



# *Understanding the Natyashastra - To Contemporary...*

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# PREFACE

***I am writing this assignment to prove what I have understood regarding the iconic literature Natyashastra and will try my level best to present my understanding of the literature through the classes. Here, I have included the explanation of the Shastra in brief. I hope this assignment goes informative, successful and satisfactory.***



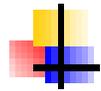
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

***Firstly, I would like to acknowledge DR. Manorama B. N. who has been helping me out like a responsible Guru, throughout the past three months. I thank her for her wonderful teaching and also for all the wonderful information she has educated me with during the memorable process. And, will also expect to join her again through some other means too...***



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# NATYASHASTRA

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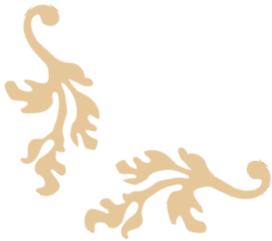
~A BREIF UNDERSTANDING INTRO

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*Here, I have tried to present my understanding of Natyashastra in whole by dividing it into certain topics so to convey my understanding more clearly...*

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***N***atyashastra, one of the most iconic texts written by Bharata Muni, an extraordinary Ancient, Indian writer, is the





***most spectacular bygone surviving text that I have ever studied. I can also say is a treasure of knowledge which does not apply only for dance and art, but also provides us awareness of many other things which are related to our normal life. It is more like an "Encyclopedia of Life Science". I always had a great taste in studying the ancient texts from a really long time. But until I was introduced to the content present in the Natyashastra, my assumption was just that, the ancient texts like Bhagavadgeeta, the 4 Vedas, Panchatantra by Vishnu Sharma and the Upanishads were the prominent texts***



*which speak about life in depth. While, the other Indian ancient texts have their own aims of preaching things was my opinion. But this opinion totally changed when I was introduced to Natyashastra almost in good detail.*

*The concept which usually Bharatnatya Dancers or people of any other classical dance or even folk have in their minds regarding Natyashastra as far as I have seen is that they think, Natyashastra is a treatise just on dance which is totally a*





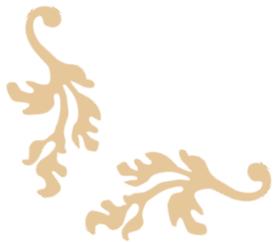
**wrong idea. Natyashastra is not meant for just Bharatnatya or other classical dancers, but is a preferable treatise which could be opted by artists belonging to any classical form or folk form which may be dance, singing, classical instrumentals, folk instrumentals or also may be the live theatre drama artists. It not only says of how a dance composition should be composed, but also speaks about the impact of different kinds of performances on their audience and their consequences which should be handled by the audience. It also says a fact that**



*dancers or any other performers, should know the...*

**CO-ORDINATION OF THE**  
**AUDIENCE WITH THE**  
**PERFORMERS**

*Natyashastra, is the only ancient text which not only shows the responsibilities of the artists performing on the stage, but also shows how responsible the audience are for a successful artistic performance to be fulfilled. In the first chapter of the*





***Natyashastra, Bharata Muni writes about how asuras react when they were depicted as the wrong doers in the performance. But they preached were preached by Lord Brahma of how they should take it positively. This incident referred to in the Natyashastra, can be actually related to our normal life, wherein people, most of the time, take the performances personally by the virtue of which people end up conducting rivals, causing disharmony in the society which is totally opposite to the objective of introduction of dance and drama on earth. Even such***



*aspects, which usually go out of consideration in the views of the people, has been explained in the form of shlokas in detail by Bharata Muni.*

*Apart from the audience, it is also the responsibility of the performers, to make sure, that they do not depict anything which is offending and which can also hurt the emotions and beliefs of the people. If incase, they fail to do so, and exceed their limits at some point while performing, this may turn up to be a great cause of disharmony and the people may resent it extremely. I would like to*



*explain this with a small comparison which I think is appropriate. "A performance, is just like a medicine, to the patient called 'Society', it can only be cured, if the medication is in proper amounts and also if the society coordinates. If not, then the medicine may act as a poison, which may make it unhealthy to such an extent, that it may also be finished off one day".*

*Therefore, Bharata Muni, has also directed the performers of how they should present themselves on stage. Even though if the character is of an ill person, he has set certain limitations even for his/her presentation.*

***But do you think that this is being followed by all the performers of this date? Let's not go too far. To be very frank, except the classical and folk dancers of India, we have come up with many other entertainment sources. It may be reality shows on T.V., OTT or especially our Bollywood Industry. Offensive performance and ill – mannerism during the performance, just to entertain a handful of ill-thoughtful people, and to show up the character or scene with even more detailing, has come up to such an extent that, we need to grade those films in the box office, to be publicized. These films can be only watched by people***

***above 18 years of age, which shows that these are not family friendly. What message is being conveyed is a different matter. Just conveying a great message is not enough. How the message is conveyed also matters. And bringing up films based on communal trends, breaks the society instead of uniting it.***

***Therefore, the all over message is that, both the audience and the performers, are responsible for a satisfying, beautiful and meaningful performance.***



## ONE OR MANY?

*Bharata Muni, the great Indian writer, has written this treatise with such detailing and beauty, that scholars even think that such a lengthy treatise, cannot be written by a single person. But, when Bharata refers to the other chapters written by him in the present reading chapter, it evidently shows the writer of this humungous text is actually a single person. Such an informative writing of Bharata Muni, actually displays about how wide and stretching his knowledge of*





*ocean was. He had the ability to explain each and every small topic in detail providing enough information and importance to each.*

## **THE ANCIENT** **BHARATEEYA SOCIETY**

*The presence of such a personality, like Bharata Muni in such an ancient time, shows how sensible and high moral valued people lived in the society of*

***Bhaarata back then. It tells that, when people in the other parts of the world had not yet discovered fire, or had not yet known to live a good lifestyle, we had such development in our society. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the Natyashastra, Sage Bharata describes the way performers are supposed to be dressed according to their character in the performance. He has also spoken about the jewelry which is supposed to be used as ornaments and also how and where to be worn. He also refers to a number of precious stones***





***which even today have a lot of value in the commercial as well as emotional world. This shows the standard of living of the people and the development of the Bhaaratiya society thousands of years before when the British had not entered India.***

***The way Sage Bharata describes the emotions of each kind of women, different kinds of people living in the same society, educates us about how the structure of the Bhaaratiya society was. Not only that, it shows how experienced might have sage Bharata been, and how much would have he seen life (i.e. of how sensible he was).***



*This can be deeply noticed, when he describes the types of men and women living in the society which is really very true, as it can also be related to our present society, where the only difference is the number of people.*

*Bharata's writing about the make-up and costumes (Aahaaryabhinaya), tells about the particular costumes which are to be adorning the artists, go according to the character, i. e. the place of habitat of the character, according to which, the skin tone or dressing of sense of the particular*





***character will be depicted. This shows that even in the ancient times of the Bhaarata's history, people had their own way of dressing which was according to the habitation or the place they lived.***

***The dressing of the people in different kinds according to the Natyashastra, displays the fact that, Sage Bharata had enough information regarding the people living in the other parts of the Indian/Bhaarata subcontinent. There are many mentions of different kinds of ornaments, which in this date, are unknown. Ornaments like a girdle or***



***Bangles or any other such temple jewelry ornaments, were also a part of the jewelry journey of dancing. The "Solah Shringaar" or "the 16 types of decorating of the human body", also has its origin somewhere from this treatise. The decoration of the artists body was strictly followed according to the performance demands, but now presently, has reduced highly, as dancers want to dress as they wish and will. We, the dancers of this date, have a very strong misconception that, Bharatnatyam dressing, or may be any other kind of dressing does not have***





***any rule. Hence, they try to make out their own, which is actually not full wrong to some extent. If even they have the same misconception, then they need to refer the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the Natyashastra, which speaks of Aahaaryaabhinaya. There, Bharata has explained each and every small point, which should be followed by every performer. He has even explained about the color of the teeth for each character a performer plays, which may actually seem a bit weird to the people of this date.***



# **SOURCE OF INFORMATION** **OF THE OLD BHARATIYA** **PURANAS**

*When we look into the Natyashastra as a whole, we could notice in the first chapter itself that, the Hindu deities such as Indra, who are considered sub-ordinate to the Tri-Devas, also had good importance in the start of the Shastra. According to how much I know, I feel that this Shastra, was not written a long time after the concept of the Tri-Devas came and lessened the importance of these*





***Devas. Also, according to the theories produced by the renowned historians and mythologists, The time of writing of the first half of Rig Veda was actually the Early Vedic Period. Also, there is a theory which suggests that in the Early Vedic Period, people had no such concepts of the Tri-Devas and constantly believed on the other Devas like Indra, Varuna, Agni, Vayu etc. whom now we regard to be subordinate to the Tri-Devas. Because, there is no mentioning of the Tri-Devas in the first half of the Rig Veda, and the only hymns we found were of none other***



***than Lord Indra, "The King of the Devas"  
and the "Deity of Rain and Thunder".***

***While in the second half of the Rig-Veda,  
we find the mentioning of the word  
"Shudra", which denotes the start of the  
"Later Vedic Period" as the Varna System,  
is shown. So as in the start of the writing  
of the Natyashastra there equal  
importance for both the Tri-Devas  
(mentioning of Brahma is found, CH: 1)  
and even the deities like Indra, it shows  
that these deities might not have totally  
lost their importance as it is now in the  
present period, and were still worshipped***





***By the people of that time by some or the other means. There is one term in Natyashastra which is quite suspicious. This term is none other than "Bala" (which may be Balarama) which is mentioned twice in the Natyashastra, once in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, 261<sup>st</sup> shloka and for the second time in the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter and 320<sup>th</sup> shloka it shows that may be the belief of Krishna cult was alive because many historians, like M.M. Ghosh and others, whenever mentioned the term "Bala", they always wrote it in a way, something like this →***

***Bala(rama). They have strong reason for stating this. And, the reason was that Bharata never wrote the term "Bala" with the prefix "rama" to make the whole term as Balarama. Yet, you may have a question in your mind that how is it that all the scholars, take it to be "Balarama" only...? Well, even to that question, we have a strong answer, with a strong reason. The reason is that, in the 261<sup>st</sup> shloka of the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, about which I have also mentioned before, is actually a shloka which tells about the "Pindi" (Now***



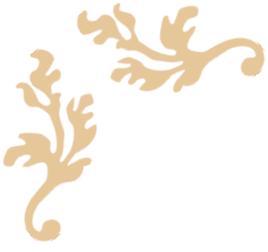


*this is a term in Natyashastra which no writer or historian has a definite idea of what it actually means, and each of them have given different meanings in their works. But as far as I have seen, the things mentioned in the shloka which Bharata calls Pindis is actually a belonging to each diety he has mentioned in the shloka. For example, Pindi for Brahma, who is here stated as "Swayambhu", has the pindi "Padma" i.e. lotus. In the same way, "Bala", who has been assumed to be Balarama i.e. brother of Lord Krishna, has a strong reason to be*



**assumed so, as the pindi for him is the "HALA" i.e. plough. Now, this is a weapon for Balarama, brother of Lord Krishna. But, the most astonishing fact is that, there is no mentioning of Lord Krishna anywhere in the whole Natyashastra, which shows that there might have not been any kind of concept of Lord Krishna, though there are verses mentioning of Lord Vishnu who had actually incarnated in the form of Lord Krishna. But we should not also forget that many people believe that Balarama is also a form of Lord Vishnu. Yes! This belief also exists! Hence, the**



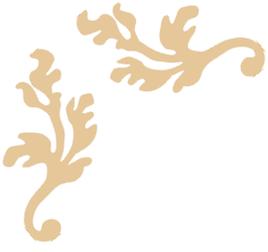


*term is not yet sorted out. This part is actually a "Prakshiptha" i.e. a later added thing. Therefore, may be after the concept of Balarama was found, it may have been included in this text. So, you can just imagine the antiqueness of the treatise which is said to be hundreds of years old or even more! Many Historians all over the world have presented their estimations of the dating of the Natyashastra. But the most renowned historian, indologist, dancer and research scholar, Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, has clearly stated that Natyashastra, is a*



***treatise, which cannot be estimated into the historical timeline, and is an impossible task. Natyashastra is as timeless as Sanatana – Dharma, and it can also be said that, the growth of knowledge of natya, to write the Natyashastra, had already started when the waves in the sea started to produce the hushing magical music, when the trees grew and started to produce treey music as the breeze passed by, and for all this, when a human started to move his limbs to the naturely beats and sounds of mother nature. So, is this actually***





***accurate to estimate the timeline of Natyashastra? And even if done, till where does this satisfy? If we bring about different theories and stories of Bhaaratiya Puranas together, this statement of an "estimated time-line", actually doesn't satisfy as all these stories and evidences, which date it back even more anciently, and present the estimation of the other historians as a false statement.***



## **"Folk" AND "Classical"? Is it TRUE?**

*Now in this part, I would like to question the whole mindset of dancers, regarding so-called folk and classical forms.*

*Before anything else, I would like to confess two things. Firstly, I myself, have used the words Folk and Classical repeatedly only for explanation purpose, as I have no other term to use in place of it for my message to be conveyed easily to the readers. Secondly, I would like to say that even I was the culprit of this*



***misconception which I will be explaining further.***

***Let's start. Now suppose you are a classical dancer, what will be your answer, if I ask you to differentiate between Folk and Classical dance forms. So, as follows may be your point of views:***

- ❖ Classical dance form is a well-defined dance form, whereas Folk is a kind of dance form, which has come up by the common people and does not have a defined form.***



❖ ***Classical dance is associated with spirituality whereas, Folk dance is done in weddings gatherings, etc.***

***Now what if I say that you are totally wrong? You may argue that whatever you are saying is that of studied form your dance text books which you use for your exams, but till what extent can this statement, satisfy your point of all your thoughts regarding so-called "classical" and "folk dance" forms being correct?***



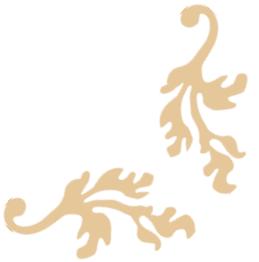


**Let us start with the concept of "FOLK DANCE". Later on, you should try to again differentiate it with classical. The best example from the folks to be discussed here is none other than, Yakshagana. Yakshagana is a so-called traditional folk dance of Karnataka. Now this fact has to be changed.**

**Yakshagana, being called a folk dance, is a well-defined art form. It contains all the needful aspects for a performance mentioned in the**



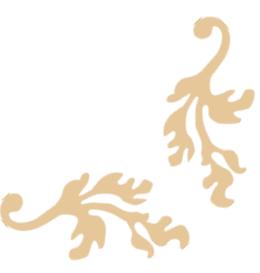
***Natyashastra, starting from dance, music, dialogue, costume (for different characters), make-up and stage techniques with an exquisite style and form. They include all the four Abhinayas, which are, Aangika, Vaachika, Aahaarya and finally Satvika. They include almost all the rules of the Natyashastra Starting from their stage settings till their performance. Just like, Lithuanian is the nearest form of languages to Sanskrit, when we speak of dance***





**forms, Yakshagana is the most defining form, which nearly associates Natyashastra. Then why is it called a Folk Dance? Well, there are no answers. Now this was just one example. There are many dance forms like this, which have such a complex structure, and are called folk dances. When we make a reality check, there is actually no concept of differentiation between classical and folk.**

**So, don't you think that we should stop claiming the classical dance forms superior to folk forms? Folk**





***forms also have their own format, just like how Bharathnatya has it's own way or Kuchipudi has it's own. Just as the so-called classical dances are spiritual, so-called folk dances are also spiritual in nature. Just like how folk dances are performed in gathering and events, even classical dances are also performed in gatherings and events. So why this differentiation? What difference do these terms classical and folk satisfy? Isn't this a point to be questioned?***





## “CONCLUSION”

*Hereby, I would like to conclude by saying that Natyashastra, a great treatise by an Ancient Indian Scholar, should not be claimed as a treatise only for the people belonging to the theatres, whether live or not. It should also be viewed by the common people to know more about the ancestral history. It is a one-stop solution for all the questions, starting from the dance, singing, important societal rules to make yourself formal, or also may be understanding human*



*mind by their gender or the mental.*

*Bharata Muni has proved that dancing or performing is not just about having knowledge of our art, but also understanding nature and learning to handle people with accordance to their mental state is also something to be known by the performer to perform.*

*Overall, dancing and performing something else on stage is not just about knowing how to dance, but to know the basic human mentalities is also important. The wideness of the content of the Natyashastra, which touches almost*





***all the topics, shows us that, just knowing the technicality of your art, doesn't mean that you have mastered it. Knowing technicality, plus knowing human logics of daily life, makes a complete art form... This is what, should be mainly learnt by Natyashastra...***





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**4. *Nandikeshwara's Abhinaya Darpanam***





**5. *India's Ancient Past, by R.S. Sharma***

**6. *Also referred to epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata (Only the parts which are related to music dance and dressing***

**7. *Self – study and research using internet and other small resources like small articles published in newspapers and also with the help of my responsible guiding Gurus***





## ***About the Author***

Ananya. P. Suvarna, is a 15 year old girl studying in class 10 of Vidyodaya Public School, Udupi D/o Jathan Padmanabha Karuna & Lathakshi P Suvarna. She is a Bharathanatyam dancer & has performed all over Karnataka being the disciple of Vidhwan Sudir Rao & Vidhushi Manasi Sudhir. She has started dancing at the age of 5 & is still trained.

Apart from this, she is also being trained in playing Veena & is also an excellent Carnatic Shastriya Singer composing and singing hymns & swaras of her own. She has evolved keen interest in studying the Vedas, Upanishads and Indian mythology and is also excelling in writing and poetry.

This article has been written as a part of her certificate programme on Natyashastra in 2023 batch; under the guidance of Dr Manorama B N.