

A Report on the International Conference on Natyashastra 8th-10th March, 2011

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An International Conference on Natyashastra was inaugurated in the Senate Hall of Svatantrata Bhavan of Banaras Hindu University on 8th March, 2011 jointly organized by IGNCA (ERC) Varanasi, Lincoln University, U.K. and B.H.U. Prof. D.P. Singh, V.C., B.H.U. graced the occasion as chief guest; while Sri C.R. Gharekhan President, IGNCA Trust adorned the seat of Chairperson. Prof. P.N. Shastri, Director, Kalidas Akademi, Ujjain was present in the function as the guest of honour. The Conference started with the mangalacharna(benedictory invocation)by Dr. Svaravandana Sharma followed by the rendering of "Kulageeta' by the students of Faculty of Performing Arts, B.H.U. Prof. R.C. Panda, the Dean, Faculty of Sanskrit Vidya Dharma Vijnana welcomed the guests.

"Mahamana Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya was a great lover of arts, music, theatre and other allied disciplines. He was himself an actor and appeared as an actor in Abhijnanasakuntalam as student of the University of Allahabad, then Myor Central College. In the same tradition, Banaras Hindu University has propagated the traditional Indian music, Sanskrit and other traditional forms and Shastric lores in the campus. It is our firm belief that the ancient Indian thought has to be spread among the people of the country and the world, couched in simple and intelligible language. I am especially happy to see that scholars from U.S.A., United Kingdom, Russia, France, Austria, Italy and other countries along with the eminent scholars of the Country are participating in this conference," observed Prof. D.P. Singh, V.C., B.H.U., speaking as the chief guest of the inaugural session. Presiding over the session, the former representative of India in U.N. Security Council and the President of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, Shri Chinmaya R. Gharekhan stated that this unique centre established in the memory of Smt. Indira Gandhi is rendering its service in preservation and propagation of traditional shastras, classical and folk art-forms of our country. So far, our focus has been on our own civilization and culture, now we are expanding its horizon and work on other cultures of the world as well. I am happy to note that in this programme, due importance is being given to the Natyashastra, our ancient text on dramaturgy."He emphasized the need of popularizing the thoughts enshrined in the Natyashastra and start a dialogue between India and abroad. Dr. Sreenath Nair of Lincoln University, U.K., delivered the key-note address and gave the outline of the International Conference.

Prof. K.D. Tripathi, Advisor, IGNCA, Varanasi, proposed a vote of thanks and stated that the Natyashastra has occupied the foremost position in the Indological studies for the past 200 years. Now it is the proper time to consolidate the entire studies and bring out a critical edition and its translation with elaborate notes which may be intelligible to experts as well as common readers. This inaugural function was coordinated by Prof. K.K. Sharma

After this very informative inaugural session, the academic sessions began. In the first session a special lecture was delivered by Prof. Radha Vallabh Tripathi, Vice-Chancellor, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi. He made a very learned presentation on the 'Concept of Beauty: sobha, saushthava, caruta and ramaniyata in Natyashastra and later traditions of Sanskrit Poetics'. In his presentation, he made a vast survey of the Indian aesthetic tradition right from the Vedic literature to modern era and as he progressed, he took into account the gradual progression of the aesthetic thought; while analyzing it vis a vis with relativity of these concepts. On his paper, Prof. K.D. Tripathi observed that Prof. R.V. Tripathi had given the conference a ground which could be expounded further. The Chairperson of the session Dr. Bettina Baumer concluded that Prof. Tripathi's presentation was seminal and ground-breaking, in which he gave a concise and condensed insight into the roots of aesthetics.

The Conference was categorized in four thematic sessions viz. (i) Text and Context (ii) Aesthetic Theory and Forms (iii) Sastra and prayoga and (iv) Natyashastra and Regional as well as Contemporary Traditional Sanskrit Theatres. These sessions were distributed in eight presentation-sessions across these three days. About 30 international and national scholars of eminence working on the subject were present along with other people from academic fraternity including students.

The theme "Text and Context" was explored in the following sessions. Prof. Kamallesh Dutta Tripathi presented his key-note address which set the tune for the seminar. He gave an exhaustive account of all the available manuscript material as well as the history of the editions of the Natyashastra. The next speaker was Dr. Anvita Sharma and she, in her paper on "The Edition of Natyashastra and the question of its Unitary Character" talked about the history of contemporary studies on the Natyashastra and discussed the question of heterogeneity or homogeneity of the Natyasastric text. She concluded that the Natyashastra was neither a heterogenous text as stated by Dr. S.A. Srinivasan and nor a homogenous one, but is unitary in its character. The next speaker Dr. Bharat Gupt made his presentation on "Natyashastra - Its present value". He said that Natyashastra essentially is a laksanagrantha and its laksya are the performance and preserving the tradition for posterity. He elucidated that Natyashastra as a prescribed curriculum is nowhere taught in the institutions which are responsible for the performative parts e.g., in National School of Drama etc. That's why, he said, "Modern day schools have a dismal ignorance about the Natyashastra and he feared that "terminology of Natyashastra is getting lost in the new and large discourse." He placed the Indian view of aesthetic experience vis-a-vis the Greek View and emphasized on the need for emergence of new genres and said that the Natyashastra should be made relevant.

Last speaker in this session was Prof. Navjyoti Singh. He presented his illustrated paper on "Towards a Formal Interpretation of Natyashastra" wherein he, highlighting the "Ekavakyata" (or one-sentenceness) of the Natyashastra and proceeded to give a very interesting inquiry of the knowledge – tradition of the Natyashastra. He illustrated the idea of interpretational tradition of the Natyashastra and explained the nature of theory of change in the text. Using the formal ontological approach of the Vaisesika philosophy, he touched

upon the complex topics of Natyashastra such as the Sadharanikarana (state of immersion), and interpretative theorization while discussing the relationship of the spectator and the spectacle. He also contended that the work of art essentially is a re-embodiment of an earlier disembodiment. Prof. K.D. Tripathi, enquiring on his paper put forth the points of krti, anukrti and bhavanukirtana.

Madam Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, responding to his paper stated her happiness over the presentations and highlighted the points of convergence in Navjyoti's and K.D. Tripathi's statements; referring to the dealing of discourse in the Kalatattvakosa volume on Indriya; written by herself.

The next session on 'Aesthetic Theory and Forms' was chaired by Prof. Kamlesh Dutta Tripathi. The first presentator in this session was Prof. Lyne Bansat Boudon from Paris. The title of her paper was "Satisfied with Performance – An Embryonic Aesthetic in the Indian Theatre's Myth of Origin". Referring to the episode of first chapter of the Natyashastra, she contended that the gods and the demons were the model sahridaya and ahrdaya, respectively, and stated that the textual inter-relatedness is necessary for proper understanding. The next paper was presented by Dr. Daniel Cuneo Italy, on "Rasa as Priti and Vyutpatti in Bharata and Abhinavagupta". In his paper, he quoted the views of Abhinavagupta, Bhattanayaka and Bhattatauta. Scholarly discussions followed these two presentations, between Dr. Sreenath Nair, Madame Boudon and Prof. K.D. Tripathi. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan recorded her appreciation for both the papers and she emphasized the need for proper classification of text and suggested the text should be looked at in a trans-disciplinary, intra-and interpenetrative- disciplinary way.

The session on 'Aesthetic Theory and Forms' continued from overnight. In the morning session of 9th march, Richard Schechner from U.S.A. gave a presentation on "Rasa-aesthetics – The Enteric Nervous System in Performance" – along with the visuals from his experimental workshop on "Rasaboxes", held in U.S.A. In this experiment, he is training students and artists to be able to express the Rasa and bhavas effectively. He highlighted the importance of properly understanding the human anatomy to express and experience the most complete emotion i.e. rasa. A very lively discussion followed the presentation. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan congratulated the speaker on his excellent Vyayama (exercise) part. She commented that the text belonged to no one but is read and interpreted differently. Bharatamuni was fully aware of human body and its various systems. She also stated that Natyashastra was never a static text and that this point should be explored further.

The next presentation was made by Dr. David Mason, of U.S.A. on "Rasa as a Conscious State". He informed that the Natyashastra has become increasingly important in the West as various theorists have played with the term 'rasa'. He described 'Rasa' and referred to the description of brain activity and consciousness as propounded by Nobel Laureate Gerald Edelman and described "Rasa as a conscious state having its own unitary and subjective quality and that Rasa of brain system, intentionality and attention". A lively discussion followed this paper as well, in which Prof. K.D. Tripathi, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan and Richard Schechner actively participated.

The concept of Aesthetic theory and form continued in another session in which scholarly papers were presented by Dr. Sreenath Nair, Lincoln University, U.K., Prof. R.N. Rai from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and Dr. Natalia Lidova from Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia. The session was chaired by Prof. P.N. Shastri. Dr. Sreenath investigated the link between the breath and the rasa, the ways in which the Natyashastra integrates; explicitly and implicitly; the aesthetics, philosophy and practice of human respiration through his paper titled 'Breath and Rasa: The explicit and implicit in the Natyasastra' with the help of Kudiyaattam artist Margi Narayan.

Prof. R.N. Rai presented an important comparative analysis of Indian and Western aesthetics with special mention of Aristotle's theory of Tragedy, which is concluded with a valuable discussion. Dr. Natalia Lidova presented her paper on 'the Ritualistic Background of Rasa'. She elaborated on the concept of Rasa that initially manifested the borderline state of transition from real earthly values to transcendental ones.

The next theme of 'Sastra and Prayoga' was explored in the following session. Under the chairmanship of Prof. Chandramauli Dvivedi, Prof. Hari Dutta Sharma presented his paper on "Bhavas in Natyashastra", wherein he gave meanings and enumeration of the 49 bhavas and contended that the entire discussion on Bhavas in Natyashastra is in accordance with the three states of human mind – cognitive, conative and effective.

Next paper was presented by Prof. Reva Prasad Dvivedi in Hindi, Sanskrit and partially in English. Prof. K.D. Tripathi later summed his paper up, in English for the convenience of all. Prof. Dvivedi spoke on the "Samanyabhinaya in Natyashastra" in his usual eloquence. He presented various interpretations of the word "Samanya". He also informed the house that he had also prepared a critical edition of the Natyashastra except chapters on music, which might be taken up by IGNCA.

A very lively discussion followed the two papers.

Prof. K.D. Tripathi presented his paper in the following session related to Sastra & Prayoga on "Samanyabhinaya and Citrabhinaya in Natyashastra". He stated that these two types of expressions are closely related to each other. Quoting Acarya Abhinavagupta, he said that Citrabhinaya is a remnant of Samanya. Facial expression is a precursor of word. He concluded his presentation stating that the Samanyabhinaya is presented in its entire dimension in Kudiyaattam alone, amongst all living traditions.

Ms. Sandhya Purecha made her lively presentation showing the 'Relation between Theory & Practice of Bhava and Abhinaya in Natyashastra' with special reference to Angika abhinaya and Sattvikabhinaya as it occurs in Samanyabhinaya. Her paper was divided in three parts – first she discussed the concepts of theory and practice. Then she explained the bhava and Abhinaya through body, speech, ornamentation and temperament. She also talked about Karanas. Her fine presentation concluded with visuals from her renditions and live demonstration.

Prof. Kausalendra Pandey presented his paper on 'Aharyabhinaya in Natyashastra'. He made his presentation in Sanskrit. Prof. K.D. Tripathi summarized him in English for the house. In this paper, Prof. Pandey contended that Prayoga is not simply performance but

much more and the performer is not only a medium of theatrical expression. He also defined the four types of Aharyas. Prof. Tripathi commented that very subtle point has been made in his paper.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan was requested to give some guidance to the Seminar. She said that during these days, she was feeling very energetic. It is not always that such metaphor such as the multiple limbs, multiple branches, the organicity of the tree i.e. its seed, tree, trunk, flowering and fruit; are brought forth. She said this conference is important on various levels – first, in terms of pure historiography of scholarship. Prof. K.D. Tripathi and Dr. Anvita Sharma have dealt with text as the centre for their discussions – and have enquired what the text states and what it does not. Marking of this seminar is that it has moved a step further in terms of discourses on textuality. She referred to the International Seminar on Sastra and Prayoga held at Heidelberg in 1980s, which is a landmark in the textual tradition of India.

A critical discourse also ensued and Dr. V. Raghvan and Prof. Reva Prasad Dvivedi were part of that in which, they discussed the text, which moved away from the text i.e. the discourse on Poetics or Alankarshastra. Prof. P.V. Kane discussed it as lawyer, putting arguments and also Pramod Kale, Prof. K. Krishnamoorthy but Prof. K.D. Tripathi's work, this seminar is a very big step forward. She said, "Hopefully, proceedings of this Seminar will be published and in true IGNC style a proper Vimarsa will be supplemented. Many excellent presentations have been made here by my friend from U.S.A., U.K. and France etc. on multiple perspectives. Multiplicity is accepted in modernity as well as post-modern discourse. She pointed out that we must remember that whenever, whoever and however, made this text i.e. Natyashastra, throws a challenge to all for its decoding and deconstruction. It is not a text on Pedagogy. he is giving us a language and within that lies a point which is – multilayering in the nature of the text is there – text is camouflaged – encapsulating – it is neither a mitra nor sankirna but is distinct like that. Many levels became explicit here – like those of looking at the text and its commentaries/interpretations; which was put in perspective by Abhinavagupta (sitting in Dachigam) and a whole trajectory of multiple commentaries like .G.C. Pandey, K.D. Tripathi, Bettina Baumer etc. The tertiary level takes us to discourses of aesthetic theories and the comparisons with Aristotle, purgation and catharsis should be looked into. This given us another line for further investigations. Comparative channels should also be explored in Richard's Asian tradition in Aesthetics.

The Session on Sastra and Prayoga continued the following morning. Prof. K.K. Sharma chaired this session which was coordinated by Prof. Lipika Dsgupta. Prof. N. Ramanathan presented his paper on Music in Natyashastra with special reference to Taladhyaya. Dr. Thomas Kintaert presented a powerpoint presentation on "Synchronization of Scenic and Musical Elements in Natyasastra". In the concluding session on "Natyashastra and Regional as well as Contemporary Tradition Sanskrit Theatre". Dr. Elisa Ganser presented her paper on "Tandava, Lasya and Modernity of Tradition". Ms. Prakani Cherukuru gave a presentation on "Analysis of Thematic Motion in Films" and Ms. Sonal Numbker gave a powerpoint presentation on the "Nature & Structure of Dance Movement".

Dr. Bhanu Shankar Mehta and Prof. Y.K. Mishra presented an extensive survey of Sanskrit Theatre in Prayaga and Varanasi.

All the presentations were very well received by the learned audience and were enriched by lively discussions.

In the same venue valedictory session started at 2.30 p.m. Sri V.B. Pyarelal, J.S. IGNCA, New Delhi graced the occasion as Chairperson and Prof. B.D. Singh, Rector, B.H.U. adorned the seat of Chief Guest.. The function started with mangalacharana presented by the students, of Music College, B.H.U. After the floral tribute to Sarasvati and felicitation of guests Prof. R.C. Panda delivered welcome address to the assembled galaxy of scholars. Dr. Sushma Jatoo presented a brief account of all the papers presented at the sessions of Conference. Next to it, well-reputed theatrical expert Dr. Bhanu Shankar Mehta was felicitated by IGNCA authorities. As a chief Guest Prof. B.D. Singh emphasized the importance of holding such conference amongst recent unrest cultural and moral degression. Sri V.B. Pyarelal while offering presidential remarks appreciated entire endeavour of IGNCA, ERC, Varanasi. The programme ended with vote of thanks extended by Dr. V.S. Shukla, head (KK), IGNCA, Delhi. This session was coordinated by Dr. Pranati Ghosal.

(Pranati Ghosal)