UNIT 2 INDIAN DRAMA
(INCLUSIVE OF DANCE)

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

After getting the knowledge of Performing Arts let us now move forward and try to understand each of these three arts – drama, dance and music.

Let us start with drama. In India we call this art as naatya or naataka. But here arises a confusion. What you see on the stage, and which is very popular, is a version of drama which arose in our country after the influence of the western concept of drama brought in by the British. The presentation, the dialogue delivery and above all, the manner of enactment (acting) are all influenced by the western practices. This influence is seen to a very large extent in the costumes, make-up, even jewellery worn. Now, this is the urban or city based practice of drama. As soon as you move away from the cities and go towards the smaller towns and villages the scene changes. You see very different type of drama. Here you see a distinct flavour of India and Indianness. Some of the facets of the performance may look peculiar or even comic to the city bred people. The first thing that strikes you is that the stage and its arrangement are totally different. The stage is not the proscenium stage that we see in the sophisticated theatres of the cities. There are no wings, no sophisticated lighting or sound system. More often than not the performance takes place at some cross-roads, courtyards or temple precincts. The costumes are definitely stylised, the faces painted in bright colours. More often than not the dialogues are delivered in a manner that appears like shouting so very loud; the actors indulge in highly stylised movements and gestures of the body and every now and then either the actors or some troupe members break out into a song accompanied by local or regional instruments. Even if there is no actual song, the loud and shrill of music continues. Above all, almost all the actors dance. Another characteristic of these presentation is that female roles are
usually performed by men. Traditionally, these dramas have a preliminary *puja*

Now a question arises as to how is it that once you put aside the westernised city

To answer this question we will have to travel back to antiquity, almost 2500

It is in this era that the legendary sage *Bharata* compiled his *Natyashastra –

Objectives :

After studying this unit you should be able to :

- understand the relevance of the *Natyashastra*;
- understand the content of *naatya* as per the *Natyashastra*; and
- identify the different components of *naatya*.

2.2 NATYASHASTRA

In the Indian tradition drama is known as *naatya*. But neither the literary form in

We have no records of the early beginning of dramatic or theatrical activity in the

Our oldest and most authentic evidence of a scientifically arranged dramatic

2.3 CREATION OF NATYASHASTRA

Indian tradition venerates *Bharata* as the founder of the *science of dramaturgy*. He is supposed to have received this art from *Brahma*, the god of creation, and produced the first performance of *naatya* on the occasion of Indra’s Flag Festival.
Bharata’s naatya was created by taking some significant details from each of the four Vedas:

1) *Paathya* or recitative text from the *Rig veda*.
2) *Sangeeta* or song and melody from the *Saama veda*.
3) *Abhinaya* or acting from the *Yajur veda*.
4) *Rasa* or human sentiments from the *Atharva veda*.

Due to this very distinctive origin the Natyashastra is called the fifth veda – the *Naatya veda*. This also means that *paathya* (recitation), *geeta* (songs), *rasa* and *bhaava* (human sentiments and emotional states) and *abhinaya* (histrionic representation or acting) are the principal components of naatya).

According to the Indian school of thought, the aim of all art forms including the art of “Natya” is to create ‘Rasa’ (aesthetic pleasure).

### 2.4 AIM OF NATYASHASTRA AND INSTRUCTIONS IN IT

The aim of the Natyashastra in all encompassing approach is to create *Rasa* and this is achieved by giving detailed instructions to the various categories of personnel concerned and connected with the stage and the stage production. The instructions envelope chiefly:

1) The dramatist - In writing of his play, the language to be used by him, the metre to be employed, characteristics of different types of plays and the analysis of their structure.

2) The stage manager and director - Their qualifications, the ritual that they follow, their duties etc.

3) The actor and the actress - Their qualifications physical attributes, proficiency, characterization, casting.

4) The *pujaa* and preliminaries - The entire ritualistic aspect connected with the stage presentation according to Hindu thought.

5) The auditorium - Specifications, construction and the religious ceremony to be conducted for consecration.

6) The greenroom manager - Costume and make-up of the different characters.

7) The music - Musical accompaniment for a stage presentation which include the theory of music in general singing of songs, playing of various types of instruments, *taalas* etc.

8) The dance - The dance movements appropriate for men and women and their classification.
Apart from the instructional part, the Natyashastra gives the mythical account of the origin of the art and its descent on the earth. A detailed study of the Natyashastra throws considerable light on the cultural data, the geographical data, languages spoken, costumes worn and the social conditions prevalent in the country in that era.

2.5 NATYASHASTRA AND DANCE

From the above very general classification of the scope of the Natyashastra a very significant fact emerges that in Bharata’s times the art of naatya included dance (nritta and nritya) and music. Infact upon analysis of the various Sanskrit plays and the lexicons and grammatical works of that times brings us to an indisputable and definite conclusion that the ancient Indian art of naatya was unthinkable without music and dance included within it. Bharata himself gives ample proof of this when he describes the creation of the Natyashastra by Brahma:

The theory and technique of Indian dance is an integral part of this conception of drama and cannot be understood without the full realization of the implications of these assertions, which have so aptly been made by Bharata. Without going into the intricate details of the historical development of dancing and the controversy whether dance emerged as an art form before drama proper or viceversa, it is sufficient to point out here that at a very early stage of development, both these arts fused into one so that, by the time Bharata wrote his treatise, the dance was very much a part of drama and at many points of contact both the arts were consciously conceived as one. The Natyashastra thus is neither a treatise on drama alone, as understood by some, nor a treatise on dancing, as believed by quite a few. The technique of Indian dancing has actually to be culled and its principles selected with acute discrimination from the technique of dramaturgy prescribed by Bharata. Once this is done, dance does emerge as an independent art; it continues nevertheless to be an integral part of drama, indeed, once the most important aspect of what we understand by dance today (what the Sanskrit dramatist understood as aAangika abhinaya) is taken out or ignored, the character of Indian drama is lost – Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan.

2.6 CREATION OF NAATYA VEDA

Let us now turn to the aim of the art of naatya as propounded in the Natyashastra. It is stated in the 1st Chapter of the Natyashastra and can be summarized as follows :-

Once upon a time Indra, the Lord of the devas approached Pitaamaha Brahma with a respectful request. Jambudvipa which was peopled by devas, daanavas, gandharvas, yakshas, raakshasas etc. was in the most miserable state due to the passing off of the Kritaayuga and the coming in of the Tretaayuga. People were growing more and more debased morally and there was a preponderance of the addiction to sensual pleasures. Desire and greed were the major characteristics of all beings who were also affected with jealousy and anger. Indra requested Brahma to give them a thing of diversion and entertainment which would be both, visible and audible. Since, the four vedas were not to be heard by the shudras, the new object of entertainment should be accessible to all the four castes (varnas). This new object should be capable of showing the
people what is righteous and what is sinful, what is good and bad etc. **Brahma** resorted to **yoga** and recalled to his mind the four **vedas**. He then thought:

“(It will) conduce to duty (dharna), wealth (artha) as well as fame (yasha), will be a collection of good counsel and will provide guidance to people of the future (generation) in all their activities”.

“With this resolve the Holy One from his memory of all the **vedas**, shaped this **Naatya veda** compiled from the four of them” – Dr. Manmohan Ghosh.

### 2.7 THE TERM NAATYA

Reverting back to the origin of the word **natya**; its meaning derived from its etymology e.g. Sanskrit *nrit* – Prakrit – *nat* – *natya* very clearly points to its essential nature as well as its uniqueness in the total scheme of world drama. Thus, the etymology of the word **natya** itself leads us to its one unique quality and that is its heavy dependence on the art of **nritta** (dance). It also depended upon **geeta** (song) and **vadya** (instrumental music).

The performance of Indian **naatya**, in its totality, was presented by the means of variegated components like spoken words (**vachika**), gestures and other bodily movements (**Aangika**), costumes and make-up (**aharya**), the depiction of mental or psychological states (**sattvika**), songs (**geeta**) and dances (**nritta**).

Now, according to the definition of **naatya** that we have arrived at, it is apparent that **Bharata** takes the means of communication of the experiences of the world as **natya** and therefore in this technique of presentation, very naturally it is the form which assumes a greater importance. And so the ancient Indian **natya** was of the nature of a spectacle and so had a preponderance of physical movements for communication (**Aangika**).

Here, it must be borne in mind that though the two arts, dance and drama, in the Indian tradition were irrevocably interconnected, they did maintain their individuality and at no given time did they get totally merged into one. But, at the same time their technique of presentation was almost the same since the same classification given above could be made applicable to dance also. The chief difference between the two arts appears to be that of the components mentioned. **Naatya** would naturally have a greater use of the spoken words, costumes and make up since it conveyed a story or a plot through a number of actors whereas dance would not put so much importance on the spoken words which would take a subordinate position to the physical movements which are, very naturally, the soul of dance. Thus, the difference between dance and drama is one of degree and not of kind.

Thus, the principles that govern the technique of classical Indian drama (**naatya**) are the same as those which govern the technique of Indian dance.

### 2.8 TECHNIQUE OF NAATYA

To understand the technique of **naatya** and various components the technical terms used may be explained very briefly as follows:

**a)** **Dharmi** (modes of presentation)

There are two **dharmis** mentioned as **lokadharmi** and **naatyadharmi**. The **lokadharmi** is the realistic mode of presentation where the natural behaviour
of people is represented on the stage. The naatyadharmi is the highly conventionalised or stylized mode of presentation.

Thus, the former appears to be more natural while the latter definitely is studied and preconceived as well as preplanned.

b) Vritti (Styles of composition).

Bharata lists four vrittis in the Natyashastra. The verbal (bhaarati), the grand (saatvati), the energetic (aarabhati) and the graceful (kaishiki).

c) Abhinaya (type of acting).

This can also be called imitation or mimicry or simple representation. Let us study the etymology of this all important word.

\[ \begin{align*}
abhi & \quad \text{near, towards,} \\
\text{ni (naya)} & \quad \text{conduct, guide,} \\
\text{abhinaya} & \quad \text{conduct to, represent on the stage, mimic.}
\end{align*} \]

As already discussed Bharata prescribes four types of abhinaya: aangika, vaachika, aaharya and saatvika.

### 2.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

2) Fill in the blank spaces in the following statements using the words given below:

a) Today’s drama has been influenced by _______ drama due to the _______ influence.

b) In the regional theatre which can be called _______ theatre there is no _______ stage.

c) In the regional theatre the faces are _______ in _______ colours.

d) The regional theatre has _______ and _______ woven into the performance.

e) The roots of the method of the regional theatre are to be found in _______.

(Natyashastra, folk, painted, song, western, dance, British, bright, Bharata’s, proscenium)

2) Write in 5 to 6 lines on the chief characteristics of the regional or folk theatre.

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3) Enumerate the major components of Bharata’s *naatyaa*.

2.10 ANSWERS

1) a) western, British
   b) folk, prescinium
   c) painted, bright
   d) song, dance
   e) Bharata’s Natyashstra.

2) The regional theatre has a distinct flavour of Indianness. There is no proscenium stage. The movements are highly stylised. The dialogues are delivered in a highly artificial and shrill tone. The faces are very colourfully covered. Song and dance are the inherent parts of the performance. Usually women roles are also done by male actors.

3) The major components of Bharata’s *naatyaa* are:
   a) Two dharmis (modes of presentation) – naatyadharmi (stylised) and lokadharmi (realistic).
   b) Four vrittis (styles)- bhaarati (verbal), saatvati (grand), aarabhati (energetic) and kaishiki (graceful).
   c) Four abhinayas (type of acting)- aangika (bodily movements), vaachika (spoken words), aaharya (costumes and make-up) and saatvika (mental or psychological states).
   d) Music and dance.