

Natya as a Theatre of Self Fulfilment

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BACKGROUND OF ITS WORLDVIEW

After analysing the history of Western Drama from the point of view of self and self-fulfilment this chapter shall take up the issues of self and self-fulfilment with regard to the plays in Sanskrit literature.

Just as the Drama of the West plays in Sanskrit literature also have been thoroughly discussed from several different points view in the past literature. As already mentioned in the introduction, in the English literature on Sanskrit plays, these plays have been referred to as Indian writers in the regional languages and Sanskrit used words like 'drishya Kavya,' 'nataka,' and 'ropaka' while referring to these plays. The poetics of these Sanskrit plays cover even gravya Kavya-s (audible poems, i.e., poems meant to be read for the All these works of poetics trace the origin of their discussion to the Natya Sastra (2nd.cen B.C), the author of which is referred to as Bharata. The Natya refers to its subject matter, which, in the language of the later works of poetics is, drsya Kavya (visible poem), as Natya. Thus, it can be seen that it is more appropriate to consider all these Sanskrit plays as scripts for a kind of theatre being referred to as Natya in the Sastra, Interestingly, Bharata also talks of or imitation as the essential nature of Natya just as Aristotle recognizes mMTTicisrrias the essential nature of art (including Drama). For Bharata, Natya is 'lokavrttanukarnnam' (Natya iastna 1,112) - imitation of the way the World runs (loka = world; vrta - activity; anukaranam = imitation). Either based on similarities of this type, or simply on account of Natya being a theatre like Drama, scholars hastened to call Sanskrit theatre as 'Drama' (for example, Shastri, 1961 : 11, S K.Dey as quoted in Singal, 1977 : 44, Singal, 1977 : 32, Raghavan, 1975 : 103, and Raghavan, 1975 : 52) (also see 2.6.3) and consider Bharata's discussion as a discussion on Sanskrit Drama,' But very rarely scholars like Taflekar (1975) (who maintains the word 'Natya to some extent in his discussion on the have recognized the need to maintain the distinction of the word Natya. Strangely, even Tariekar slips into translating Natya as Drama in the course of his further What has missed the attention and emphasis in most of the past

English literature on the Natya Sastra is the bottom line : just as different forms of Western Drama are to be placed in the broader cultural framework of the respective times, Sanskrit plays and Bharata's discussion of classical Sanskrit theatre are to be placed in the cultural of which these works were products.

The forthcoming analysis shall show the essentiality of this view of placing the forms of theatre in their respective cultural backgrounds, by showing the problems arising due to the absence of such a view.

Bharata, in his Natya shastra , very clearly emphasizes that Natya follows the Vedic worldview in its imitation of nature. He called his subject ratter as Natya Veda (NatyaSastra I.16).² Abhinavagupta, who wrote a commentary called Abhinavabharati on the NatyaSastra (in Bharata, 1994 : 6) and other traditional authors Of poetiCS SUCH as Dhananjaya (DaSarGcakam I.4). Simhabhupala (Rasamava Sudhakara 147-46) among others and the Sanskrit poets such as Kalidasa, who write within the Vedic framework of ideas, accept the view put forth by Bharata that Natya is a Vedic art This can be further evidenced in the forthcoming discussion from time to time.

Recognizing such a basis of Vedic worldview in Natya helps arriving at an answer to problem of the most conspicuous differences between Drama and Natya, namely : all serious Drama is Tragedy, while mainstream Natya is a Shubhanta (happy ending) play; philosophies of different forms of Tragedy change from time to time, while the philosophy of Natya remains without changing.

One the probable reasons for the absence the analysis of Bharata's work from the point of view of Vedic principles in the past literature may be that he does not overtly use such principles in his elucidation of Natya. The Vedic principles in his elucidation are indicated by certain usages and explanations found in his book. When analyzed in the light of these principles propounded directly and elaborately in certain works of Vedic literature like the Bhagavat Gita (hereafter Gita) and Itihasa-S (legendary mythologies) like the Mahabharata, these usages and

explanations can be seen to be perfectly fitting into the Vedic worldview elaborated in these works. Even the authors of Sanskrit plays (scripts for were learned in Vedic literature and their works abundantly reflect such knowledge.

For example, in his introduction to *uttamRamaC&tiam* of Bhavabhuti, M.R.Kale writes, "Bhavabhuti had acquired thorough proficiency in the various branches of knowledge which then formed the usual curriculum of Brahmanic study. He gives proofs of his vast erudition in the course of his works. He had mastered the Vedic lokes, the six systems of philosophy, rhetorics, &c. &c. His knowledge of the Yoga philosophy he displays in *Mai. - Madh.* (Act V.) and in *Mv* (Act III.). That he was familiar with the literature of the Upanisads is shown by his references to the doctrine of Vivarta in more than one place in the *Uttar* {111.47; IV.15}, by his description for the *Vairaja Lotos* (11.12) and by his allusion to the *Asurya Lokas*(Act IV. p103)" (1982 : 16). (Wal *Madh* = *MSlati MSdhavn*, *Mv* = *Mahavira Caritam Uttar* = *Uttam Rama Caritam*).

While discussing Kalidasa also, Kale says, " His works bear further testimony to his considerable acquaintance with the Vedas, the philosophy taught by the Upanishads, the the Puranas, the systems of Yoga and as propounded by Medicine, and the rudiments of Astronomy" (in Kalidasa, 1969 : 11). Similar comments are often found made about the different authors of Sanskrit Thus, it can be seen that the sources of Vedic overview can safely be used to talk about the worldview underlying both the *Natya Sastra* and the Sanskrit plays. With this understanding the usages and explanations from the *Gita* and other sources will be cited from time to time in the forthcoming discussions.

THE STORY OF THE ORIGIN OF NATYASHASTRA AS A KEY TO ITS WORIDVIEW

One of the most important Vedic principles in *Natya* is the law of karma. Varadapande, a modern scholar, in his book *Religion and theatre.* recognizing the significance of the law of karma says,

'The law of Karma - Karma Siddhanta - has deeply influenced Indian playwrights. On more than one occasion Bharata clearly states that the karma of people is the basic theme of the drama [sic]. It narrates actions of men [namron karmasanshrayam], it depicts his various acts [karmani midhari cfta]. "I have created this sdcence of dramaturgy taking into consideration the karma of the people, their deeds and their emotions,' says Bharatha. It is no wonder that the entire course of Indian drama [sic] [Sanskrit] was governed by the law of The plots the dassical Indian plays are governed by the tenets all-pervading religio - philosophical theory " (1983 : 3).

Abhinavagupta summarizes the law Of karma depicted in *Natya as iubhakarimha subham phalam*,

: Those who perform actions get auspicious results, and those who perform inauspicious actions get inauspicious results' (in Bharata, 1994 : 33). According to him the auspicious actions are the actions based on moral order in tune with the laws of nature and inauspicious actions are the actions which are against the laws of nature. He reveals this idea as he elaborates the law of karma. He says, actions following dharma bring auspiciousness (subham) and hence happiness (sukham) and actions against dharma result in inauspiciousness (asubham) and hence unhappiness (duhkham) (in Bharata, 1994 : 33). The term dharma is commonly understood to be representing morality. But the broader, in fact, fundamental and etymological meaning of the word dharma is natural law or natural order. The *Mahabharata* (XII.109.11) gives the definition of *dharma* as *dharanat dharma itiahuhutdharmena vidhrtaha prajaha - dharma is Called by that name because it Sustains the individuals.* This means the natural order that sustains the selves who follow this Often, the word dharma in Vedic literature is interpreted as the duty ordained to human being in the *Veda-%* and the *smrti-s* (codes of conduct) in accordance with the *VSda-s*. But it should be noted that the idea, here, is that the are revelations of natural order. Hence, following the is to follow the order which sustains nature. Thus, the karma, according to Abhinavagupta, is that actions in consonance with the nature sustaining laws revealed in the breed happiness and those against such laws, unhappiness.

In fact, Abhinavagupta notes this principle while commenting upon a story in Bharata's *Natya &astra*. This story is one of the most crucial and key portions of the *Natya Sastrs* where the Vedic basis of the *Natya Sastrm* is clearly articulated. Not taking note of the true significance of this portion is one of the reasons for the non-recognition of the distinction of *Natya* as opposed to Drama, by the scholars mentioned above. Most of these scholars took this story to be merely a story of origin of *Natya* and considered the purpose of the story to be to attribute the Vedic sanctity through the means of a divine origin to *Natya*.

P.S.R. Appa Rao and P.Sri Rama Shastri, while recognizing this motive in the modern authors on *Natya Sastra*, say, " The divine nature of *Natya Sastra* has been interpreted by them as only a means of providing a respectable social status to actors, musicians and dancers since they were at one time relegated to a very low order of soaety" (1967 :14). But this story serves lot more serious purposes than such a simplistic one. This story, in fact, articulates in a narrative form, the nature and purpose of *Natya*, apart from many other crucial issues of *Natya*

going to be discussed in the forthcoming sections of this work (2.5, 2.6.1 & 2.8). This significance is recognized by the authors of poetics like Abhinava, who look at this story as meant to reveal the principle of karma incorporated in Natya.

THE STORY BRINGS OUT THE BASIS OF LAW OF ACTIONS OF NATYA.

According to the Hindu mythology time is cyclical and runs in the form of infinite cycles of cycles. Each cycle is divided into four *Yugas*, namely, *Krtayuga*, *Tretayuga*, *Dvaparayuga* and *Kaliyuga*. In the beginning, i.e., in *Krtayuga* there is perfect order, peace and happiness as all people of that era follow *dharma* (the laws of nature revealed in the *Veda-s*) perfectly. In each of the succeeding *yugas* people become increasingly immoral and do not follow their duty (*dharma*) as prescribed in the Hindu mythology holds that *dharma* stands on four legs (*pada-i*) in *Krta yuga*, on three legs in *Treta yuga*, on two legs in *Dvapara yuga* and on one leg in *Kali yuga* which is the present age. That is to say that the people's adherence to in each of the is hundred percent seventy five percent fifty percent and twenty five percent respectively (*pada* also means a quarter).

The story under discussion occurred during the *Treta yuga* when people acquired base emotions like lust, greed, jealousy and anger as they did not follow *dharma* (the moral order prescribed in the *Veda-s*). Due to this they lead a life which was a mixture of both 'happiness and unhappiness' (*sukhta dukhkte*) (*Natya Sastra* 1.9). (Abhinava, while commenting on this phrase, says that here the emphasis is on unhappiness). The rulers of the world headed by (whose duty is to look after the welfare of the world) were worried about this. They wanted a means by which people could be made to follow the *Veda-s*. So they went to *Brahma* (the mythical god from the *Puranas* who is believed to be in charge of the creation of the world. He is said to have revealed the four namely *veda*, *Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda* at the beginning of the creation) and requested for a fifth *Veda* (*Natya Sastra* 1.12),³ one which is *kridaniyakam*, playable, i.e., entertaining and which could both be seen (*driyam*) and also be heard (*sravyam*) (*Natya Sastra* 1.11). Upon the request of the *loka-patis* (rulers of the world), *Brahma* decided to create *Natya* (theatre - which is both 'seen' and heard")

Brahma created *Natya* by taking various elements from the *Veda-s*, such as speech (*pathya*) from the *Rik Veda*, song (*gita*) from *Sama Veda*, histrionic expression (*abhinaya*) from the *Yajur Veda* and *rasa-s* from the *Atharva Veda* (*Natya Sastra* 1.17). After creating the *Natya*, *Brahma* handed it to *Bharata* with a request to compose *Natya* on the basis of his teachings. *Bharata* composed

and produced a play called *Asura Parajaya* (the defeat of the demons) which depicts the defeat of the demons (*asura-s*) in the hands of the gods (*deva-s*). *Asura* became angry at this depiction of their defeat in the hands of *deva-s* in *Natya*. They tried to disrupt the performance with their magical power. When they were questioned by *Brahma* on the reason for their anger, they replied that they were angry because *Natya* was favouring the gods and was created to belittle them. In order to pacify the *asura-s*, *Brahma* revealed to them the nature and purpose of *Natya*. He said that it imitates the actions and emotions of all kinds of people. According to him, *Natya* portrays auspicious [*sattvika*] as well as the inauspicious [*asubham*] fate that befalls the gods and the demons' (*Natya Sastra* 1.106).

Commenting on this story *Abhinava* holds that *Natya* is not interested in depicting particular characters of particular times but depicts the general workings of nature. He insists that when the demons perform auspicious activities, their attainment of auspicious results will be shown in *Natya* (in *Bharata*, 1994 : 33-4). In other words, in *Natya*, the actions and not the actor that matter.

To show that *Bharata* meant that *Natya's* purpose is to depict the laws of nature, *Abhinava* cites as an evidence the word *itihasa* used by *Bharata* to describe *Natya* (*Natya Sastra* 1.15). The word *itihasa* means past happening = this way, /w + *asa* = said to have happened. But there is another sense in which the word *itihasa* is used. The (legendary mythologies) along with the *Puranas* (mythologies)⁵ are believed to be those which reveal the same laws of nature as revealed by the *Vedas*, but through narrative form. For example, the *Mahabharata* is called *Itihasa* and *Bhagavata Purana* and others are *Purana-s*. The *Mahabharata* shows that *Pandavas* who followed *dharma*, attained the kingdom and *Kauravas* who did not follow *dharma*, were ruined (see Appendix 4). The law of actions revealed in the *Vedas* is thus exemplified in the *itihasa* called *Mahabharata*. According to *Abhinava*, it is in this sense that *Bharata* calls *Natya* as an *itihasa* (in *Bharata*, 1994 : 12). Since the story of creation of *Natya* begins with the description of *Treta yuga* as, at least according to *Abhinava*, predominating in unhappiness due to not following *dharma* (moral order), it may be concluded that *Natya* is being considered to be giving happiness by motivating the individuals to follow *dharma*.

It may be noted that within the two parts of the law of karma, namely, the bad results' for bad actions' (actions which are not in compliance with the laws of nature¹) and 'good results' for good (nature - bound) actions,' the first one appears to be similar to the principle in Greek Tragedy that the self not complying with the rule of gods gets punished. But there is a difference. In Greek Tragedy, gods are directly mentioned, where as in *Natya*, it is the

laws (dharma) which are given prominence and the gods governing them do not directly come into picture. In spite of this similarity in the depiction of punishment for non-compliance between Natya and Greek Tragedy, Natya maintains its distinction on account of the depiction of rewards for compliance, which is conspicuously absent in the Greek Tragedy. This is what makes the mainstream Natya as seriously happy ending. This difference is rooted in the structures of principle characters in the Greek Tragedy and Natya. In the Greek Tragedy, the character who receives punishment for non-compliance is the principle character. Whereas, in Natya, both the complying and characters are principle characters. But the complying one is the protagonist and the other, antagonist. Such a structure makes the play to be a story the reward for compliance and thus a happy ending one, though it contains the punishment for the non-compliance also.

Fact, in maintaining that self is governed by certain laws determining the happiness and unhappiness of self, even the other forms of Drama are similar to Natya. But in Drama, a perennial probe into what these laws are, resulted in the depiction of newer and newer laws. Whereas in Natya, no such probe is evident on account of the ultimate laws of nature being considered to be once for all revealed in the Veda-%. As seen in the articulations of dramatists like Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller quoted earlier from the point of view of Drama, such a probe is thrilling and desirable.

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