

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts
Regional Centre, Puducherry
Natyashastra reflects cultural Asia

Report for Vihangama

Date: 16th July-2024.

Event: A Special lecture on “Natyashastra for Bharathiya Aesthetics”

(பாரதீய கலை உணர்விற்கு நாட்டியசாஸ்திரம்)

The Natyashastra, of Bharata Muni, is an ancient Indian treatise that has played a crucial role in shaping the performing arts not only within the Indian subcontinent but also across wider cultural Asia and is regarded as a foundational text in the domains of theatre, dance, and music. Its influence extends to various Asian cultures, contributing significantly to their artistic traditions.

The Natyashastra encapsulates many practices and aesthetics that resonate with many Asian cultural traditions. The treatise's emphasis on integrating various art forms such as dance, music, and drama has parallels in the performing arts of several Asian countries. It is the responsibility of every artist to make the world aware of the uniqueness of the Natyashastra and its great significance. This responsibility has been taken up by the Regional Centre of IGNCA at Puducherry.

Under the auspices of the Regional Centre of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for The Arts (IGNCA) in collaboration with Alliance Francaise, Puducherry, A Special lecture on “**Natyashastra for Bharathiya Aesthetics** (பாரதீய கலை உணர்விற்கு நாட்டியசாஸ்திரம்) by **Padma Vibhushan. Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, Iconic Bharatnatyam Dancer, Research Scholar, Music Composer, Indic Scholar**, Trustee of IGNCA, was organized at the Auditorium of Alliance Francaise de Pondicherry on 24th (Friday) May, 2024 at 6:00 pm. The inauguration ceremony commenced with a welcome and introduction address by Dr. Nallam Satish, President, Alliance Francaise, Puducherry.

After the inauguration Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam's lecture delved into the significance of the Natyashastra, authored by sage Bharata Muni. She emphasized that the Natyashastra was not only relevant to the Indian subcontinent but also had a profound influence beyond its borders. According to her demonstration, the Natyashastra encompasses a comprehensive understanding of the arts and serves as a foundational text for Bharathiya (Indian) aesthetics.

During her discourse, she highlighted the holistic nature of the Natyashastra, explaining how it integrates various art forms and provides a cohesive framework for understanding and performing them. She discussed its relevance in contemporary times, illustrating how its principles continue to influence modern performing arts and aesthetics. By drawing parallels with other global traditions, she underscored the universal appeal and timeless wisdom encapsulated in the Natyashastra.

She felt that as the earliest treatise on music, dance, drama, and poetics, sage Bharata's Natyashastra was conceptualised for the whole Indian sub-continent and beyond and it is regarded as the fifth Veda. It took over a century of research by several scholars across the world, including in France, to determine that the Sanskrit treatise comprised 36/37 chapters. However, in the lack of consensus on its antiquity, scholars have assigned for its origin a date range of a thousand years, from 500 BCE to 500 AD.

Natyashastra & National Unity

Referring to her own extensive research, and book, "Natyashastra & National Unity", she hypothesised that the Natyashastra may have been written in the early phase of the Treta Yuga, and could be contemporaneous to the period of the Ramayana and its author Valmiki. She argued that the absence of the names Rama or Krishna anywhere in the scripture suggests that its concept predates their manifestation. Moreover, her research discovered that the last chapter of the Natyashastra, structured in a poser and response form, mentions Valmiki in the group of rishis who sought answers from Bharata. "If the Ramayana is a shared legacy for the whole of Indian subcontinent, perhaps even Asia, awareness should be created that the Natyashastra, too, is a common cultural heritage for a larger geographical region".

References to Jambudweepa in the Natyashastra

The references to Jambudweepa in the Natyashastra highlight the inclusive and comprehensive nature of Bharata Muni's scripture. By acknowledging the various traditions within Jambudweepa, Bharata emphasizes the importance of diversity in enriching the performing arts. This perspective not only provides a historical context for the cultural landscape of ancient India but also encourages an appreciation for regional variations and their contributions to the collective artistic heritage.

According to the more references of Jambudweepa, she concluded that Natyashastra was created for the Eurasian continental expanse. Looked at in this light, she reveals that France also has a rightful claim to the heritage of Natyashastra.

The deconstructed Angika pedagogy system

Turning to the aesthetic sense demonstrated by her students Smt. Mahati Kannan (dance) and Gayatri Kannan (recitation), she points out that "Natyā" is not just dance but includes music, drama, and poetry. "तत्र गीतं वाद्यं च त्रिविधं नाट्यमुच्यते" (Tatra gītaṃ vādyam ca trividhaṃ nāṭyamucyate). The Angika pedagogy system of 108 Karanas deconstructed by her (the depiction of dance movements in temple sculptures) gives a sense of the challenge of mastering all aspects of Abhinaya. She noted that the influence of the "karanas"- not postures but movements frozen in a given moment in dances, from classical Koodiyattam and Kathakali to folk art forms like Therukoothu, illustrates that the Natyashastra is a living tradition and a common technical aesthetic fount for the performing arts. In fact, the Indian theatre tradition demands that the artists act and dance to communicate.

The Key Concepts of Natyashastra

1. The Rasa concept -

शृङ्गारहास्यकरुणा रौद्रवीरभयानकाः।

बीभत्साद्भुतसंज्ञौ चेत्यष्टौ नाट्ये रसाः स्मृताः॥ नाट्यशास्त्रम् 6/15

The concept of Rasa is pivotal in the Natyashastra. Bharata Muni identifies eight primary Rasas: Śṅgāra (erotic), Hāsya (comic), Raudra (furious), Karuṇa (compassionate), Vīra (heroic), Bhayānaka (terrible), Bībhatsa (odious), and Adbhuta (Marvelous). A ninth Rasa, Śānta (peace), was later added. Each Rasa is associated with a specific Bhāva (emotion).

2. The Bhava concept -

Bhāvas are the states of mind or emotions which evoke Rasa in the audience. Bharata lists 49 Bhāvas, classified into Sthayi Bhāva (durable), Vyabhichari Bhāva (transient), and Sattvika Bhāva (involuntary) विभावानुभाव-व्यभिचारि-संयोगाद्रसनिष्पत्तिः॥ नाट्यशास्त्रम्-7/5 - The combination of determinants, consequents, and transient emotions leads to the manifestation of Rasa.

3. The Dhvani concept -

Although not explicitly detailed in the Natyashastra, the concept of Dhvani (suggestion) later became significant in Indian aesthetics. It refers to the implicit meaning conveyed through words and actions, enriching the experience of Rasa.

4. **Stage Design concept:**

The Natyashastra provides detailed guidelines for stage construction, ensuring it is conducive to the performance of drama and the evocation of Rasa.

5. **Acting Techniques:**

Bharata Muni outlines various acting techniques, including Āṅgika (gestures), Vācika (speech), Āhārya (costume and makeup), and Sāttvika (emotions). These techniques form the foundation of classical Indian acting आङ्गिकौ वाचिकश्चैव ह्याहार्यः सात्त्विकस्तथा। चत्वारोऽभिनया ह्येते विज्ञेया नाट्यसंश्रयाः॥ नाट्यशास्त्र- 6/23. (Acting consists of gestures, speech, costumes, and emotions)

Based on all the Key Concepts of Natyashastra, Finally, she stated that "Aesthetics, in the Indian philosophical tradition, is not about assimilating beauty on an intellectual or emotional level, but experiencing it on a transcendent spiritual plane,". After completion of the demonstration, **Sri Ashish M Khokar**, Eminent Critic and Scholar, Bengaluru, acknowledged Padma Subrahmanyam's skills and contributions to the field of Bharatanatyam and allied subjects. Thereafter **Mr. Laurent Jalicous**, Director, Alliance Francaise, Puducherry expressed his opinion thus the collaboration between IGNC and Alliance Francaise - Puducherry successfully brought to light the enduring legacy of the Natyashastra, fostering a deeper appreciation for India's rich cultural heritage.

The event was well-received by the audience, who appreciated Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam's deep insights and articulate presentation. At the end of the program, **Dr. Gopal J**, Regional Director, IGNC, RCP expressed his gratitude to all dignitaries, organizers, and participants. The lecture concluded with an interactive session, where attendees engaged with her, further enriching their understanding of Bharathiya aesthetics.

Prepared by
Dr. KTV Raghavan,
Assistant Professor,
RCP, IGNC
