

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

INDIAN CLASSICAL DRAMA AND ITS SPECTATORS: AN ANALYSIS
OF BHARATIYA NATAKA AND PREKSAKA BASED ON BHARAT
MUNI'S NATYASAstra

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Gutimali Goswami. Indian Classical Drama And Its Spectators: An Analysis Of Bharatiya Nataka And Preksaka Based On Bharat Muni's Natyasastra-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(17), 584-586. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Natyasastra, Bharatmuni, spectators, drama.

ABSTRACT:

Bharat Muni's *Natyasastra* is believed to be the origin of Indian dramatic tradition. This *veda* in a very elaborate manner describes not just the inception but also the development, forms and various categories existing within the concept known as drama. Often regarded as *Drśya-Kavya* or visible poetry, drama was an artform of utmost importance in ancient India. The purpose of drama too, was clearly proclaimed at the very outset of *Natyasastra* which was to provide its spectators the experience of the world. To fulfill the same, greater importance was given to the relation between an actor and the spectators. It was believed to be fundamental as drama was used as a means to provide wisdom to the spectators. This paper attempts to study the role of *Preksaka* or spectators in Indian *nataka* or drama and the relation between these two binaries.

Bharata or Bharatmuni, is believed to be the creator of an Indian *upapurana*, which is regarded as a treatise on drama and dramatics. It was named *Natyasastra*. Though Bharata is honored as the first writer of dramatics, no evidence or personal details of this sage are available for us to scrutinize this popular faith. On the contrary, the name "Bharata" itself is often under controversial examination as the word means 'an actor', rightfully creating speculations whether the word is a proper noun or a class noun. The word *Natya* has been translated as 'drama' and this 'sastra' or text in form of thirty-seven chapters gives us a detailed analysis of Indian dramatic conventions and aesthetics. *Natyasastra* gives us the following passage which may pass for a definition of the *natya*:

A mimicry of the exploits of gods, the Asuras, kings as well as of householders in the world, is called drama (Ghosh XLIII). In ancient India, *natya* was rightfully regarded as a product of

harmonious osmosis between two binaries: one who stands on the stage i.e., the actors/characters, and the other who are out of the stage i.e., the spectators/audience. Bharata in his *sastra* has legitimized the same in various ways. Almost in line with Aristotle and Cicero's idea of imitation or *mimesis*, *Natyasastra* lays down elaborate rules of mimicry or *anukarana* of men and their semi-divine and divine counterparts. Probably because of this representative nature of Indian drama it came to be known as a 'poem to be seen' (Ghosh XLIV). However, *Natyasastra* also advocated for *lokadharami* or "realistic" stage performances, i.e., natural behavioral practices of men and women.

Though no attempt was made to restrict the action or length of a dramatic production, utmost importance was given to the unity of impression which it was calculated to produce. For the same, we find mention of two most important devices in the *Natyasastra*: Germ (*bija*) and Prominent Point (*bindu*). The relation of these two devices to every act of the play helped us achieve the desired unity. The nature of performance and the impact it created was of greater consideration in Indian dramatic traditions because in early times plays were essentially considered to be *preksa* or spectacle. Their innate nature was regarded as 'things' to be visualized. Hence, the *preksaka* or the spectators were given a much higher status and were never referred to as mere "audience". Probably that is the reason, while discussing the origin of drama and its characteristics, *Natyasastra* states:

This teaches duty to those bent on their duty, love to those who are eager for its fulfillment, and it chastises those who are ill-bred or unruly, promotes self-restraint in those who are disciplined, gives courage to cowards, energy to heroic persons, enlightens men of poor intellect and gives wisdom to the learned. This gives diversion to kings, firmness to the mind of persons who are afflicted with sorrow, and wealth to those who are earning it, and brings composure to persons agitated in mind. The dramas as I have devised, is mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions and which depicts different situations. This will relate to actions of men good, bad and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all" (Ghosh XLVII).

This quote not only sums up the varied profits a spectator shall reap from an Indian dramatic performance but in a way also demonstrates the many-sidedness of an "ideal" drama. *Natyasastra* formulated its definition of an "ideal" drama in relation to its theory of "successful" drama. Dramatic Success, according to Bharata were of two types. One that is *daiviki* or divine and the other *manusi* or human. The former is attained when a person possessed of culture and education relate to the performance and are impacted for better. The latter is rather a human success related to its superficial aspects and came from ordinary spectators who were ordinary human beings. During medieval times the appreciation of the latter was considered as appreciation *par excellence* and was seen to have often superimposed the opinions of learned critics.

Bharata's inclination to spectators (*manusi*) was very evident with his theory of *rasa* which was purely a game of psychology. Sentiments of spectators were targeted through the utilization of four specific *vrtti*-s or styles which can aid in satisfying the spectators and thereby turn the performance a successful one. Verbal or *bharati vrtti* is the one where the theatrical presentation is characterized by preponderating use of speech. Here we find exclusive utilization of male characters and evocation of pathetic and marvelous sentiments or *rasa*. *Sattvati* or Grand Style depends on various speeches and gestures and a grand display of strength. It is believed to be responsible for the creation of heroic and furious sentiments amidst its spectators. Energetic or *arabhati vrtti* includes presentation of a bold person speaking many

words, practicing deception, falsehood and bragging and doing deeds of magic. This leads to the creation of terrible and odious sentiments. *Kaisiki vr̥tti* or graceful style involves female characters wearing charming costumes who dance and sing to develop love and enjoyment. This produces erotic or comic sentiments in the psychology of the spectators. Rasa theory is believed to be an exclusive answer to the question, An audience must be such as could appreciate the artistic point of a dramatic show. What is meant by such an appreciation? (Adya 68)Chapter VI (*Rasa Theory*) and Chapter VII (*Bhava*) of Natyasastra can be regarded as an ultimate celebration of the dominant role played by the spectators in an Indian dramatic performance.

Hence, to conclude we can state that Bharatmuni's *Natyasastra* through its nature and construction of plot, *abhinaya* of the actors, its varied styles and *vr̥tti*-s, rasa and bhava theory and implementation of various aids to supplement the presentation on stage (costumes, makeup, ornaments, and props) acknowledges and worships the presence of *preksaka* or spectators. Indian *nataka* or drama, therefore, is influenced by the presence of *preksaka* and influences them as well.

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