



## A Discourse on *Nāṭya* (Indian Drama): Origin, Development and Technicalities

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### Abstract

'*Nāṭya*' has achieved the prestigious rank of *Veda* in Indian civilization. The term '*nāṭya*' in Indian tradition signifies the mimic representation of particular characters or situations. Origin of this performance-based art can be traced back in the ancient socio-cultural activities. Rituals, festivals, dance etc. are identified as the basic sources of Indian drama that have also helped to evolve it. Different pedagogies regarding the origin and development of Indian drama are discussed in the first part of the paper, while the later part is dedicated to explore the theatrical representation of ancient Indian drama as told in the ancient scriptures like Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The technicalities like '*abhinaya*', dialogue, plot, stage, make-up, properties that are the essential issues to transform any literary texts to theatre are the key focus of this paper. Apart from the entertainment factor, the legacy of Indian '*nāṭya*' has a unique appeal beyond the limitation of social division and conveys a message of harmony as one of the strongest mediums for mass education.

### Keywords

*Nāṭyaśāstra*, *nāṭya*, *nāṭaka*, *rūpaka*, *abhinaya*

### Introduction: What is ‘nāṭya’?

Drama is often recognized as a form of poetical composition where “epic, lyric and imitative representation are united into in a single artistic whole” (Winternitz 179), but primarily drama is meant for stage to be performed. This popular form of art that holds a twofold objective as a medium of entertainment and mass education has its own graph of development in every country/culture. No doubt, India is one of the most prominent civilizations who can claim to hold a very ancient legacy of drama.<sup>1</sup> In Indian tradition drama has achieved the equal status of the *Vedas*. It is recognized as “*Nāṭyaveda*”.

Nowadays, the word *nāṭaka* though generally used to mean any kind of dramatic performance, yet in a strict sense of the term it indicates the literary texts and ‘*nāṭya*’ specifies the theatrical representation or the performance. In this regard, how these two terms are used in the tradition of ancient Indian drama has an obvious demand to be discussed.

The word ‘*nāṭya*’ in Indian drama is always dedicated to point out the mimic representation. Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the oldest text on drama, time and again unambiguously defines *nāṭya* in that very sense –

‘*trailokasyāsya sarvasya nāṭyaṃ bhāvānukīrtanam*’ (1.106) - [drama is a representation of the state of Three Worlds]<sup>2</sup>

‘*nānābhāvopasaṃpannam nānāvasthāntarātmakam/ lokavṛttānukaraṇam nāṭyametanmayā kṛtam/*’ (1.111) [The drama as I have devised, is a mimicry of action and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions, and which depicts different situations. ]

‘*devatānāmasurāṇām rājñāmatha kuṭumbinām/ kṛtānukaraṇam loke nāṭyamityabhidhīyate/*’ (1.120) [A mimicry of the exploits of gods, the Asuras, king as well as of householders in this world, is called drama.]

Dhanañjaya’s *Daśarūpaka* (10<sup>th</sup> Century CE), another famous text on Indian drama, echoes Bharata’s opinion – ‘*avasthānukṛtirnāṭyam*’ (1.7) [Drama is the imitation of situations.]

Moreover, Drama in ancient India stands for a distinct category of poetics<sup>3</sup> that carries the ability to be performed before the spectators. It is also known as *rūpaka/rūpa* (representation)<sup>4</sup> and *prekṣā* (spectacles)<sup>5</sup>. It is notable that no specific term is prescribed to

<sup>1</sup> “There are only three ancient cultures in the world which have developed the genre of drama, namely the Greek, the Indian and the Chinese. Of these the drama in Chinese literature is comparatively of late origin and can convincingly be shown to have been influenced by the Buddhist dramas of Indian origin.” (Tripathi 7)

<sup>2</sup> Translation by Manomohan Ghosh.

<sup>3</sup> Sanskrit poetry is divided into two big categories, i.e. *drśya* (visible) and *śravya* (audible).

<sup>4</sup> *Rūpaka* - as it is the artificial assumption of forms by the actor.

mention the composition or literary text of the play. For the plot ‘*vastu*’ or ‘*itivṛtta*’ is the idiom. On the other hand, the word ‘*nāṭaka*’ is only a specific category of *nāṭya* like ‘*prakaraṇa*’, carrying some particular features (see below 3.2). Though drama is a wholesome production, where performance and literary composition proceed hand in hand, yet the word *nāṭya* is closely associated with performance or theatrical representation. It is because, in Indian drama performance that includes costumes, make up, as well as, elements such as gesture, posture, words, representation of temperament etc. plays the most important role, which “gives the *nāṭya* its characteristic form” (Ghosh XLIII) and makes it different from Greek drama.<sup>6</sup>

### Origin of Drama in India: Different Theories

Some scholars are in view that the Indian dramas have been developed under the Greek influences. The theory is equally accepted and criticized. A number of Orientalists opined in favour of this theory, among them A. Weber was the prominent one who stated:

Perhaps the representation of Greek plays in the courts of Greek kings in Bacteria, in the Punjab and in Gujarat had given impetus to the creation of the imitative at in India and had been the root of the origin of Indian drama. (Winternitz 192)

Here we should recall the historical incidence of the battle of Jhilm in 326 BCE, from where the Indian campaign of Alexander the Great began.

E. Windisch proposed that Indian drama developed under the influence of Greek comedy, although it was refuted by the counter arguments of some other Indologists like Jacobi, Pischel, Schroeder, Levi etc. E. Gross argued that more or less “every primitive story is a drama” (Winternitz 179) and G. M. Miller, famous American scholar announced that “recitation of ballads was originally always combined with music and dramatic dance” (Winternitz 179). These two views convinced the scholars like M. Winternitz to state:

In India too, the drama has at least one of its main roots in such proto-ballad poetry, that we have seen continued from the Veda down through the epic,

<sup>5</sup> Even today the theatre hall is known as *prekṣāgrha*.

<sup>6</sup> “The term like *rūpaka* or *rūpa* (representation) and *prekṣā* (spectacle), all denoting dramatic works, also characterise the Hindu dramas and show their difference from the drama of the Greek who laid emphasis on action and not on the spectacle ...in case of Hindu dramas the decoration (i.e. the costumes and make-up) mostly play an important part. Equally with five other elements such as gesture and posture, words, the representation of the Temperaments, it gives the Nāṭya its characteristic form. But the theatre of the Greeks, it was not the case. In the performance of tragedies, for example, they did not care much for the spectacle, if the declamation was properly made. For Aristotle himself says that “the power of tragedy is felt without representation and actors”” (Ghosh XLII-XLIII)

purāṇic, Buddhist and Jain literatures, and in it we are obliged to trace the origin of old Indian epic. (180)

One of the major points, on which the Greek theory stood, is the use of the word *yavanikā*. Now a day, *yavanikā* denotes the curtain between the audience and stage. But, neither in ancient Indian drama, nor in Greek, is any use of theatre curtain between the audience and stage found, although a curtain between the stage and tiring room is prescribed in Sanskrit drama. Most of the scholars are of the opinion that the use of the word *yavanikā* began in later period, and it indicates a cloth, something like Persian tapestry, has no connection with Greece culture (G. Shastri 98)<sup>7</sup>.

On the other hand, the common features like the interchanges between prose and verse, use of popular dialects, similar kind of character (*sūtradhāra* in Indian drama and *archimimus* in Greek), and appearance of the mass people in the stage, point out the correspondence between Greek *mimus* and Indian drama. But this theory has been refuted, as the dissimilarities are also very prominent. For example, Greek drama, where, theoretically, the unity of place, time and action is strongly prescribed, differs from the pattern of the Indian drama, as in Indian drama the time gap between two acts can be more than years. (G. Shastri 98). Most of all, no such evidence is found that any Greek drama was staged in ancient India (Winternitz 193).

The most significant claim to be the source of Indian drama, supported by the etymological evidence, is of the dance. All the words like *nāṭya*, *nāṭaka*, *naṭa* (actor) have their origin in root *naṭ*, which seems to be the Prakrit progeny of the Sanskrit root *nṛt* carrying the meaning 'to dance'.

A myth, described in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is also found related with the origin of drama. The story illustrates that in request of the gods, Brahmā, the creator created a new form of entertainment that is audible and also visible. It is a combination of plot, song, acting and sentiment that are taken from four *Vedas* and achieved the grade of the Fifth *Veda*, accessible to women and all castes of the society (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, ch.1).

Apart from this divine origin scholars find the germ of Indian drama in the *Vedas*. The *R̥gveda*, the earliest literature of the Hindus, also of the world, carries the first evidence of dialogue form, which is considered by the scholars as the embryo of drama in Indian

<sup>7</sup> But Winternitz mentioned "The word may mean, in any case, also "curtain" generally and thence also a cloth made by Yavanas (Greek or Persian), sometime like "Persian carpet" as meant by Levi. Since the Sanskrit word *yavanikā* occurs also in Bhāsa it does not seem likely that it is just a Sanskritisation of the Prakrit word *javanikā*, as opined by Pischel". (193-94 footnote.)

subcontinent. This kind of text, known as Dialogue Hymn or *Samvāda-sūkta* is actually a fragmented portion of ancient ballads, where the prose part, the narrative structure of the story is lost, only the verses remain in the form of dialogue. Among twenty Dialogue Hymns of the *R̥gveda*<sup>8</sup> *Pururavā-ūrvaśī-samvāda* (10.52) is most famous; it further became the source of Kālidāsa's drama *Vikramorvarśīya*.

Among four *Vedas*, the *Sāmaveda* is considered as the storehouse of melodies and singing; singing of *sāmagāna* in the sacrifice or *yañja* was a mandatory part of some rituals, and the priest for this *Veda* was known as 'Udgāta' (who sings the Vedic *mantras*). Even the *Atharvaveda* records the performances of dance and music as a common entertainment of the people of the then society (*Atharvaveda- Śaunaka-śākhā* 10.2.17). F.B.J. Kuiper opined that the seed of Indian drama must be in the Vedic rituals. In some of the Vedic rituals a kind of symbolic representation or imitation of some particular action or situation is prescribed to be enacted, where a perfect echo of dramatic performances can be traced. For example, in the ritual called *Mahāvratā*, as referred in *Sāṅkhyāna Āraṇyaka* text, for a piece of white leather a conflict between *vaiśya* and *śūdra* is to be performed in a shape of a drama.

In the post Vedic period the religious cults, more particularly the cult of Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa and Rāma) and Śīva, are recognized as one of the major sources of Indian drama. *Vaiṣṇava* cult was accepted to be attached with mimic dances (Winternitz 181). *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, a major text in Purāṇic literature, illustrates how the heavenly music of flute by Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa drew the attention of the *gopinīs* (cowherdresses) (*Viṣṇupurāṇa* 5.13.14-17). The Rāsa-dance of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā with *gopinīs* is commonly depicted in the Kṛṣṇa temple<sup>9</sup> and also described in the scriptures (*Rādhā Upaniṣad*). This dance, imitating the deeds of Kṛṣṇa, is often performed in festivals also. Winternitz proclaimed that this kind of mimic dance as a part of religious ceremonies contains the germ of the development of dramatic art (182).

The *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, two great epics of India, record their close association with drama. In Indian drama, even in modern days, the actors are designated as the *kuśīlava*, and that makes us remember of two sons of Rāmacandra, Lava and Kuśa, who sang the whole story of Rāma. In the *Mahābhārata* protection of the dancers, comedians etc. for the entertainment of the people are ascribed (*Mahābhārata, Sabhāparvan*, chapter 69).

Prof. Pischel proposed that puppet plays are the original source of drama in our country. He tried to synchronize the character *sūtradhāra* of Indian drama, who basically

<sup>8</sup> Some famous dialogue hymns of the *R̥gveda* –10.10 (*Yama-yamī-samvāda*), 10.51-52 (dialogue between Agni and other gods), 10.108 (*Paṇi-saramā-samvāda*).

<sup>9</sup> A very famous Rāsa-cakra is depicted on the wall of Syamarai temple, Visnupur, Bankura, WB.

organizes the whole show and always initiates the show, with the man who, in the puppet show, executes the work to manage and control the puppets with the thread. Prof. Luders was of the view that shadow play is the birth place of Sanskrit drama. Even now a days in some temples of different states of Sothern part of India, like Andhra, Karnataka and Kerala the Shadow plays are being occasionally conducted.

Eminent scholar Harapashad Shastri had the opinion that Indian drama is originated on the occasion of Indra's Flag festival (*indradvaja-pūjā*). Even in the myth, told in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, indicates that Brahmā asked the gods to enact the first play, as the festival of Indra's Flag was began. At the lunar month of Bhādrapāda the festival used to be celebrated to honour Indra, the god of rains. The Indradvaja festival is still in practice in some part of India, like in Mysore and Orisa. A Vedic text, entitled *Suparṇādhyāya*, is found that is usually enacted in the Indradvaja festival. *Suparṇādhyāya*, a metrical dramatic work<sup>10</sup> composed in late Vedic period, is, as claimed by Prof. Tripathi, "the oldest in India of this genre, possibly even in the entire world" (1).

No doubt, the topic regarding the origin and the development of ancient Indian drama carries multiple theories, but most of the scholars hold the view that Indian drama developed independently, without any Greek influence. Some features could be similar between these two, but the similarities can be considered as the basic requirement for the development of dramatic art in any country/culture. The Indian drama contains "such a strong national Indian character" (Winternitz 195) full of Indian life and spirit, "that it stands against the hypothesis of any foreign influence on it" (Winternitz 195).

### **Theatrical Representation: Some Technicalities**

The second objective of our discussion is to a have an idea of some features and techniques<sup>11</sup> of the ancient Indian plays. Before we delve into our discourse we should keep in mind that the traditional theories and techniques of ancient Indian drama are preserved in some particular texts among which Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* is most famous; *Daśarūpaka* of Dhanañjaya, *Abhinaya-darpaṇa* of Nāndikeśvara are some other reputed texts; some chapters of *Agni-purāṇa*, *Viṣṇudhamottara-purāṇa*, *Sāhityadarpaṇa* etc. contain huge discourse on drama. What they place before us, though served in a prescriptive/ normative mode, can be considered as a literary evidence of the then history of Indian drama. They can also be considered as a general production manual of the play. These texts sometimes offer similar

<sup>10</sup> The text *Suparṇādhyāya* was first published by Elimar Gurbe in 1875.

<sup>11</sup> Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* contains thirty eight topics, among them only few are in our focus.

views, but sometimes differ from each other. For our present purpose I would chiefly follow the view of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the oldest one.

*Nāṭya* or *Rūpaka* is divided into some branches and sub branches according to different features of the play. The main branches, ten in number, are - *Nāṭaka*, *Prakarāṇa*, *Bhāna*, *Vyāyoga*, *Samavakāra*, *Ḍima*, *Īhāmṛga*, *Aṅka*, *Vīthi*, *Prahasana*. Some of the points where they differ from each other are the central theme or the plot, number of the acts, main characters of the play, language to be spoken etc. For example, where *Nāṭaka* contains at least five acts, we find *Prahasana*, *Bhāna*, *Vyāyoga*, *Aṅka*, *Vīthi* as one act play. *Nāṭaka* is prescribed to have a celebrated person like god/ famous king/ king-seer/ anybody from a well known family etc. as the hero, but the central character of *Prakarāṇa* should be someone from the class of brahmin/merchant/ priest/ officer of king etc. All categories of *Rūpakas* were not similarly popular; *Nāṭaka* and *Prakarāṇa* mostly grabbed the attention.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, eighteen sub-branches are known as *upa-rūpaka*<sup>13</sup>, where song, dance, music, panto-mimic occupy the major attraction than the literary aspects.

The technique to present the “artificial assumption of forms by the actors”, what actually dramaturgy means, can be divided into two kinds of practices, i.e. realistic or popular (*lokadharmī*) and conventional or theatrical (*nāṭyadharmī*) (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, ch.14, verse 62-67). By the term *lokadharmī* Bharata indicated “the reproduction of natural behaviour of men and women on the stage as well as the cases of other natural presentation” (Ghosh XLII ). To place any kind of theme, even for the realistic practices certain degree of artificiality is required, which cannot be executed without theatrical presentation.

For the *nāṭyadharmī* practice the most vital is *abhinaya* (representation/ imitation of condition). *Abhinaya*, according to ancient scriptures can be of four types, i.e. gestural, vocal, extraneous and internal. *Nāṭyaśāstra* offers a huge range of gestural/ physical representation or *āṅgika abhinaya*, where several postures of head, face, hand etc. are described to reflect different *rasa*-s (sentiment). It is worthy to mention that Bharata prescribed thirty six categories of eye-expression. The *vācika abhinaya* or vocal representation means the uses of speech. Musical notes (*svara*), voice registers<sup>14</sup> (*sthāna*), pitch of vowels (*varṇa*), intonation (*kāku*), speech tempo (*laya*) etc. are included in this class of representation. In the next category, i.e. *āhārya abhinaya* indicates different kinds of makeup, costume and also stage decoration. Even, for the representation of animal character exclusive costumes and makeup,

<sup>12</sup> Exmp. *Nāṭaka – Abhijñāna-śākuntalam* by Kālidāsa, *Prakarāṇa – Mṛcchakaṭikam* by Śudraka

<sup>13</sup> Two most popular types of *upa-rūpaka* - *Nāṭikā* and *Troṭaka*.

<sup>14</sup> Places to produce different kind of voice for the person staying at different proximity; exmp. to call a person staying at a distance the voice should be produced from head register.

known as *sañjīva*, were in use of the ancient Indian play. The *svāttika abhinaya* or representation of the temperament or physical resources deeply related to the *rasa* or sentiment, the most significant aspect of all kind of Indian poetry. Sanskrit *Alaṅkāra-śāstra*<sup>15</sup> mentions some major sentiments (*rasa*) that are originated from related dominant states (*sthāyībhāva*). Eight *rasa*-s are - *śṛṅgāra* (erotic), *hāsya* (comic), *karuṇa* (pathetic), *rudra* (furious), *vīra* (heroic) *bhayānaka* (terrible), *vībhatsa* (odious), *adbhuta* (marvelous).<sup>16</sup> To know why these sentiments are named as *rasa* we should follow what Bharata-muni proclaimed:

As taste (*rasa*) results from a combination of various spices, vegetables and other articles, and as six tastes (*rasa*) are produced by articles such as, raw sugar or spices or vegetables, so the Dominant States (*sthāyībhāva*), when they come together with various other states (*bhāva*) attain the quality of Sentiment (i.e. become Sentiment). (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, ch. 6, verse 31, translation by Ghosh)

One of the most important aspects that support the actor to represent the situation is the stage decoration, and, although it is an integral part of *āhārya abhinaya*, yet it demands a unique space for discussion. Now a day the use of various kind of scenes as the background is very common, which was not possible for the ancient play because of the structure of the theatre/ play house. The play houses, as told by Bharata, can be of three shapes, viz. rectangle, square and triangle. The general structure of the then theatre was primarily divided into three segments, i.e. auditorium (*raṅgamaṇḍala*) and stage (*raṅgamaṇḍala*) and tiring room (*nepthya*); again the fore section of the stage, known as *raṅgapīṭha* was used for the performance, the rest, back portion of the stage was utilized for setting of the orchestra (*raṅgaśīrṣa*). As the space between these two doors was specified for the musicians, no place remain for the back scene; only some common designs were used for decoration.

Then, how the ancient Indian drama convinced the audience for a scene of particular place or time? They had different devices to cope up the lack of back scene; numerous descriptions of place and time are used to evoke the imagination of the audience so that they can speculate the supposed situation. For example, to make the spectators to know that the king is entering a hermitage a vivid description of the place is presented through dialogue with the minute details of the common features of a hermitage. Even to specify the season like summer etc. or time like morning/evening they took the help of description only.

<sup>15</sup> Scripture of poetry, that basically holds the theories of Sanskrit literature.

<sup>16</sup> The respective *sthāyībhāva*-s are : love, mirth, sorrow, anger, energy, terror, disgust, astonishment.

Another essential tool was the zonal division of the stage. Though there was no such practical compartmentalized separation, it depends on the movement of the actor, as well as imagination of the spectators. In Sanskrit drama a very familiar movement of the actor is “*parikramya avalokya ca*”, means turning and seeing; these turns and particular footsteps are used to make the viewers understood about different places, like palace, garden, river, forest etc. But for hill, aerial car, elephant etc. the representation was prescribed to be executed by some suggestive models, known as *pusta* (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, ch. 2, verses 6-8), made by cloth, leather, wood etc.

In Sanskrit drama the languages are specified for different characters; hence, *Nāṭyaśāstra* mentions four types of speech, i.e. speech for gods (*ati-bhāṣā*), noble being (*ārya-bhāṣā*), different social strata (*jāti-bhāṣā*) and animal (*yonyantarī-bhāṣā*). One of the peculiarities of Sanskrit drama is the usage of Sanskrit and Prakrit language simultaneously. Normally, the Brahmin and Kṣatriya have the right to speak in Sanskrit, while the other cast people like Vaiśyas and Śūdras, and woman character of all caste deliver their dialogue in Prakrit. But a number of exceptions follow this norm; for example, if a king is suffering from poverty, can speak in Prakrit, on the contrary, anybody can use Sanskrit at the time of quoting the divine speech (*daivavāṇī*). Several types of Prakrit language are used by the character representing different social categories<sup>17</sup>; again, seven kinds of dialects (*vibhāṣā*) are to be spoken, where some are specified for the low caste people like *śavara* (mountaineer), *vanecara* (forester), *caṇḍāla* (outcaste) etc.

While the language pattern of ancient Indian drama is related with social structure, the show timing of the play is associated with the physical condition as well as the psychological status of the mass. For example, the evening, after a day-long work when one seeks the company of his beloved lady, is the perfect time for the plays of erotic sentiment that is full of music, song and dances. Likewise, the play based on virtue should be acted at forenoon. Plays emphasizing on the magnanimity of the hero or on the pathetic sentiment or comedy used to be performed in the morning. Except midnight, noon or the particular time of ritualistic practices any time of the day could be the show time.

‘*Vastu*’ or ‘*itivṛtta*’ or the plot, as proclaimed by Bharata, builds the body of the drama. Plot can be twofold, i.e. principal and incidental. The former one or *ādhikārika* is the chief subject matter or the theme that is directly linked with the result of the drama; the later one, i.e. *prāsaṅgika* is something that the character acts in his/her own interest, but

<sup>17</sup> Exmp. *Śaurasenī* Prakrit for heroine, *Dākṣiṇāṭya* Prakrit for gambler.

incidentally becomes connected with the purpose of the hero. From the perspective of the result of the hero or the main character the development of the plot is possible through five junctions (*sandhi*). They are – Opening (*mukha*), Progression (*pratimukha*), Development (*garbha*), Pause (*vimarśa*) and Conclusion (*nivahaṇa*). In the *mukha-sandhi* the germ of the theme seeded. Though ‘*garbha*’ means embryo, here it holds the main obstacles to achieve the result, which is to be overcome in *vimarśa-sandhi*. Normally, the graph of the ancient drama, to some extent, similar with the modern plays, is in the shape of a curve, where *garbha-sandhi* holds the climax of the drama.

Another uniqueness of the Sanskrit drama is the use of explanatory devices or the extra scenes, which are not the integral part of a particular act, but placed before an act, or between two acts. The reason behind the use of this kind of device, known as ‘*arthopakṣepaka*’, is to maintain some rules of the scriptures of dramaturgy. According to *Nāṭyaśāstra* neither the incidences of more than one day, nor so many happenings of one day can be presented in a single act. Hence, to illustrate the events of more than a day, or a series of occurrences, it was a trend to take the help of *arthopakṣepaka*, which builds the link between through dialogues. Simultaneously, some events are prohibited to be directly performed on the stage; marriage, battle, loss of kingdom, death, sex, excessive anger, curse etc. belong to this list; and to produce them the explanatory devices are the perfect way.

In Sanskrit tradition the development of the plot depends on the action of the hero, rather the main character. The hero supposes to get a certain result (*phala*), achieving which the journey of the drama, obviously not a smooth one, ends. Like the plays of the modern times ancient Indian drama did not possess the concept of a villain, although some negative characters like Śakāra in the drama *Mṛcchakaṭīka* is found. The obstacles that the hero or the hero and the heroine both have to surpass, are generally, made by the destiny or *niyati*. Ancient India believed that destiny has its way anywhere (*Abhijñānaśākuntala*, 1<sup>st</sup> Act, verse 15) and can be pre set by the divine cause, or driven by some human behaviour. In respect to the concept the destined fate Indian dramas hold some kind of parallel theory of the Greek, though, very unlikely to the Greek, Sanskrit dramas admire the up gradation of the main characters or the hero or of the whole situation towards the conclusion. Tragedy or *karuṇa rasa* can be the partial sentiment of a play, but tragedy as the basic sentiment is rarely found. The tradition of Sanskrit dramas records the name of *Ūrubhaṅga* of Bhāsa as the only tragic play.

### Conclusion: Social Harmony in Ancient Indian drama

I would like to conclude throwing some light on the acceptance of drama by the common mass, not only as an entertainment device, but also a place of social harmony. The social arrangement of caste system of Hindus is very often criticized for the inequalities, yet the legacy of ancient Indian drama demonstrates that how all castes and classes would have equal rights. The mythological story about the divine origin of drama portrays that when the lower caste *śūdras* and women had no right to learn the *Vedas*, the *nāṭya* was originated to educate and entertain the common people, irrespective of any caste or gender.

How the ancient dramas of India used to involve all categories of people can be comprehensible from the structure of the then theatre group. With the actor-dancers, director and play writer, the theatrical party used to include the persons like makers of ornaments and garlands, craftsman, even dyer, who normally belong to the so-called lower class of Hindu society.

The theory of success is another point to prove the non-existence of the caste barrier for the sake of art. Two kinds of success, namely, *daivikī* (divine) and *mānuṣī* (human), are mentioned by Bharata. The divine success is the deeper aspect of the play, which would come from the spectators of culture and education, no hierarchy of castes is the determining factor there. Again the latter one is related to the ordinary spectators. The most significant is the appointment of some special persons, known as *prāśnika*, to decide the quality or success of the play if any confusion arises. In the body of the *prāśnika* ten members are fixed to execute that very task. In that very committee along with the persons like experienced one in Vedic rituals and meter, linguists, king and government officer, we found dancer, musician, painter and archer, and caste bar is not applicable. The inclusion of prostitute in the same group of *prāśnika* immediately refutes the orthodox mentality of the then society that is often wrongly asserted.

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