of performance arts is ultimately to let the spectator experience his own consciousness, then evaluate and feel the spiritual values innate in him, and rise to a higher level of consciousness. The playwright, the actors and the director all aim to transport the spectator to an aesthetic experience within him to eternal universals, to emancipate him from the mundane to creative freedom within.

### A historical overview and critical assessment:

The *Natyashastra*, which has been described as the science of drama, is an ancient treatise on dramaturgy that throws light on Indian aesthetics, poetics and performing arts. The title of the text is composed of two words, "Natya" and "Shastra". The root of the Sanskrit word *Natya* is *Nat* which means "act, represent". The word *Shastra* means "precept, rules, manual, compendium, book or treatise", and is generally used as a suffix in the Indian literature context, for knowledge in a defined area of practice. The text consists of 36 chapters with a cumulative total of 6000 poetic verses describing performance arts. The subjects covered by the treatise include dramatic composition, structure of play and the construction of a stage to host it, genres of acting, body movements, make up and costumes, role and goals of an art director, the musical scales, musical instruments and the integration of music with art performance. The *Natyashastra* is notable as an ancient encyclopaedic treatise on the arts, one which has influenced dance, music and literary traditions of India. It is also notable for its aesthetic "Rasa theory", which asserts that entertainment is a desired effect of performance arts but not the primary goal. The primary goal is to transport the individual in the audience into another parallel reality, full of wonder, where he experiences the essence of his own consciousness, and reflects on spiritual and moral questions. The text has inspired secondary literature such as Sanskrit *bhasya* i.e. reviews and commentaries.

The composition date of *Natyashastra* is unknown as the estimates vary from 500 BC to 500 AD. However, Bharata Muni in the second century BC is supposed to have composed this text on theatrical practice and theory that formulates Indian aesthetics. The text of *Natyashastra* provides a system by which performance experience can be organised and made sense of and rendered comprehensible. Scholars date the origin of *Natyashastra* as early as 200 BC, and as late as 600 AD. The text in an oral form, similar to what we know as *Natyashastra* today, was most likely composed between 200 BC and 400 AD. There has been a lot of debate on the issue of the authenticity of the composer of the *Natyashastra*. Scholars have wondered if "Bharara" is a proper name or an acronym or title. It is even possible that the text was composed by Abhinavgupta or several authors over a period of decades or even centuries. However, all debates converge on the fact that the author of the *Natyashastra* clearly knew theatre from experience. Kapila Vatsyayan (2003) is of the opinion that *Natyashastra* was composed by one person, namely Sage Bharata, who was actively engaged in theorizing when Sanskrit drama came into being. The existence of dramatic rituals, epic stories which were later interpreted in dramatic form also establishes the fact that it was this time that Sanskrit drama came into being. Unfortunately, there is no physical evidence to substantiate the existence of Sanskrit dramatic performance. Unlike the Greek and Roman theatre, whose ruins have left behind some tangible evidence of theatre and performance, there are no surviving Indian theatre structures. However, plays, dramaturgical texts (surviving on palm leaf manuscripts) and descriptions through commentaries provide some information.

If we have to look at background of ancient Indian dramaturgy, we may mention here that *Natya* or theatre is an ancient practice of entertainment in India. Surviving texts and treatises suggest that theatre existed in the Indian subcontinent prior to the Vedic age. Both Gods and human beings were said to be

connoisseurs of art. The golden period of Indian theatre, mostly in Sanskrit, is said to have lasted until the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. In spite of dramatic literature receding soon after the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, performance traditions thrived through dancers, musicians, singers and storytellers. The basic aesthetics of dramaturgy survived, morphed into various variants, through the traditional folk and classical forms. Paul Kurtz (1988) suggests that the Rig Veda gives evidence that dramatic theatre in India came into being around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. According to Kurtz, the Jataka stories illustrating Indian life between 600 BC and 300 BC contain evidences of theatre.

Like its Greek counterpart, Indian drama and theatre owes its origin to religion. The two great Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* have contributed vastly to performing arts in ancient times. The *Natyashastra* of Bharata Muni brings out the evidence of theatre arts at festivals and public celebrations during the Maurya Dynasty. The Maurya Dynasty ruled India for a long period and during this period, kings sent Buddhist missionaries to various places like Ceylon, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Tibet, China and Japan to spread Buddhism. The missionaries used various forms of arts including drama to teach Buddhist dogma. In a similar way, the Gupta Dynasty (320-535 AD) ushered in India's golden or classical age in which Buddhism accepted by king Ashoka and the dramatic theatre flourished. The great playwright Kalidasa was patronised by king Vikramaditya and he also gathered a unique group of poets and scholars. Many known and unknown historical factors contributed towards the production of Indian theatre and gave it a religious stamp that prevailed throughout the classic age in the serious nature of the drama. The age of classical theatre is believed to be golden period of Indian theatre. This period last until the 5<sup>th</sup> century and soon after the wane period for Sanskrit drama began.

The *Natyashastra's* primary concerns are not philosophical or theoretical; rather, the text elucidates and elaborates how theatre is performed. It prescribes in detail the construction of theatre spaces in India, the application of make-up, the design and building of props, arm, foot, eye and other body movements, ritual practices, the organization of theatre companies, the audience, dramatic competitions and the community of actors with additional chapters on music and audience appreciation. It elaborates the affectiveness of theatre. Primarily dealing with stagecraft, the *Natyashastra* prescribes and influences Indian music, dance and literature. It nourishes itself with mythology of classical India which was transcribed into drama and performed in the temples and courts. Besides its relevance to the theatre, the *Natyashastra* shapes our understanding of music and dance in ancient India. Both music and dance have derived a great deal from the guidelines laid down on the stage, has taken its language of gestures, steps and moves from it. Besides, the guidelines for critique that Bharata developed are said to have influenced dramatic criticism till today.

The text has survived into the modern age in several manuscript versions, wherein the title of the chapters varies and in some cases the content of the few chapters differ. Some recensions show significant interpolations and corruption of text, along with internal contradictions and sudden changes in style. Scholars such as PV Kane stated that some text were likely changed as well as added to the original between the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, thus creating some variant editions, and the mixture of poetic verses and prose in a few extant manuscripts of *Natyashastra* may be because of this. According to Pramod Kale, who received a doctorate on the text from the University of Wisconsin, the surviving version of *Natyashastra* likely existed by the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The poetics of theatrical performance that the *Natyashastra* promotes has become important to understanding of original Indian arts in general. The *Natyashastra's* primary interest has been in the stylish presentation of bodies in motion on a stage. In India, one can hardly critique a novel or a poem or a dance or a painting without taking into consideration the term "rasa", which the *Natyashastra* identifies as a touchtone of aesthetic experience. In spite of this, classical Sanskrit dram regarded the *Natyashastra* as a prescriptive text that find little or no application so far as real performance on the stage is concerned. As in Greek drama, a lot of variation has been visible in Sanskrit dramas which allude to things that seem to coincide with parts of the *Natyashastra*, but many Sanskrit dramas also include elements that the *Natyashastra* does not mention or even forbids. Here one can compare the *Natyashastra* to Aristotle's *Poetics*, which was in itself prescriptive and had little application on the Greek stage. Since *Natyashastra* has contributed towards the growth and

development of Indian classical music, dance, drama and art, it may be said that *Natyashastra* has laid the cornerstone of the fine arts in India. The commentaries on the *Natyashastra* are known, dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earliest and the only available one is the *Abhinavabharati* by Abhinava Gupta written between 950-1020 AD. It was followed by works of writers such as Saradatanaya of 12-13<sup>th</sup> century, Sarngadeva of 13<sup>th</sup> century, and Kallinatha of 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, *Abhinavabharati* is regarded as the most authoritative commentary on *Natyashastra* as Abhinava Gupta provides not only his own interpretation of the *Natyashastra*, but a range of information about pre-Bharata traditions. It gives us an enduring theory about theatrical performance that pervades South Asian culture and aesthetics.

Religion and philosophical thought have always influenced society and art in particular moments of history. The political and spiritual climate was different from what we see today at the time of composition of the *Natyashastra*. There were various religious strains in India, namely, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic faiths. The development and propagation of religion was accompanied with vivid imagination which was reproduced in works of art. No aesthetic could be devoid of spiritual form and content. The two epic *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* fed the imagination of the artists. People believed in the supernatural and emphasis was placed on the mystic symbolism in dance, music, art and theatre. *Nataraj*, the representation of the dancing Shiva came to symbolize the cosmic rhythm of creation and destruction. The myths and legends of Shiva and Krishna have contributed to the imagination and have led to the rendering of this to song, dance and drama in Indian aesthetics, particularly the Sanskrit drama.

Bharata's *Natyashastra* establishes the characteristics of Sanskrit drama. The mythological origin of classical South Asian theatre is narrated in the *Natyashastra*. The narrative at the opening of the *Natyashastra* points at certain characteristics of Sanskrit drama such as:

1. It is composed of sacred material.
2. It is meant for an audience that is well-versed in the performance tradition.
3. It is performed by members of the highest rank in the caste system, i.e. priests.
4. It requires special knowledge and skill to execute.
5. A complete understanding of dance, music, recitation and ritual language is a must.
6. Training is a hereditary process descending directly from God, and passed down from father to son.
7. It must be performed on consecrated ground.
8. It serves a dual purpose – to educate as well as entertain.

The *Natyashastra* was originally written in Sanskrit which was the language of the educated and elite upper class society. It was a work of erudition intended for an educated, elite audience. Like classical Greek theatre, classical Indian theatre was also performed in temples or in the king's court. Therefore, *Natyashastra*, like Aristotle's *Poetics*, also propagates a theory that associated theatrical performance with religious activity. It confirms through the description of the performers, stage and emotions that theatre performers in classical India occupied a particular position in the social hierarchy.

Traditionally, Bharata's *Natyashastra* is considered as an additional Veda: the fifth Veda. Written in Sanskrit the vast treatise comprises 6,000 sutras. It has been divided into 36 chapters, sometimes into 37 or 38 due to further bifurcation of a chapter or chapters. The title can be loosely translated as "A compendium of Theatre or A manual of Dramatic Arts". The *Natyashastra* is believed to be a compendium of answers to the queries made by a number of *munis* (sages), who approached Bharata to know about the secrets of *Natyashastra*. *Natyashastra*, therefore, comprises of narratives, symbols and dialogues. It begins with inquiries made by Bharata's pupils, which he answers by narrating the myth of its source in Brahma and thus, opens with the origin of theatre. Bharata explains the very nature, objective and expense of *natya* as a Veda through this unique myth. The text is in the form of elaborate dialogues between the author and a group of *munis* or sages, who wished to know about *Natyaveda*, the knowledge of the performing arts as dance, music and drama.

Bharata presents a detailed inquiry into the various facets of drama including its nature, the origin, theories, techniques of the theatre with all its components of speech, body-language, gestures, costumes, décor and the state of mind of the performers, apart from rituals, architecture of theatre etc.

The *Natyashastra* consists of four elements namely *pathya* or (readable) text, including the art of recitation and rendition in performance taken from the Rig Veda; *sangeet* or songs, including instrumental music from the Sama Veda, *abhinaya* or acting, the technique of expressing the poetic meaning of the text and communicating it to the spectator from the Yajur Veda, and finally, *rasa* or aesthetic experience from the atharvaveda. It's spirituality is obvious in the *anukarana* or 'redoing' of the *triloka* or triple universe and life in its entirety, and its rendition reposes on the *anukirtana* of bhava i.e. 're-telling' of emotive states in order to create a new world of 'imagination'. Though *Natyashastra* speaks of theatre, it actually encompasses all forms of art expressions. The text, in fact, claims that there is no knowledge, no craft, no lore, no art, no technique and no activity that is not found in *Natyashastra*. The reason that theatre-arts were discussed specifically is that, in the ancient Indian context, drama was considered the most comprehensive form of art-expressions. Further, during the time the *Natyashastra* was compiled, the arts of poetry, dance, music and drama, and even painting, sculpture and architecture were not viewed as separate and individualised streams of art forms. It was an integral vision of art, which blossomed in multiplicity. All artistic expressions were viewed as propagating beauty while providing both pleasure and education, through refinement of senses and sense perceptions. The objective of drama during the time was to show people the proper way to live, an ideal way in which one could live and behave, so that one might be still better human and attain *mokshya* or salvation.

According to Satya Dev Choudhary (2002), for convenience, the *Natyashastra* categorizes the entire Sanskrit Poetics into ten *kavyamgas* or constituents. They are:

1. *Kavyasvarupa* (the nature of poetry): (i) the causes of poetry, (ii) the definition of poetry, (iii) various classifications of poetry, and (iv) the purpose of poetry.
2. *Sabdasakti* (the significance of a word).
3. *Dhavni-kavya* (a piece of poetry containing an aesthetic suggestivity).
4. *Gunibhuta-vyamgya-kavya* (a piece of poetry where the suggested sense is secondary to the primary sense).
5. *Rasa* (sentiment), i.e. the poetic relish.
6. *Guna* (the excellence of poetic expression).
7. *Riti* (the style of composition of poetry).
8. *Alamkara* (the use of figurative words to enhance the beauty of poetry).
9. *Dosa* (blemishes in poetic expression).
10. *Natya-vidhana* (the science of theatre or dramaturgy).

Apart from this, the *Natyashastra* is composed in thirty-six books or volumes, as follows:

1. The mythic creation of theatre, 2. Theatre buildings, 3. Religious rituals, 4. Dance, 5. Pre-show activity, 6. *Rasa*, 7. *Bhavas*, 8. Acting: head and face, 9. Acting: hands and limbs, part 1, 10. Acting: hands and limbs, part 2., 11. Stage movement: steps, 12. Stage movement: combination of steps, 13. Stage movement: gaits, 14. Areas of the stage and styles of plays, 15. Voice, 16. Meter, 17. Poetic figures, 18. Languages, part 1, 19. Languages, part 2, 20. Types of plays, 21. Plot, 22. Mood, 23. Costume, 24. Acting: imitation and representation, 25. Acting: characterization, 26. Gesture, 27. Success of a production, 28. Music, 29. Stringed instruments, 30. Hollow instruments, 31. *Tala* (drumming rhythms), 32. Songs, 33. Drums, 34. Character categories, 35. Roles, and 36. The theatre myth.



Yazhini Balu (2010) has made a comprehensive summary of the *Natyashastra*. For our understanding of the text, it is necessary to cite Balu's summary in entirety. She stated:

In the first chapter Bharata talks about the response and involvement of the spectator in drama. The spectators come from all classes of society without any distinction, but are expected to be at least minimally initiated into the appreciation of theatre. This is because of the fact that they may respond properly to the art as an emphatic *sahridaya*. Theatre flourishes in a peaceful environment and requires a state free from hindrances. The first chapter ends emphasizing the significance and importance of drama in attaining the joy, peace, and goals of life and recommending the worship of the presiding deities of theatre and the auditorium. The second chapter lays down the norms for theatre architecture or *prekshagriha*, i.e. auditorium. This also protects the performance from all obstacles caused by adverse nature, malevolent spirits, animals and men. It describes the medium-sized rectangular space as ideal for audibility and visibility, apparently holding about 400 spectators. Bharata also prescribes smaller and larger structures, respectively half and double this size, and square and triangular halls. Bharata's model was an ideal intimate theatre, considering the subtle *abhinaya* of the eyes and other facial expressions which he described in the second chapter of *Natyashastra*.

The third chapter describes an elaborate puja for Gods and Goddesses protecting the auditorium, and prescribes rituals to consecrate the space. Chapter four of the *Natyashastra* begins with the story of a production of *Amritamanthana* i.e. "Churning of the Nectar", a *samavakara* performed according to Brahma's instructions on the peaks of *kailasa*, witnessed by Shiva. After some time, a drama titled *Tripumdaha* or 'Burning of the three cities' is staged, relating Shiva's exploits. Shiva asks Bharata to incorporate *tandava* dance in the *purvaranga* preliminaries and directs his attendant *Tandu* to teach Bharata. *Tandu* explains the components of *tandava*, the categories of its movements required for the worship of the Gods and rituals. This chapter also lays the foundation of *angitaabhinaya* or physical acting developed in later chapters. The fifth chapter, however, details the elements of *purvaranga*. Thus the first five chapters are structurally integrated to the rest of the text. The sixth and the seventh chapters deal with the fundamental emotional notions and aesthetics of *rasa* and *bhava*. The *bhavas*, which include the *vibhavas*, are communicated to spectators through *abhinaya*, especially *angika*. Therefore, it receives elaborate treatment in chapter 8-11.

The chapters like 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 codify body language based on a definite semiotics. Movement requires well-defined blocking, so immediately afterwards the *Natyashastra* lays down the principle of *kakshyavibhaga* in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter. The extremely flexible and easy principle of establishing space on stage and altering it through *parikramana* or circumambulation is a unique characteristic of traditional Indian theatre and dance and are subtly dealt in the next chapters of *Natyashastra*. Chapter 18 discusses the ten major *rupakas*, or forms of drama and *natika*, a variety of *uparupaka*. The next chapter analyses the structure of drama as well as the inclusion of *lasyangas* or components of feminine dance derived from popular dance and recitative forms in theatre.

Chapter 20 gives an elaborate account of the *vrittis*. Chapter 21 deals with *aharyaabhinaya*, which covers make-up, costume, properties, masks, and minimal stage décor. Chapter 22 begins with *samanya* or common *abhinaya*, which compounds the four elements of *abhinaya* harmoniously. It discusses other aspects of production too, which may be viewed as 'inner', adhering to prescribed norms and systematic training, and 'outer' or done freely outside such a regimen. This chapter ends with an analysis of women's dispositions, particularly pertaining to love and terms of address, while the following chapter 23 deals

with male qualities and patterns of sexual behaviour, as well as classification and stages of feminine youth.

Chapter 24 enumerates the types of characters in Sanskrit drama. Chapter 25 deals with *citrabhinaya* i.e. 'pictured acting' especially meant for delineating the environment occurring as a stimulant or *uddipनाविभवा* of different *bhavas*. It also defines the specific ways of expressing different objects and states, and the use of gestures, postures, gaits, walking, and theatrical conventions. The next two chapters present the nature of dramatis personae, the principles of make-up, and speak about the success and philosophy of performance. The chapter 27 deals with music employed in theatre. Chapter 28 covers *jati* or melodic types or matrices, *sruti* or micro-intervals, *svara* or notes, *grama* or scales, and *murcchana* or modes, now ragas. Chapter 29 describes stringed instruments like the *vina* and distinguishes between vocal and instrumental music, further dividing vocal into two types, *varna* or 'colour', only syllabics and *giti* or 'song' with lyrics. Chapter 30 describes wind instruments like the flute and ways of playing it.

Chapter 31 deals with cymbals, and *tala*, rhythm, and metrical cycles. Chapter 32 defines *dhniva* songs, their specific employment, forms, and illustrations. Chapter 33 lists the qualities and defects of vocalists and instrumentalists. Chapter 34 relates the origin and nature of drums. The concluding two lay down the principles for distributing roles and the qualifications for members of the troupe. Bharata narrates the story of his sons, who ridiculed the sages and were cursed. He instructs them to expiate their sin, so that they attain their lost glory again. He returns to the performance in heaven where *Indra* enacts *Nahusha*, and finally to the descent of theatre on earth. Bharata ends his *Natyashastra* by stating the glory of theatre. *Natyashastra* remained an important text in the fine arts for many centuries whilst influencing much of the terminology and structure of Indian classical dance and music. For about 2000 years the *Natyashastra* has inspired new texts and various regional traditions of theatre. *Kutiyattam* in Kerala is an extant Sanskrit form that imbibed and developed the theory and practice originating from the *Natyashastra*. The analysis of body forms and movements defined in *Natyashastra* also influenced Indian sculpture and other visual arts in later centuries.

#### Conclusion:

The content of *Natyashastra* is so vast and varied that for centuries it was a challenge for dramatic theorists to formulate new doctrines regarding Indian aesthetics and dramaturgy surpassing those stated by Bharata. The *Natyashastra* gives us an elaborate and exclusive theory about theatrical performance that pervades South Asian aesthetics. Bharata's sense of how theatre affects audiences, rooted in his understanding of the Sanskrit terms *bhava* and *rasa*, are quite akin to Aristotle's *Poetics* of Greek drama and continue to illuminate and challenge how we think of what theatrical performances can do. Therefore, the questions like whether or not the *Natyashastra* was compiled in a particular year by a particular person are not very important. The historicity of the matter and answers to these questions that have remained a mystery for many historians, have many views. Yet it cannot undermine the importance of this ancient work, diminish its worth nor distract its wisdom. It is unanimously accepted that the *Natyashastra*, the ancient treatise of Indian dramaturgy, has provided a sustainable foundation and framework for development of theory and practice of performing arts in India. Just as Panini standardized the classical form of Sanskrit language, Bharata's *Natyashastra* has standardized the classical form of drama.

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