

Exploring the Timeless Artistry: The Essential Elements of Sanskrit Drama

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Abstract:

Sanskrit drama, an integral part of India's cultural heritage, has enriched the world of performing arts with its distinctive elements and profound thematic depth. This research paper delves into the fundamental components that constitute Sanskrit drama, shedding light on its historical significance and artistic excellence. It explores the intricacies of Sanskrit drama's structure, aesthetics, and themes, highlighting its enduring influence on modern theater and cultural traditions. Through an in-depth analysis of key elements such as *Rasa*, *Bhāva*, *Nāṭaka*, and *Sūtradhāra*, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the essence of Sanskrit drama and its timeless relevance.

Keywords:

Sanskrit drama, classical Indian theater, *Rasa*, *Bhāva*, *Nāṭaka*, *Sūtradhāra*, *Pūrvaraṅga*, *Nāndī*, performing arts, cultural heritage, aesthetics, thematic depth, artistic excellence.

Introduction:

Sanskrit drama, a form of classical Indian theater, holds a distinguished place in the annals of world literature and performing arts. Rooted in ancient Indian traditions, it exemplifies a rich cultural heritage and has significantly contributed to the global appreciation of theater as an art form. This research paper aims to dissect the essential elements of Sanskrit drama, revealing the intricate nuances that make it an enduring masterpiece. These elements encompass the aesthetics, structure, emotions, and themes that form the backbone of Sanskrit drama. Sanskrit drama is often celebrated for its ability to evoke *Rasa*, the aesthetic essence of emotional experience, in its audiences. This exploration will elucidate how *Rasa* and *Bhāva*, the emotional states, are expertly crafted to elicit profound sentiments in the spectator. Furthermore, we will delve into the conventions and roles of characters, the development of the *Nāṭaka*, and the pivotal role of the *Sūtradhāra*, the director and narrator of the play. By examining these elements in detail, we will gain a comprehensive understanding of the profound artistic depth of Sanskrit drama.

Aristotle¹ listed the six elements of a tragedy—plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song - that define its excellence in the Greek or Western theories of drama. These six components are now recognised as the six components of drama.

We cannot discover any explicit reference of the fundamental components of theatre in Sanskrit dramaturgy. In his *Dasarūpaka*, Dhanañjaya² lists three elements - *Vastu*, *Netā*, and *Rasa* - that set one type of drama apart from another. It was agreed that these three components were necessary for a play. Regarding the components of drama, neither Western thought nor Sanskrit theory offers an agreement. The aspects of a drama are generally agreed to include the story, characters, dialogue, moral or message, and stage direction.

Even if the fundamental components of theatre aren't listed in Sanskrit dramaturgy texts, we may nonetheless deduce them from practical plays and the writings of Dhanañjaya and Bharata.

Drama must be portrayed on stage, which is the first thing to be aware of. It is distinct from other genres of poetry because it is visible³. Both Bharata and Dhanañjaya have emphasised this point, with Bharata writing, 'we seek that form of entertainment which would be seen and aural both'. As Dhanañjaya put it, 'It is called *Rūpa* because it is seen.'

The inclusion of an entertaining aspect in drama is the second factor that has to be emphasised.⁴ Its primary goal is to satisfy, as both Bharata and Dhanañjaya attest to. It is evident that all plays, be they realistic, humorous, spooky, or serious, amuse us. Every playwright has taken the audience's pleasure into mind.

Now, let us consider *Nāndī* to be the first fundamental component of Sanskrit theatre, as no Sanskrit play starts without a prayer to the gods and an invocation for their favours. Alternatively, we could claim that practically every play opens with some sort of invocation to the gods. The remark made by Bharata⁵, "First, I have made *Nāndī* consisting of words of blessings, having eight *padas*," confirms it as well. The reason *Nāndī*, or benediction, gets its name is that it has to have the consent of monarchs, Brahmins, and gods at all times. It is composed of eight or twelve *padas* and should be spoken in a medium tone.

We might address the introduction as the second crucial component. Almost all plays include an introduction, which can be either extremely short or very long; before the play's real subject matter begins. Either the poet or the *Sūtradhāra* may have written it. An overview of the poet and his work is provided in the introduction, and the subject matter is symbolically hinted at by using the *Āngas* of *Vīthī* or the actors' conversation. The audience's curiosity is piqued at the introduction. When talking about *Pūrvaraṅga*, Bharata introduces the topic with complex guidelines. As per the perspectives⁶ of Bharata and Dhanañjaya, following the completion of *Pūrvaraṅga*'s rites, an additional actor, dressed similarly to *Sūtradhāra*, joins the stage and introduces himself appropriately to set the scene for the play in question. He can take on the form of a mortal, divine, or both, depending on the subject matter of the play. He charms the audience with his beautifully worded stanzas before endearing the poet and his creation and hinting at the topic at hand in a few different ways before leaving to introduce the play. This is true for plays in general as well as Sanskrit dramas. Prologues can also be found in Western plays.

We may interpret the third crucial component as the general division of the subject matter of Sanskrit tragedies into two categories:

- (a) To have a stage presence.
- (b) To be made clear.

It is not feasible to cover every topic on stage. Every play has a section of the tale that must be understood in order to understand the rest of the play. It is not feasible to depict every episode on stage since some have occurred in the past or in far-off places. There are also other acts that are necessary but not good enough to perform on stage. Different gadgets indicate all of this stuff. The term *Arthopakṣepaka*⁷ in Sanskrit dramaturgy refers to all of this superfluous material. Five types of *Arthopakṣepakas*, or *Viṣkambhakas* and *Praveśakas*, are employed to designate the topic. Both Bharata and Dhanañjaya have provided guidelines about the subject to be indicated⁸ as well as methods for doing so. The most important thing to know about this is that Sanskrit plays never depict the hero's death⁹. In addition to Sanskrit plays, methods were used in Western drama to signify the subject.

Acts represented the division of the subject to be directly depicted.¹⁰ Bharata and Dhanañjaya have indicated that 'whatever was intriguing, leading to feeling, including Hero and his activities, or individuals associated to him, sweet, and possessing *Bīja* and *Bindu*, was displayed into Acts'. We also see this in plays. At the conclusion of the Act, every character made their escape. Acts and scenes are the divisions used in English plays, and the characters leave at the conclusion of each act.

The storyline or subject matter is the second most important component, without which no play can be created. It was Aristotle's first priority. It was considered as the drama's body in Sanskrit as well. Additionally, the narrative has three crucial components that are necessary for the drama to be complete. *Avasthās*¹¹ are highly important in a drama; all actions up to the achievement of the ultimate goal must follow these five stages in the sequence described, from Bharata's and Dhanañjaya's points of view. There are five *Avasthās*: the *Phala*'s achievement, beginning, effort, possibility of attainment, and certainty of accomplishment. Not all of the *avasthās* can be found in short plays. For instance, not all of the five *avasthās* can be found in Bhāsa's one-act dramas, such as *Ūrubhaṅga* and *Dūtavākya*m. However, Bhāsa has not adhered to Bharata to the letter.

Arthaprakṛtis is another crucial component of the drama. Even though it is claimed that they number five, not every one of them may appear in a play. However, the *Arthaprakṛtis* will indeed be present. Bharata and Dhanañjaya mentioned the following *Arthaprakṛtis*¹²: *Bīja*, *Bindu*, *Patākā*, *Prakarī*, and *Kārya*. *Patākā* and *Prakarī* might not appear in every play, but *Bīja* and *Kārya* are almost always present. The ways by which the *Phala*'s aim is realised are called *arthaprakṛtis*.

Sandhis are the third crucial component of the play's storyline, following these two. *Sandhis* are the divisions made of a play after its stages. Even though *Sandhis*¹³ are said to be five, plays could not have all of the entire *Sandhis* because of the demands of the play. Five *Sandhis* are listed by Bharata and Dhanañjaya: *Mukha*, *Pratimukha*, *Garbha*, *Vimara*, and *Nirvahaṇa*. You can find *Mukha* and *Nirvahaṇa* in one-act dramas as well. Therefore, a drama would not be complete without these three *Avasthās*, *Arthaprakṛtis*, and *Sandhis*, even if their numbers may vary. They are the fundamental components of the story.

Characterization comes after the story. It is also among a drama's most crucial components. Characterization is a prerequisite for a plot as the characters are vital to the *Vastu* tale. Plot is made up of happenings, and as incidents can never happen in a vacuum, characters are created to bring a tale to life. 'Hero' in Sanskrit refers to all the characters; it should be interpreted as meaning characterisation. "Hero" refers to the heroine, her helpers, messengers, his helpers, and his entourage. Three¹⁴ different types of characters are thought to exist in Sanskrit, based on the three aspects of human nature: (a) *Uttama*, or best; (b) *Madhyama*, or medium; and (c) *Adhama*, or low.

Characters in Sanskrit theatre come in a wide range. For Dhanañjaya, the play's "*Netā*" is what sets it apart. Characterization has received a lot of attention in contemporary Western plays.

Following characterization, *Rasa*, or feeling, is the most important component of Sanskrit play. Its significance in Sanskrit thought and practice has been acknowledged in full. Critics from the West have also acknowledged its force. It is in a special place. A play's feeling or spirit is its *Rasa*. It is indeed the fundamental tenet of Sanskrit play, and Bharata¹⁵ states that "No *Artha*" advances without *Rasa*. Upon witnessing a play being performed, an audience member experiences a unique and pleasurable aesthetic high that lifts their spirits above the everyday grind of life and allows them to bask in a completely other kind of experience. We may characterise it, in general, as the spectator's emotional response. In Sanskrit dramaturgy, there are supposedly eight feelings, however there could be more. Every drama has a dominant feeling and a submissive sentiment. The play's portrayal of sentiment¹⁶ stirs up emotions in the audience by arranging *Vibhāvās* (determinants), *Anubhāvās* (consequences), and *Vyabhicārins* (transient psychological states). The persistent psychological states that practically all people have are essential to the arousal of emotion.

The effectiveness of the play's performance now largely on how much emotion is aroused. The production and *Vṛttis* are closely connected. The types of behaviour or styles of procedure are known as the *Vṛttis*. In Sanskrit Dramaturgy, four *Vṛttis*¹⁷ are usually recognised: *Sāttvatī*, *Bhāratī*, *Kaiśikī*, and *Arabhaṭī*. One or more of these *Vṛttis* may be present in a play. Depending on each character's sentiment in the play, the *Vṛtti* will change. Since feeling, or *Rasa*, is the most crucial component of drama, *Vṛtti* follows suit as a crucial component of play since the two are intimately related.

While *Vṛtti* is strongly associated with the four varieties of representation¹⁸ that are recognised in Sanskrit Dramaturgy, it is also tied to feeling. Whereas the *Ahāryabhinaya* is significant in *Kaiśikī*, the *Āṅgika*, or the portrayal of limbs, is dominant in *Arabhaṭī*, the *Sāttvika Abhinaya* is prominent in *Sāttvatī*, the representation of words, or *Vācikābhinaya*, is prominent in *Bhāratī*. These four *Vṛttis* are all made up of word and limb representations. The play is performed and created on stage with the aid of four kinds of *Vṛttis* and four varieties of representation; these two components contribute to the play's delight as well as that of *Rasa*, one of its key features.

After these, comes the element of dialogue or speech. Dialogue or speech is an essential element of the drama, because it is through speech that the characterization finds its expression. In Sanskrit Dramaturgy and Drama, there are various modes¹⁹ of speech. Dhanañjaya²⁰ has divided all the subject-matter of the play into three, keeping in view the element of speech. This three-fold division is 'audible to all, audible to the limited and not audible.' The speech audible to certain persons is again of two kinds, *Janāntika* and *Apavārita*. There is a slight difference between these two. In *Janāntika*²¹ a particular position of the hand is made, called *tripatākā*. In Sanskrit drama, there is also another popular technique of speech, often used in dramas called, '*Akāśabhāṣita*' or 'speech made in the void or vacuum'. In this technique a character utters questions and answers supposing another character to be present but not really present and the speaker is shown as facing the sky. 'Inaudible or '*aśrāvyam*' is that speech which a character utters to him and which is not supposed to be heard. This '*Svagatabhāṣaṇa*' or speaking to oneself is essential to reveal the inner thought or emotion or certain idea passing through the mind of the character concerned, and so the dramatist has to resort to this technique. We also find this mode of speech employed in English and other Western dramas in the form of soliloquy. In the element of speech we may include the text or recitation of the play. In Sanskrit dramas both the '*Samśkrta*' and '*Prākṛta*' recitations are used in the plays as the need be. In dialogue or speech of the characters Sanskrit dramas freely employ prose and verse equally well. Although not so much important, yet we may include modes of address also in speech.

The final verse of the Sanskrit theatre, *Bharatavākya*, comes last yet is just as significant as the speech. Although it isn't specifically addressed in either the Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* or Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka*, it is described as a subdivision²² of the last section, the *Nirvahaṇa Sandhi*, whereby a hope for the welfare of the country, or the people, is conveyed. Nearly all Sanskrit plays conclude with *Bharatavākya*, also known as "*Praśasti*"; the epilogue in Western plays is comparable to this.

The essential elements of Sanskrit drama are, therefore, the Prologue or *Prastāvanā*, which includes *Nāndī*, *Prarocanā* and *Āmukha*, division of subject matter into two, Acts and *Arthopakṣepakas*, or, in other words, worth representation and not worth representation, Plot or *Vastu*, which includes *Avasthās*, *Arthaprakṛtis* and *Sandhis*, *Netā* or characterization, *Rasa* or sentiment, and associated with it *Vṛttis* and *Abhinaya*, or representation, speech or dialogue, and the Epilogue, which includes

Kāvyaśāstrā, or attainment of *Phala* and *Praśasti*, the prayer for the general well-being. A Sanskrit play looks incomplete without them. Even though they aren't specifically stated in any text of Sanskrit dramaturgy, these components might be thought of as the fundamental aspects of Sanskrit play, and they also encompass the fundamental components of Western drama.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the essential elements of Sanskrit drama, as explored in this research paper, showcase a remarkable fusion of artistry and cultural wisdom. The intricate web of *Rasa* and *Bhāva*, combined with the meticulously structured *Nāṭaka* and the guiding hand of the *Sūtradhāra*, underlines the sophistication of Sanskrit drama. This art form not only captivates the imagination but also imparts moral and ethical values, rendering it timeless and relevant even in contemporary society. Its influence on modern theater, literature, and cultural traditions is a testament to its enduring legacy. To preserve and celebrate this invaluable heritage, it is crucial to continue studying and appreciating the essential elements of Sanskrit drama, ensuring that its brilliance continues to shine in the world of performing arts for generations to come.

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3. Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Supra, Int. Ref. I, Dhanañjaya, *D.R.*, I. 7, 'rūpam dṛśyatayocyate'.
4. Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch. I, 11, 114.
5. *pūrvam kṛtā mayā nāndī hyāśīrvarcanasamyutā |*
aṣṭāṅgapadasamyuktā vicitrā vedanirmitā ||
āśīrvarcanasamyuktā nityam yasmātprayujyate |
devadvijanṛpādīnām tasmānnāndīti samjñitā ||
sūtradhārah paṭhettetra madhyamaṃ svaramāśritaḥ |
nāndī padairdvādaśabhiraṣṭabhirvāpyalamkṛtām || Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch.V, 56-57, Ch.V ,24, 104.
6. Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch. V, 162-169, Ch. XX, 30, 31, Dhanañjaya, *D.R.*, III, 2-8, 21, 22.
7. *arthopakṣepakaiḥ sūcyam paṃcabhiḥ pratipādayet /*
viṣkambhacūlikāmkāsyāmkāvātārapraveśakaiḥ // Dhanañjaya, *D.R.I*, 56, 57,58.
8. Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch. XVIII, 26, 35-38, Dhanañjaya, *D.R.*, I, 59-63, III, 34, 35.
9. Bharata, *N.S.*, Ch. XVIII, 39, Dhanañjaya, *D.R.*, III 36.
10. Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch. XVIII, 13-25, Dhanañjaya, *D.R.* III 30-31, 36-37.
11. Dhanañjaya, *D.R.*, I, 19
samsādhye phalayāge tu vyāpārah kāraṇasya yaḥ |
tasyānupūrvyam vijñeyā paṃcāvasthāḥ prayokṛbhiḥ ||
prārabhaśca prayatnaśca tathā prāpteśca sambhavaḥ |
niyatā ca phalaprapṛtiḥ phalayogaśca paṃcamaḥ || Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch. XIX. 7, 8
12. Bharata, *N.Ś.*, Ch. XIX, 20-21, Dhanañjaya, *D.R.*, I.18.

13. Dhanañjaya, D.R., I. 22-24.

pūrṇasandhiśca kartarvya hīnasandhyāpi vā punaḥ |

niyamāt pūrṇasāṃdha syāddhīnasandhyathkāraṇāt || Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. XIX.17, 37.

14. *samāsatastu prakṛtistrividhā parikīrtitā |*

puruṣāṅāmātha strīṅāmattumādhamamadhyamā || Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. XXIV. 1.

jyeṣṭhamadhyādhamatvaina sarveṣāṃ ca trirūpatā |

tāratamyādyathoktānām guṇānām cottamāditā || Dhanañjaya, D.R., I.45-46.

15. Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. VI, p. 272 'na hi resārte kaścidarthaḥ pravartate'.

16. Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. VI, p. 272, Dhanañjaya, D. R., I. 7, IV. 1.

17. tadvayāpāratmikā vṛttīscaturthā | Dhanañjaya, D. R., II. 47-62.

nāṭyavedasamutpannāvāgaṃgābhīnayātmikā |

evametā budhairjñeyā vṛttayo nāṭyasamśrayā || Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. I. 41-42, Ch. XX. 20-74.

18. Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. VIII, 9-10.

19. Bharata, N.Ś., XXV, 86-94.

20. Dhanañjaya D. R., I. 63-67.

21. Bharata, N.Ś., Ch. XIV, 5; Dhanañjaya, D. R., II. 64-65.

22. Bharata, N.S., Ch. XIX, 104 'nṛpadeśaprasāntīśca prasastirabhīdhyate'.

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