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The Indian Theory of Drama

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The Indian Theory of Drama

Siddhartha Singh

Abstract- The source of the Indian theory of drama is the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of the sage Bharata, an encyclopedic treatise on all the aspects of dramaturgy. Bharata the instaurator and codifier of the Indian tradition of drama postulates theories of drama, music, dance, and poetry, construction of stage, the concept of *rasa* and the mimetic role of drama, etc. While neither Aristotle nor Plato applies to any form of Western dance style, in India, everyone goes back to *Nāṭyaśāstra* to find the source of various styles of Indian classical and regional dances and music. Metaphysically, the Indian theory of drama is based on Karma unlike the Greek theory of drama based on fate.

At the outset, the present paper shall explore and discuss the origin of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and will analyze some of its most significant aspects.[1]

Keywords: kāvya; nātyaśāstra; veda; brahma; bharata; aristotle; asuarās; deva; rūpaka; rasa; bhāvanukirtanm; lokdharmī; natyadharmī; artaud; brecht; sahridya; neta (character); abhinaya; saussure; schechner; howard gardener; śāstra (theory) and prayoga (praxis); vastu (plot); daśa rūpaka (ten types of drama); dance; karma; avasthas (stages); sandhis.

I.

The term *Kāvya*, literarily 'poetry', stands as in Aristotle, for entire imaginative literature, whether in prose or verse. *Kāvya* is, in Indian literary tradition, divided into two categories: *Drisya Kāvya* (visible poetry-poetry that is seen with eyes or performed) and *Śrvya Kāvya* (literally audible poetry-poetry that is to be heard with ears). This is off course a simplistic division, for *Driśya Kāvya* is both seen and heard. They are intended to refer to *Nātya* and narrative and stanzaic poetry respectively. *Nātya* has been considered the supreme form of *Kāvya*. The significance of *Nātya* is often highlighted as the most charming genre. (*"Kāvyeşu Nāṭkam ramyaṁ").* Of all poetry, drama is the most delightful).

Both forms of *Kāvya* have their separate *Śāstras* (scientific treatises) for their understanding and evaluation. The former, called *Nātya-śāstra*, is the oldest discipline, beginning with Bharata's *Nātya-śāstra* (500 B.C.), and including such works as *Bhāva Prakāshanam* of Shardatanya, *Nātak Lakshan Ratna Kosha* of Sagaranandin, *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* of Ramchandra Gunachandra, *Pratāparudrīya* of Vidyanatha, *Sangitaratnākar* of Śārṅgadeva, *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Viśvanātha, *Agnipurāna, Vishnudharmottara Purān*, etc. This tradition is further enriched by the commentaries on Bharata's *Nātya-śāstra* by Śankuka, Bhattalolaka, Bhattanayaka, and Abhinavgupta. The discipline related to narrative poetry is called *Alankār-śāstra*. It started much later in the 7th century A. D., with Bhāmaha's *Kāvyălamkāra* and Daṇḍin *Kāvyādarśa* and continued till Pandit Raj Jagnnath's *Rasagaṅgādharaḥ* in the 17th century.

II.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata is probably one of the earliest and certainly one of the best and most comprehensive unique encyclopedic compendiums on Indian Dramaturgy. A highly codified system drawn from earlier traditions of dramaturgy, interlinking text, and gestural language, the sole authority on Indian Dramaturgy, was described as the fifth Veda. "*Nātya* was created by Brahma" for the people "goaded by greed and avarice, and jealously and anger, [who] took to uncivilized (vulgar) way of life," with an aim to "not only teach" them "but be pleasing to eyes and ear" (Rangacharya 1996 1). Thus *Nātya*, created by Brahma, was to be accessible to all the varnas, including Śūdra, who were prohibited from listening to (learning from) the Vedas. Like all creations, the creation of *Nātya* is a fittingly tribute to divine ingenuity. The creator of the world and the supreme creator of everything, Brahma created drama also, on the exceptional requisition of the gods. He took words from *Ṛgveda*, music from *Sāmveda*, movements and make-up from *Yajurveda,* and emotional acting from *Ātharvaveda* to create an additional Veda (which consists of around 6000 verses structured into 36 chapters).[1] In addition to music and dance, the subjects dealt with are semantics, morphology, the various dialects, and their phonology, play-writing, play-construction, production, rehearsal, acting, dramatic criticism, drama-audience, producer, and many allied crafts. (Rangacharya 1966 2)

When Brahma asked Indra to compose plays, he modestly refused because that neither gods were competent enough nor was it proper for them to act in plays. The responsibility should be carried by the learned sages, and hence Brahma chose sage Bharat and his hundred sons to learn the dramatic art and to prepare the first performance. Assisted by Svāti (employed to play musical instruments), Nārada

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[1] I am grateful to Professor M. S.Kushwaha (Former Head, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow) and Professor Radhavallabh Tripathi (Former Professor of Sanskrit, Sagar University & Former Vice Chancellor, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi) for their suggestions and critical reading of this article.

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(engaged in singing songs) and newly created Apsaras by Brahma, the occasion of the celebration of the Banner Festival[2] (which consists of the victory of Indra on Daitya and Dānvas) was chosen for the first show. This first performance was foiled by the *Asuras* because the story showed the defeat of *Asuras* by the gods. Uninvited Daitya and Dānvas instigated the *Vighnas* (malevolent spirits) with Virūpākṣa as their leader, who said, "Come forward, we shall not tolerate this dramatic performance" (Ghosh 1951 10). Though they were routed, still the play could not be performed— the Daitya and Dānvas decided to repeat the obstruction. To protect the performance Vishwakarma constructed a theatre structure but the conflict was resolved only when Brahma called a meeting of both the parties and explained the characteristics of drama. Assuring them that drama was not propaganda and no one should feel hurt because, Brahma said, "The drama will thus be instructive to all, through actions and states depicted in it, and through sentiments, arising out of it." (Ghosh 15) The Great Grand Father further explained that drama is not meant to represent one individual exclusively. "It will [also] give relief to unlucky persons who are afflicted with sorrow and grief or [over] work, and will be conducive to the observance of duty as well as fame, long life, intellect, and general good, and will educate people. There is no wise maxim, no learning, no art or craft, no device, no action that is not found in drama." (Ghosh 15) Thus Brahma pacified Daitya and Dānvas: "You should not have any anger towards the gods; for a mimicry of the world with seven Divisions (*sapta dvīpa*) has been made a rule of, in the drama." (Ghosh 16)

This traditional legend of the origin of drama and theatre gives us a wealth of practical information. Yet at the very outset, the purpose of the fifth Veda, a discourse of knowledge, is the promotion of the commonly accepted ends of life; "a knowledge text as it mediates between philosophy and ordinary people who need the ideas of philosophy but cannot access them" (Kapoor 13). Unlike the four Vedas, it is not confined to the realm of wisdom alone; it provides entertainment too. Further, its form and structure are bound to be sacred as it is composed out of sanctified materials. Finally, it is to be performed by specialists, who belong to upper-class people, trained in various arts, especially of theatre (drama, music, recitation, and rituals). As it claims to take all the knowledge to be its province, it is also an encyclopedia of the language of gestures, steps, poses, movements of all the Indian classical dances. Entertainment is given priority as the aim of drama is to attract ordinary people. Just as Panini standardized the classical form of Sanskrit, so Bharata standardized classical form of Drama.

There is no indication of the existence of fully established theatrical tradition and its theory prior to Bharata, however there were stage-shows, called *rūpaka* and Bharata acknowledges hundreds of them. Most of these dealt with *śringara* or low humor. (Rangacharya 1966 6) In Indus valley civilization there are hints of the existence of dance, which might be part of rituals and festivals of the people of that civilization. There had been a long tradition of *Nat-Sūtrās* (dialogues) from ancient times and the earliest evidence is *Shailalak* in Ṛgveda. (Mishra 41) In Ṛgveda we find several forms of dialogues (*Samvādsūkt*), for example the dialogue of Pururava and Urvashi, Vishvamitra and Nadi, Yam and Yami etc. and rituals[3], but they do not appear to have developed into theatre. The earliest hint of a dramatic performance can be ascribed to Lava and Kuśa (hence called *Kuśilavah*, means actors) who performed the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* in the court of Rama. A further hint of the development of the *Nātya* tradition can be traced in *Mahabharata* where the words *Nat*[4] and *Shaileshu* for actors are used. From the earliest Sanskrit dramas of Śudraka, Bhāsa, Aśvaghosa follow most of the dictates of the *Nātyaśāstra*. Early Buddhist literature provides the earliest evidence for the existence of Indian theatre. My submission is that before *Nātyaśāstra* we don't find an accepted Indian theory of Drama which is fully established. Sharadatanaya in his *Bhav Prakash* mentions the old Bharata who composed *Nātyavedāġam* (which had twelve thousand shlokas). Later Bharata abbreviated it in six thousand shlokas and composed the *Nātyaśāstra*. It is worth mentioning here that Bharata was not a single person. Most probably the *Natas*, who were dancers and actors, started telling themselves Bharata and thus they established the tradition of Bharatas. We cannot be sure how many experts, in how many centuries, of the Bharata tradition would have composed the *Nātyaśāstra*? That is why *Nātyaśāstra* is also known as *Bharata-śāstra*.

a) Subject Matter and Style of representation

Nātyaśāstra proposes that *Nātya* is a representation of not any particular individual but of the entire three worlds, whether of gods or asuras, and their ways. No motive should be attributed to the dramatist because he intends to give good advice through entertainment (I.107). With a clear perception of theatre-world relationships, *Nātyaśāstra* emphasizes pleasure as the primary aim of drama. What is to be noted here is that the subject of representation is not action but the recreation of *bhāva* or emotional states (*Bhāvanukirtanm*) because actions are individual, emotions are universal, and the emphasis is to represent every universal *bhāva* of human life. Brahma says that "*Nātya* is the representation (*anukarana*) of the ways of the world involving these various emotions and differing circumstances" (Rangacharya 1996 4). This theory of mimesis receives its authority from Aristotle as well. Bharat enumerates two modes of representation: *Lokadharmī* and *Nātyadharmī*, variously translated as realistic and stylized or dramatic, mimetic and conventional, worldly and theatrical modes. Under

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chapter XIV entitled "Regional Styles and Nature of Plays," Bharat describes

> *Lokadharmī*: A play in which men and women, in their own nature, without any change (*avikṛta*), without any gestures, behave naturally is *Lokadharmī*.
>
> *Nātyadharmī*: A play in which speech is artificial and exaggerated, actions unusually emotional, gestures graceful, is Nātyadharmī, (dramatic). That also is *Nātyadharmī* in which voice and costumes are not from common use.
>
> When a well-known theme is dramatized, investing characters with emotions, it becomes *Nātyadharmī*.
>
> When characters are side by side and the speech of one is supposed not to be heard by the other, it is Nātyadharmī. ….
>
> A drama must always be produced as *Nātyadharmī,* because without bodily gestures, there can be no drama. (Rangacharya 115)

Though Bharata describes different dramatic modes here, he asserts that only in the *Nātyadharmī* mode of representation, the subject matter of a drama can be well presented.

To represent the universal *bhāvas* (subject matter) of human life, well-known stories are to be chosen. Here Puranas play a vital role in the selection of stories that are to be recreated on the stage. These stories are fitting subject matters to serve the purpose of *Nātya. Nātyaśāstra* informs that the first performance, presented by Bharata, celebrates the event (*Devasur Sangram*) in which Indra, with the help of a host of gods, had destroyed asuras and danvas. The exploits of the hero are restricted to his success, whether in love or war, and this success is represented in *Nātyadharmī* style to make an everlasting impact on the spectator[5]. A story of defeat, or being captured by the enemy or the flight of the hero cannot be the subject matter of a drama.

Nātyaśastra is a compendium of an integrated art of music, dance, action, and poetry where all information on the various arts is brought together. It is the boast of the book (and it is often repeated) that there is no knowledge, no craft, no love, no art, no technique, and no activity that one does not find in *Nātyaśāstra*. Here it would be appropriate to make a slight comparison between the western concept of drama and the *Nātyaśāstra.* Artaud who has grasped the main feature of *Nātyaśāstra,* eulogies the Eastern theatre in his *The Theatre and its Double*:

> Our theatre has never grasped this gestured metaphysics nor known how to make use of music for so direct, so concrete, dramatic purposes. Our purely verbal theatre, unaware of the sum total of theatre, that is, of everything that exists spatially, that is measured and circumscribed in space, having spatial density — I mean: movements, forms, colours, vibrations, postures, shouts —, that theatre of ours could learn a lesson in spirituality from the Balinese theatre with regard to what is indeterminable and depends on the mind's suggestive power. (Bansat-Boudon 56)

Artaud conceives theatre in its totality which any Western theory fails, and he openly condemns Western theories which more or less remains theories of either tragedies or of comedies. Even Brecht "in his search for artistic impulse, which bridged centuries and continents, did not fail to notice the attractions of Indian Classical drama." (Lutze 101)

b) Characters

Since the emphasis is on the universal, therefore characters are types rather than individuals. There may be differences in shades only. The *śāstras* have often conceived them in terms of the binary opposition of noble (*Divya*) or ignoble (*Adivya*). There is another type where they are not necessarily noble or ignoble but a mixture of both (*Divyādivya*). *Nātyaśāstra* (XXXIV 1-5) defines three varieties of male and female characters. They are *Uttama* (superior), *Adhama* (inferior) and *Madhyam* (middling). Heroes (superior characters) are classified primarily by their character and temperament as four types (another classification is based on one or more wives): Gods are taken as *Dhiroddhata* (firm and brave), Kings as *Dhiralalita* (firm and sportive), chiefs of army and ministers as *Dhirodatta* (firm and noble), and Brahmins and merchants as *Dhiraprasanta* (firm and calm). (XXXIV 16-18) 'Firmness' is the most important factor in the character of all these heroes, and by these standards an infirm character like Hamlet or King Lear can never be a hero in Indian Drama. Corresponding to these are four types of jesters: Sannyasins, Brahmins, other twice-born castes, and disciples.

There are also four types of heroines based on their characteristics: They are *Dhira* (steady), *Lalita* (charming), *Udātta* (noble), and *Nibhrata* (quiet), but the actual types are "celestial women, queens, high born women, and courtesans. Celestial women and queens will have all the four characteristics. But a woman born in a good family (or high family) has only two, viz., nobility and quietness, while a courtesan, being an artist, has nobility, light-heartedness, charm, and expertise in dance, music, and other arts. Sage Bharata describes various roles and types of character; at the same time he also speaks how to choose the right actor for a role. (XXXIV 24-29)

These qualities or characteristics are called *sattva* or *Sāttvika* quality of characters who pass through spiritual suffering during the Drama. Intension is to bring wisdom of Vedas to be passed to the audience through the elevation of characters. The emphasis is on spiritual evolution (*Sādhnaparak*) where characters are moulded and they emerge as mature and polite or *Sahridya*. The ego of the character, even highest in status, is to be dissolved to become a *Sahridya*.

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(*Abhijnana Śakuntalam* is a sublime example of the Indian theory of Drama).

c) Abhinaya

Here drama is conceived only that one can represent on stage; it is not simply which is found in the text: that simply a written text is called script. Along with text, *Nātya* includes so many other things, especially drama, dance, music, both vocal and instrumental, and *Abhinaya* (derived from the root *nī means* to take or carry +*abhi* means towards= to carry performance towards spectators). It is not simply 'acting,' but other things that go to make up the medium of expression. Bharata provides the most sophisticated and detailed description of abhinaya which consists of The Gestures of The Head (chapter VIII), The Gestures of the Hands (chapter IX), The Gestures of other Limbs (chapter X), The Cāri Movements (of the limbs like feet, shanks, thighs and lips) (chapter XI), The Maṇḍala Movements for the discharge of weapons (chapter XII), The Different Gaits (chapter XIII), Generic Representation (chapter XXIV), The Arts of Courtesans (chapter XXV), and The Special Representation or *Cītrābhīnaya* (chapter XXVI). These description are mind blowing and unmatched in its style and subtleties. The limited scope of this paper does not allow me to go into details. I would like to acquaint the readers with a general idea of abhinaya.

Here *Abhinaya* means transferor of meaning, and its multi-channeled world has taken over whether in language theories (Saussure onwards), performance studies (Schechner onwards), and recently even in psychology and education (Howard Gardener). (Gupta X)

Abhinaya with all its sub-varieties of physical gestures is of four kinds (see chapter VIII),: the first is *Āṅgika* or physical abhinaya (Expression of the limbs); the second is *Vācika* or verbal abhinaya (Expression of speech); the third is *Āhārya* or non-verbal abhinaya (Costume, make-up, and scene); and the fourth is *Sāttvika* or emotional abhinaya (True expression), which is a manipulation of *Bhāva*. These four types of countenances lead spectators towards experiencing *rasa.*

Āṅgika and *Vācika* need some elaborations here. *Āṅgika* or "bodily acting" should be seen under three heads: (1) physical gesture (six main limbs-hands, chest, sides or hips, waist, and feet), (2) facial expression (conveyed by eyes, eyebrows, nose, lips, cheeks, and chin) and (3) posture or movements *Cesta* there are thirteen kinds of movements, each conveying a meaning). The *Āṅgikabhinaya* chapters have to be understood as body-language in contemporary language and not merely as gesticulation, poses, and postures, as has often been done. (Vatsyayan 59)

The next *Vācika* concerns more with voice-control (as in Body acting, body control is more important) than speaking or language. The author of *Nātyaśāstra* says that in drama, speech-language is of four varieties by the social standing of the character on the one hand and the part of the country to which he belongs. Thus there is *atibhasa* (grandiloquent language), *Aryabhasa* (the refined speech of kings and aristocracy), *Jatibhasa* (mother tongue of ordinary folk), and the *Mlechabhasa* (the corrupt language of foreigners and low born). (Rangacharya 1996 31)

As for as actors are concerned, along with intelligence, strength, and physical beauty, they are supposed to have considerable knowledge of everything required on the stage. The physical strength in the actor is a universally accepted concept, be it theatre or in movies. In Artaud's imagination, as might indicate, for example his notion of the actor is as an "affective athlete," the basis of whose performance is breath control. (Lyne Bansat-Boudon 56) Instructed by gods and sages, the actors should possess knowledge of time and tempo, appreciation of sentiments and emotions, experts in rituals, flawless recitation, a retentive memory, knowledge of music, dance and other arts, etc., for they are to be judged by critics for the merits and demerits of their works. They should also avoid the following faults: Unnaturalness in acting, incorrect movement, unsuitability for a role, forgetfulness, improper use of gestures, defect in costume and ornaments, defect in the rhythm of execution, improper projection, and excessive laughter or weeping.

The strength of their actions lies in their equal emphasis on theory and praxis, which is a general principle of the *Nātyaśāstra*. Kapila Vatsyayan points out this aspect: "*Nātya-śāstra* does not consider *śāstra* and *prayoga* (theory and praxis) as antonyms or in opposition. Instead Bharata asserts at the very outset that he is writing a *prayoga śāstra"* (41-42).

d) Types of Drama

Indian dramaturgy does not recognize any classification based on the end of the drama, and there is no such thing as a happy or a sad ending. A drama, therefore, in Indian tradition does not convey any conflict. The western theory of drama, derived and conditioned by Aristotle, is essentially the theory of tragedy. M. S. Kushwaha draws our attention to the fundamental difference between the Western and Indian theories of drama that while the Greek concept of tragedy is based on the tragic sense of life, "Such conception of drama… is alien to Bharat's view, which is based on the Indian theory of *karma*". This fundamental difference "determines their respective approaches to drama." (9) The western classification of drama as tragedy and comedy, based on a dialectical view of nature, is inconceivable in the holistic pattern of Indian thinking. Kushwaha further illuminates:

> Though Bharata, too, speaks of ten kinds of plays, his classification is totally of a different order. It is based purely

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on the differences in the styles (*vṛiti*) of composition and has nothing to do with naturalistic considerations. The drama, as Bharata takes it, represents human nature "with its joy and sorrows (1.121)". Both tears and laughter play an integral part in his conception of drama. If it resembles anything in Western dramatic literature, it is tragicomedy like Shakespeare's *As You Like It* or *The Merchant of Venice*. (10)

In this context Indian concept of drama, unlike the Greek concept, discards the fictional unity of action, time and space. It is the unity of impression which has to be carefully calculated before it is produced. (Ghosh xlv). The emphasis is not to present too many incidents. Drama is the imitation of a situation (*avasthanukriti natyam*), and it is called a show (*rūpa*) because it is seen (*rūpam drsyatayocyte*). To standardize the existing primitive forms of drama (which was not considered literature in this sense), Bharata evolved new forms. Bharat speaks about ten kinds (daśa *rūpaka*) of plays in chapter XX. These *daśa-rūpakas* are major forms of drama; there are some minor forms of drama which are called *up-rūpakas*. These *daśa-rūpakas* are traditionally associated with certain modes of representation or style of representations or *vṛttis*. Bharata recognizes four *vṛttis*; (a) *bharati*, i.e. verbal-duel, (b) *sāttvati*, i.e. grand and noble deportment, (c) *kaisiki,* i.e. graceful and lyrical, and (d) *ārabhatī*, i. e. strong and energetic. The *Vṛttis* are the ways of rendering a scene; or, the acting styles and the use of language, diction that different characters adopt in a play, depending upon the nature or the Bhāva that relates to the character. (Sreenivasarao)

The root cause of ten types of drama lies in the *Vastu* (plot), *Neta* (character) and *Rasa* (वास्तु, नेता रसस्तेषां भेदक:). Rasa is the foremost component, and the manifestation of Rasa is the main criterion of poet's success. Following are the names of ten types of plays, their names, (1) the Nataka, (2) the Prakarana, (3) the Anka, (4) the Vyayoga, (5) the Bhana, (6) Samavakra, (7) the Veethee, (8) the Prahasan, (9) the Dima and (10) The Ihamriga. Dhanik-Dhananjay in their treatise *Daśrūpaka* explains that these forms are based on the ten Rasa (sentiments). The following table is quite useful to understand these forms and their characteristics (serialization and some of the appropriate examples, here, are based on Radhavallabh Tripathi's lecture on YouTube):

Sr. no.	Form of Drama	Number of Acts/ characters	Protagonist	Prominent Rasa	Associated vṛttis	Nature of story and scenes	Examples
1.	The Nataka (regarded as the best, most important and complete form of *Rupa*)	Five to ten/ Not more than five or six characters should have useful roles.	Royal sage, noble hero or *Dhīroddhātta and Dhīralalita*/ Great heroines of celestial natures	Śṛṅgāra (love) or *vira* (heroic) (All rasa may be present.)	Presents all four vṛttis for depicting different types of diverse situations. (*Kaiśiki* and *Sāttvati* are more suitable)	Well-known story in idealized form with supernatural and noble sentiments; fierce scenes or scenes bordering on vulgarity are prohibited.	*Abhijñānaśākuntalam Uttararāmacarita*
2.	The Prakarana	Same as above	Brahmin or a minister or a merchant or a soldier (*Dhiraprasanta*)or even a social parasite (*Vita*)/ A courtesan could also be the heroine	Śṛṅgāra (love) (All rasa may be present.)	Same as above	Fictitious story, invented by the poet; realistic, deals with the affairs of the social classes coming from a mixed milieu,	*Mṛcchakaṭikā*
3.	The Samavakra	Three acts/ twelve heroes	Exalted Gods and asuras *Dhīroddhātta* and *Dhīrodātta*	*Vira* and raudra (Śṛṅgāra can also be there)	*Ārabhatī* and *Sāttvati*	Well-known story; triple structure/ action oriented; three Aṅkas, three Kapatas (deception), three Vidravas (flights), three Śṛṅgāras (dharmaśṛṅgāra or righteous love, Arthaśṛṅgāra or love with financial motivation, and kāmaśṛṅgāra or	*Amrit-Manthan*

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						love with sensual desires).	
4.	The Ḍima	Four acts/ sixteen heroes	Gods and asuras *Dhīroddhātta* and *Dhīrodātta*	six rasa-s (i.e. except śṛṅgāra and Hāsya)	*Sāttvati* and *Ārabhatī*	Well-known action oriented story of fight and agitation, more ferocious than the Samavakra	*Tripura Dahana*
5.	The Īhāmṛga	One act	Man/damsels	Any rasa except *hāsya* (mirth, laughter) and śṛṅgāra	*Sāttvati* and *Ārabhatī*	Mixed story of gods and men; action oriented, agitation, flight, encounter, kidnapping and ravaging of women, fights on account of celestial damsels (the hero relentlessly pursues a woman who is as elusive as a swiftly flying gazelle (mṛga); and, it is very difficult to get her.)	*Rukmaaniharan by* Vatsaraj
6.	The Vyayoga	One act, a sort of an extension of the Ḍimaḥ	*Dhīroddhātta* and *Dhīrodātta*: A well-known divine being or a royal sage with limited numbers of women characters	Any rasa except *hāsya* (mirth, laughter) and śṛṅgāra	*Sāttvati* and *Ārabhatī*	Well-known story, coincident, Incidents of fight, wrestling, altercation, pushing, pulling, etc.	*The Victory of Paraśurama*; *Madhyam Vyayoga* by Bhasa (Story of Ghatotkach)
7.	The Anka: (Also called Utsṛṣṛikāṅka)	One act	Noble hero/ *Dhīralalita*, Ordinary man, but no divine character/ women characters	Karūnā (compassion).	*Bharati*	well known or not known story; characters turning back from fierce fight, tragic, wailing of women	*Urubhanga* by Bhasa
8.	The Prahasan (Farce) Two types, pure (*Śuddha*) and mixed (*Saṅkīrṇ*)	A burlesque, one or two-Act-skit	*Śuddha* Prahasan/ low character:: *Saṅkīrṇ* Prahasan/ courtesans, menial servants, eunuchs, rogues and gallants	*Hāsya*	*Bharati*	In Śuddha Prahasan satire on gurus, ascetics, Buddhist monks, learned Brahmins, etc. by ridiculing (atīhāsa) them. In saṅkīrṇ Prahasan distorted characters appear in immodest dress and make openly (obscene) gestures.	*Bhagavadajjukam* of Bodhayana (6th - 7th century AD) and *Mattavilasa Prahasana* by Pallava King Mahendravarman I (571– 630 CE)
9.	The Bhana	One act monologue narrated by a single actor	A rogue, a parasite or Vita, not a hero but fills the stage	śṛṅgāra or *vira*	*Bharati* and *Kaiśiki*	A satirical performance put on by a single actor, talking to himself, making	*Ubhaya-abhisarika* of Vararuchi; *Padma-rabhrthaka* of Sudraka; *Dhurta-Vita-*

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						conversation with the imaginary persons, imitating the other characters and chastening the high-class by lampooning their licentious ways. (Sreenivasarao)	*samvada* of Isvaradatta; and *Pada-taditaka* of Syamalika.
10.	The Vīthī, (among the earliest forms of Sanskrit Drama)	One act	Noble (*Dhīralalita*), middle or low type of male hero/chaste woman (kulapālikā), a common woman (sāmānyā) or of the other type (parakīyā)	Endowed with all the Rasas (*Sarva-rasa-lakṣaṇāaḍhy ā yuktā*), but śṛṅgāra is the main rasa.	*Bharati*, Dhananjaya classified it under *Kaiśiki* Vrtti (Sreenivasarao)	Story built by the dramatist or the episodes culled out of mythologies and popular tales were narrated by use of clever and inventive witty dialogues, might have originated from the ancient Samvada -Suktas of the Rig-veda.	*Līlāvatī Vīthī* of Rāmapāṇivāda

(NS XX 10-113)

The Samavakar, the Ḍima, the Īhāmṛga, and the Vyayoga were the four oldest kinds of *rūpaka.* They bear out the assumption of a long pre-literary development and belonged to the energetic type, battle genre and were pantomimes. Bharata makes it clear that plays of the Vīthī, the Samavakra, the Īhāmṛga, the Anka, the Vyayoga, the Bhana, the Prahasan, and the Ḍima classes should be made devoid of the Graceful style. (XX 8-9). V. Raghwan opines that these eight classes are minor specimens, the imperfect ones while the other two, Nātaka and Prahasan are major forms and the perfect ones. Raghwan's observation is worth citing here:

> From another point of view these ten kinds fall into two classes, the heroic and the social. Now two of the ten varieties are major specimens--the nataka in which the heroic trend reaches its perfection, and the *prakarana* in which the social trend attains its full scope of development. Among the lesser varieties under the heroic are the *samavakara*, *dimā*, *vyāyoga*, *anka* and *ihamriga*; and under the social type are the *prahasana*, *bhana* and *vithi*. The heroic category portrays actions of gods or epic heroes, their fights and the consequences thereof, types which probably still survive in Java and Bali in the dramatic *baris*. The social type depicts the life and love affairs of common men. The former presents before us the example of supermen, while the latter holds up the mirror to the world. (17)

e) Dance

Dance is a very important element in all these types of dramas. Bharata has explained the subtle movements as well as nuances of both classical and regional dance forms. In the tradition of *Nātyaśāstra,* the regional forms of dance and drama are classified as nṛttaprabadhas, nṛtyas, deśirūpaka, geyarūpaka, anyarūpaka, saṁkrinarūpaka and uparūpaka. It is important to remember that Bharata dexterously transformed and incorporated *nṛtta* (dance) — an ancient well-schematized formal non-representational art— into the larger scheme of *Nātya* (Chapter IV). Described and explained by God Shiva's disciple Tandu (hence called *tāndava*), the long manual of dance, which was initially incorporated into *nātya* as part of its prologue (*purvaranga*), *nṛtta* was later orchestrated into *nātya* through *abhinaya*. By enriching the "language of gestures," *nṛtta* adds another dimension to *anūkarana* based *abhinaya*. Rendered with the grace of dance, ordinary gestures (borrowed or reproduced from *Loka*) were heightened by incorporating many *nṛtta*-gestures impregnated with meanings. When absorbed with *abhinaya*, *nṛtta* not only acquires and produces meanings beyond itself, but it is also significantly re-contextualized to help to produce *rasa*. In Bharata's conception *anūkarana* is not a replica of the world. It aims at transforming the real world, through imagination, in a stylized form which he calls *nātyadharmi* (having traits peculiar to *nātya*).

f) Music

Similarly, Bharata (in Chapter XXXII, Unni's translation) transforms the spirit of *gāndharva*. This chapter on music (called *gāndharva*) lays down the foundation of the various forms of Indian classical music, which are still in practice. The classical form of *gāndharva* was based on *svara* (scales), *tāla* (musical meter), *sthāna* (base note or various registers—low, medium, high), *tāna* (note-sequence elaboration), *ālāp* (yodel) and syllables and *pada* was auxiliary to *svara* and *tāla*. This form of music, which tended to overpower the linguistic purport totally, was not appropriate for ordinary folks, because this musical form was not dominated by *pada* (lyric or the sung text) or linguistic

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purport to convey precise meanings; therefore the need was to recreate it into *gāna* or *Dhruva* —theatrical songs. Only then they could be able to express any sentiment or evoke *rasa* by making *svara* and *tāla* auxiliaries to *pada;* "they were there to lend the power of melody and rhythm to the sentiments expressed in the sung text." (Lath 8) Bharata's experiment in giving a theory of music is so perfect and eternal, that even today no one could add an eighth *svara*.

g) Plot of Nātya

In a very meticulous tone, Bharata gives a prescription of *Itivṛtta* or drama-building (plot construction), which is mainly based on the theory of *Karma* (*NS* XXI). Bharata enumerates two kinds of plot, viz, the one as *Ādhikārika*- the principal one and the other as *Prāsaṅgika*- the subsidiary one. He explains that which is conceived as resulting in fruition forms the principal one while the other is to be known as the subsidiary. (*NS* XXI 2-3) In any action that a man undertakes to achieve an object, Bharata explains, in bringing off the final results proceeds in regular order by five stages or *avasthas.* The five stages of the development of story are described as five *sandhis* (joining, combining) and each sandhi means the joining of an outward circumstances (*arth-prakriti*) with a voluntary action of the hero. The five *avasthās*, the corresponding five *arth-prakritis*, and the five *sandhis are* as follows:

Sr. No.	The five *avasthas* (stages)	The five *arth-prakritis* (elements of the plot)	The five *sandhis* (juncture)
1.	*Ārambha* (begining),	*Beeja* (seed; sown in limited measure)	*Mukha* or the original cause (opening one, joining *ārambha* and *beeja*)
2.	*Praytna* (Making effort)	*Bindu* (contributory incident; prolongs the plot)	*Pratimukha* or progression (raising hopes and combining *ytna* and *bindu*)
3.	*Praptayasa* or prapti-sambhav (meeting of obstacles and possibility of achievement)	*Pataka* (major sub-plot)	*Garbha* or development (raising doubt in which *praptayasa* and *patāka* joins)
4.	*Niyatapati* (removal of obstacle and certainty of achievement)	*Prakari* (minor sub-plot or stray incidents; forrms the part of the main plot)	*Vīmarśa* or pause (situation under control, here are joined *niyatapati* and *prakari*)
5.	*Phalagam* (final achievement or denouement)	*Kārya* (denouement; fruition of the effort is enunciated)	*Nīrvahaṇa* (conclusion *phalāgam* and *kārya* are combined)

(*NS* XXI 6-40)

Bharata talks about the organic development of drama which first sprouts, then grows, and finally, there is fruition. It is worth noting that he sets yardstick of linear time scale, and point, and line in general geometrical terms. Vatsyayan elaborates its further

> Bharata explores 'time' multidimensional through a tripartite module of the notions of *avastha*, *arth-prakriti,* and *sandhi*, employing consistently the metaphor of *bīja* (seed), *bindu* (point) and suggesting *Purusa* as an unspoken term of reference through the notion of *mukha, pratimuka, garbh* etc.
>
> In the first, ie. *avastha* (states), the movement is from the point of view of the hero, the chief protagonist. This is clear enough in the names of the five stages… This suggests a clear linear order of progression. (75-76)

Bharata prescribed coalescing of these five stages into a single unit, without violating their proper sequence, to bring forth the desired ultimate fruit. In some cases, as warranted by specific reasons, one or two junctures may be dropped. (*NS* XXI 17-18) Apart from these subtle enumerations, Bharata delves deeper to speak about the theoretical arrangement of these junctures and their further division into twenty one special junctures. No treaties in world offers such systematic and scientific elaboration of the plot construction of drama. Aristotle, who considers the plot as the most significant of six elements of drama, seems rudimentary if compared to Bharata's conceptions.

III.

Certain indispensable concepts and stylizations, borrowed directly or indirectly from *Nātyaśāstra,* are universally accepted in almost all the regional theatres in India. It has an everlasting influence of the theatrical tradition of many other Asian countries. Tripathy observes that "in India, various concepts-fundamental philosophy of art- have percolated so deeply through various forms of dance and drama that despite all geographical, social and anthropological differences, this single unique text of Bharatamuni has served the cause of sustenance of and synthesis between the diverse regional theatrical traditions of India." (5)

It is not so much the story of the hero or the heroine; Bharata affirms the fabrication of the story as a primal postulate. Bharata has made deliberate efforts to see that a drama and a dramatic performance must first be a work of art and then literature, our friend,

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philosopher and guide. It is the type of entertainment that would capture the people's hearts of different tastes, and the spectator must appreciate the artistic point of the dramatists show. Hence Bharata has also evolved a well-defined and well-categorized theory of Rasa (eight in numbers, *Śṛṅgāra*, *Hāsya*, *Karuṇa*, *Raudra*, *Vīra*, *Bhayānaka*, *Bībhatsa*, and *Adbhuta*) and makes it explicit that there is no Nātya without rasa. He explains that rasa is the cumulative result of vibhāva (stimulus), anubhāva (involuntary reaction), and Vyabhicārī bhāva (voluntary action) (Rangacharya 1996 55). The aim is to provide instruction through entertainment and the emphasis is on recreation of bhāvas (भावानुकीर्तनं). The theory includes various forms of the show, necessitates music with instructions for actors to perfect subtle nuances of acting with the minutest of details. Bharata also gives clear-cut directions to build the structure of theatre. Radhaballabh Tripathi makes a very significant comment that "Bharatamuni stands as a Vyāsa in the Indian theatrical universe and like Vyāsa his *Nātyaśāstra* has remained with us as a *Saṁhita* (compendium) with a systematic presentation of the conceptual framework as well as the theories of practices of theatre…" (2014 1)

Nātyaśastra is theatre oriented rather than text-oriented, and Bharata not only differentiates *Lokdharmī* and *Nātyadharmī* but also asserts that drama should be presented in the *Nātyadharmī* style. Bharata seems to be a step ahead of Aristotle by defining the subtle difference between two modes. The concept of Nātyadharmi anticipates subtle nuances of the present-day theatre. Narayanan makes a valuable observation

> Bharata's exposition on *Nātyadharmī* implies the fundamental principle that every object, action, and area of the stage—what more, the stage itself—is a sign. The theatrical communication works less through a world reproducing mimesis than through a process of differential semiosis, established through practice and convention. Inscribed in Bharata's postulation of the possibilities of *Nātyadharmī*, are such principles which, in the terminology of modern day theatre semiotics, may be phrased as the constitutiveness of all the sensory possibilities of performance, the arbitrary relationship between the theatrical signifiers and signifieds, the transferability of the signs, etc. (137)

The classical theory of drama remained a source of inspiration for later *ācāryas* for thousands of years. Western thought, the groundwork of which began with the rise of Renaissance and the *Poetics*, with other Greek and roman texts, was revived after thousands of years. The continuity of tradition which *Nātyaśāstra* enjoyed and was enriched is missing in the West. Bharata's treatise has received numerous commentaries and is still relevant. We may call it an integral multidisciplinary approach, an ocean, and assuredly a confluence (Vatsyayan 45). It was no accident that Artaud, the Absurdists, and several other dramatists abandoned the lexis-centered (word/dialogue centered) theatre and adopted the semiotic, gestured and music based Eastern models that relied upon none other than the tradition of *Nātyaśāstra*. (Gupt ix)The evident fact is that like today's cinema *Nātya* is a composite art in Indian tradition with principle of *Karma* at its center. Therefore we have a tradition of tragic-comedy and the idea of tragedy was never a part of the Indian Drama. But alas the English departments of Indian universities (except a few) do not include any aspect of *Nātyaśāstra* except the rasa theory and that too under Indian poetics. There are talks on decolonizing the syllabus, but when it comes to preparing it, nobody cares about any Indian *Śāstra,* forget about *Nātyaśāstra*

My humble submission here is that instead of exclusive and persistent devotion to the Western theories, we need to turn from Anglomania to *metanoia*. India's deep-rooted wisdom, a long intellectual and cultural tradition, is still capable of illuminating the world. As for as the Indian scenario is concerned, the western theories partially help us, while the most important western theories (since Eliot), like formalism, structuralism and deconstruction owe a great deal to the Indian intellectual tradition. As for as *Nātyaśāstra* is concerned, it is par excellence. I have exposed and analyzed some of the important aspects to let the readers be acquainted with the stature of the text. The Western insights and speculation can further enrich the text. Bharata Gupt rightly observes that *Nātyaśāstra* becomes a cardinal text for all kinds of communication skills and art forms and has to be revisited with deep regards for its value, more so by us in India to where it belongs but whose elite classes are overburdened with Euro-American paradigms. (x)

Notes:

1. The tradition believes that the text had 12000 verses, but only 6000 survived. In some versions there are 37 or 38 chapters. Most of the verses are in *Anushtup* metre (4x8, or exactly 32 syllables in every *Śloka*), some verses are in *Arya* metre, and some are in prose (especially chapter 6, 7, and 28).
2. Banner Festival: This festival occurred on the twelfth day of the bright half of the moon in the month of *Bhādra*. It was a very popular festival in India. (Ghosh 9)
3. The complex Vedic rituals and ceremonies with elaborate rites and symbolic gestures, and physical actions could have served as the foundation for the emergence of theatre.
4. In later history, the word *Nata* was used to describe dancers and pantomimists, as well as actors.
5. The importance of the play lies in its representation and critical appreciation, as the plays are to be essentially 'spectacle' (*prekśa*) or 'things' to be visualized; hence persons attending the performance of a play were referred to (XXVII. 48-57) as 'spectators' or 'Observers' (*prekṣaka*) and

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never audience (*śrotā*), however there was always the speech element in it, which was a thing to be heard.

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