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Bharatmuni's *Natyasastra*: A Literary Analysis

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The discussion about drama is incomplete without the mention of *Natyasastra*, the oldest text and significant treatise on the theory of drama. Bharat Muni's *Natyasastra* is celebrated work on Indian dance & drama. It mainly deals with all the major aspects of drama namely stage setting, music, plot construction, characterization, dialogue and acting. In fact, *Natyasastra* is the first major treatise on the art of performance which depicts the entire framework of drama so minutely.

Natyasastra contains around 6,000 sutras or verse stanzas includes in 36 chapters. There is no fix date which clearly justify when it was written but it is believed that the text may be written between 200 BC and 200 AD. According to some scholars, it may have been written by various authors at different periods. However, a scholar like Kapila Vatsyayana argued that the unity of structure and its coherence suggests that it is written by the single person. At the end of the text, the verse appears "Since he alone is the leader of the performance, taking on many roles, he is called Bharata", indicates its author. The following chapters of *Natyasastra* show that it minutely discusses everything which is related to performing arts, drama.

1. Origin of drama
2. Description of the playhouse
3. Puja (offering) to the Gods of the stage
4. Description of the karana dance
5. Preliminaries of a play



6. Sentiments (rasa)
7. Emotional and other states
8. Gestures of minor limbs
9. Gestures of hands
10. Gestures of other limbs
11. Cari movements
12. Different gaits
13. Zones and local usages
14. Rules of prosody
15. Metrical patterns
16. Diction of a play
17. Rules on the use of languages
18. Modes of address and intonation
19. Ten kinds of play
20. Limbs of the segments
21. Styles
22. Costumes and make-up
23. Harmonious performance
24. Dealings with curtains
25. Varied performances





26. Success in dramatic performances
27. Instrumental music
28. Stringed instruments
29. Time measure
30. Dhruva songs
31. Covered instruments
32. Types of character
33. Distribution of roles
34. Descent of drama on the Earth
35. Roles
36. The Theatre Myth



The influence of Bhartmuni's *Natyasastra* can be clearly seen in the works of major Sanskrit dramatists since ancient time to modern time. In short, Bharat Muni's *Natyasastra* is a complete, systematic book on the art of drama that goes deep and discusses every aspects of drama. Drama is a performing art. It is a mimetic presentation of human being with all activities on the stage.

The critic has praised the milestone work of Bharat Muni and compared it with equally great work of Panini Muni. In *Natyasastra* Bharat Muni describes the origin of drama and discusses each element of drama and dramaturgy in detail. There is a myth rooted in the origin of



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Natyasastra itself. As per that myth laymen were fascinated towards the material pleasures and lust in ancient time. So to maintain the social decorum and divert the entertainment needy folk, drama as a medium is derived by God Brahma on request of Lord Indra. Objective was to provide people, gods, demons, yakshas etc. with a form of delight which does not preach directly but which pleases the senses. Drama has fulfilled the need of visual art as a form of entertainment in that transformative phase.

The entire idea of *Natya* was given by Brahma after a long meditation. Brahma pulled out the text from *Rig Veda*, songs from *Sama Veda*, the art of acting from the *Yajur Veda* and Rasa (aesthetic experience) from the *Atharva Veda* and combined them into a fifth Veda “*Natya Veda*” and thus gave birth to the art of drama. He handed it over to his son, Lord Indra, the God of the skies. In a way, *Natyasastra* provides not only the story of birth of drama but also establishes standards and methodology to perform the drama. Dialectical, regional and national literature of Indian subcontinent is highly influenced by this treatise and majority a time it has been followed in the dramas of respective age and language.



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