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NATYASHASTRA - A TREATISE ON INDIAN DRAMATURGY: IN REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

According to the Natyashastra, the play depicts the three worlds in their current state. It is a satire on human actions and behaviour, brimming with a variety of emotions and portraying a variety of situations. The rasa definition has developed and been extensively discussed in Sanskrit drama to become the most contentious issue. Numerous treatises clarify the rasa theory, but this study will interpret and analyze it through the lens of its most authoritative source, the Natyashastra. Abhinavagupta, a Kashmiri philosopher and aesthetician, wrote a book titled Abhinavabharati. The rasa sutra of Bharata is generally regarded as the root of the rasa theory. Abhinavabharati provided a philosophical foundation for the rasa theory. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that formal articulations of Sanskrit drama concepts in the English language began.

Bharat Muni's Natyashastra: The Essence

There is no exclusive portrayal of you or the Gods in it (Natya), since the drama is a depiction of the condition of the three worlds (Bhaavaanikiirtana). It contains references to duty, to sports, to money, to peace, and to laughter, as well as references to war, to love-making, and to the murder of people. This teaches duty to those who are determined to perform it, and it chastises those who are ill-bred or unruly, encourages self-control in those who are disciplined, gives bravery to cowards, energy to heroic people, enlightens men of low intelligence, and wisdom to the wise.

This provides diversions for kings, stability (of mind) for the bereaved, and (hints for acquiring) capital for those pursuing it, as well as calm for the mentally agitated. The drama, as I have conceived it, is a parody of human acts and behavior, replete with a range of emotions and depicting a variety of situations. This will apply to men's acts, whether good, poor, or indifferent, and will provide them with bravery, amusement, and pleasure, as well as counsel. Thus, the drama will serve as an educational tool for all, both through the acts and states (Bhva) portrayed in it and through the sentiments elicited by them.

It will alleviate the suffering of unfortunate people who are plagued with sorrow and sadness or are overwhelmed by work, and it will promote the practice of service (dharma) as well as glory, long life, intelligence, and general well-being, as well as educate the populace. There is no wise maxim, no knowledge, no art or craft, no unit, and no movement in the drama that is not contained in it (Natya). As a result, I created a drama in which we encounter all branches of science, various arts, and various acts. Thus, (O daityas), you should have no ill will against the Gods; for the drama has made a point of simulating the world with its Seven Divisions (Sapta Dvipa).

Stories derived from Vedic texts as well as semi-historical tales (Itihasa) are embellished to the point of providing pleasure. It is referred to as a drama (Natya). A drama is a recreation of the adventures of Gods, Asuras, kings, and commoners in this world.

And it is called a drama when human nature, with its joys and sorrows, is portrayed in representation through Gestures and the like (Words, Costume, and Temperament).

OBSERVERS & COMMENTATORS

However, the rasa concept has evolved and been extensively engaged with to become the most contentious topic in Sanskrit drama, recognized, used, and/or questioned by dramatists, authors, and critics for over two millennia for various interpretations.

These are the works that have been credited by the majority of their modern, twentieth-century commentators and interpreters (Kavi, De, Kane, Krishnamoorthy, Pandey, and Gerow, among others) with introducing new perspectives to Sanskrit Poetics' perennially engaged discipline of rasa criticism, in contrast to other ancient and medieval age commentators such as Bhamaha, Udbhata, Bhatta Lolata, Sri S. Their commentaries, like Bhanudatta's Rasatarangini, are significant for their encyclopaedic coverage of the rasa debate rather than for making any recent, incisive contributions.

Further shaping and influencing the application and interpretation of the rasa principle in aesthetic appreciation have been evolving perspectives within subsequent emerging Indian philosophical frameworks. This can be attributed to two factors: the first is Bharata's brevity in enunciating a sutra of enormous psychological insight and meaning, which instantly demanded a more precise articulation by each subsequent commentator.

The second was the unambiguous recognition by all Natyashastra commentators of rasa's role as a pillar of aesthetic appreciation. They worked methodically to transform it into a basic aesthetic idea for all Indian art forms, beginning with drama and dance and progressing through music, literature, and now cinema. There are numerous treatises that explain the rasa theory, but this study will base its understanding and analysis on its most authoritative source, the Natyashastra (as translated by Ghosh 1961 and Rangacharya 2010), and its most prominent critique by the 11th century CE. Abhinavagupta, a philosopher and aesthetician from Kashmir, authored a book called Abhinavabharati (as discussed by Gnoli in 1956). According to all later medieval thinkers and modern Sanskrit scholars, the Abhinavabharati represents the pinnacle of critical and intellectual achievement in the evolution of the 'Rasa School of Appreciation'.

It is the only source that reviews the lost original works and views of the majority of pre-10th century Natyashastra commentators, including Bhattalolata, Sankuka, Bhattanayaka, and Bhattatauta. Abhinavagupta also wrote an influential commentary on Anandavardhana's seminal 'dhvani theory' (Dhvanyaloka 9th century CE), which proposed that the nature of an aesthetic work could be found in its dominant rasa. Anandavardhana's sound theory of rasadhvani (the aesthetic suggestion of an art form) fully established the functional implications of the aesthetic principle of rasa in all literary genres and reinterpreted all previous categories of poetics in light of this essential principle, for the first time expanding its reach beyond the

realm of drama to include all other forms of art, such as music. Bharata's text is placed first since it is widely acknowledged as the source of the principle of rasa and serves as the earliest and most fundamental, if concise, template for all subsequent discussions and commentaries. However, Abhinavabharati endowed the rasa principle with a solid philosophical basis, elevating it to an accepted truism in Sanskrit Poetics, 'never to be discarded by rival systems and strengthened only in detail by subsequent speculations'. Gnoli emphasizes rasa criticism's subsequent rise, stating: 'With few exceptions, Abhinavagupta's conclusions in Abhinavabharati were universally acknowledged by all subsequent Indian aesthetic thinkers as the most important text in the history of Indian aesthetic thinking.'

Additionally, there was a significant lull in the study of Bharata's rasa sutra following Abhinavagupta in terms of the inclusion of some radical new contributions or theoretical change. Jagannatha's late seventeenth-century Rasagangadhara, the final major medieval translator of Bharata's rasa sutra, demonstrates the text's strong influence on Abhinavagupta, who is quoted in numerous passages. Formal articulations of Sanskrit drama principles in the English language did not begin until the mid-nineteenth century, with the appearance of English translations of ancient Sanskrit dramas and the resurfacing of manuscripts of the Natyashastra, beginning with William Jones' 1789 translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntala* (*The Recognition of Shakuntala*, 5th century CE) (1826).

In the modern era, a critical re-engagement with Sanskrit aesthetics occurred only after M. Hiriyanna's pioneering and imaginative *Art Experience* (1919), which inspired a generation of twentieth-century scholars (Ghosh, Pandey, Gnoli, Krishnamoorthy, Raghavan, Sankaran, Rangacharya, and Gerow, among others) to carry his observations as a talisman for investigating the contours of Indian aesthetics. Ramakrishna Kavi edited the *Natyashastra's* first critical edition (1926). Manomohan Ghosh (1950/1956), an anonymous board of scholars (1980s), and Adya Rangacharya have all contributed significant English translations (latest reprints of which are dated 1990s onwards). Additionally, the twentieth-century commentaries and translations of the *Natyashastra*, *Dhvanyaloka*, and *Abhinavabharati*, as well as their interpretations of the rasa theory, were included. Kapila Vatsayan, an art historian, observes the paradigm-shifting status and power of Hiriyanna's work:

It is no longer possible to comprehend Indian aesthetics through the lens of Plato, Aristotle, and others. Nor is it appropriate to demonstrate the existence of a lengthy and sophisticated philosophical debate on aesthetics.

Comparative Aesthetics 1 & 2 by K.C. Pandey (1950) is one of the earliest notable post-independence compendium commentaries. Although Pandey discusses the *Abhinavabharati* against the backdrop of Indian aesthetic thinking, his work examines aesthetic issues from the perspectives of various dramaturgs and poets against the backdrop of Eastern (Sanskrit drama) and Western (Aristotle's *Poetics*) thought. Kane, De, and Krishnamoorthy's critical engagement with the evolution of rasa theory also centers on a comparative study of the Rasa School's various commentators. Kane's *The History of Sanskrit Poetics* (1994) offers a chronology of the *Natyashastra* commentaries.

However, its style is more encyclopedic and educational than argumentative. Though S.K. De's *Some Problems of Sanskrit Poetics* (1959) is reasonably argumentative, it attributes a regression in the study of Indian aesthetics in the post-Abhinavagupta era to the medieval commentators' misunderstanding. From the numerous laws, canons, meandering divisions, and sub-divisions of the *Natyashastra*

and its interpretations discussed by Kane and De, K. Krishnamoorthy's *Essays in Sanskrit Criticism* (1974) distills the rasa doctrines and points-of-view pertinent to contemporary aesthetic criticism. Edwin Gerow's *Indian Poetics* (1977), a landmark review of Indian aesthetics written by a Western scholar, engages the relevant themes of the rasa theory in an aesthetic study set against the twentieth-century commentary of interpreters such as Gnoli, De, Kane, Krishnamoorthy, and others.

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