

Significance of Classical Poetics with Reference to Indian and Greek Tradition in 21st Century

Abdul Hamid Sheikh

M.A. in English
Jamia Millia Islamia

Abstract: Aristotle and Bharata Muni are the first propounders of dramaturgy in ancient Greece and India, respectively. Aristotle's "Poetics" and Bharata Muni's "Natyashastra" are two ancient texts that offer a theoretical understanding of drama and its purpose. Both are treatises on drama and are believed to be the earliest in the field. Both view drama as an art form that has different purpose, but the purpose differs from one another. Aristotle sees drama as a means of achieving catharsis, while Bharata Muni sees it as a means of delighting and instructing the audience. The central term in "Poetics" is mimesis, the relation of the story to the way the world works. This paper attempts to discuss the significance of both these critical texts in the tradition of drama in 21st century.

Keywords: Dramaturgy, catharsis, mimesis.

Introduction

"Natyashastra" is the oldest surviving encyclopedic treatise on dramaturgy from India. It has the same position in Indian performance art as Aristotle's "Poetics" in ancient Greece. Both the texts extends their reach into asking and understanding the goals of performance arts, the nature of the playwright, the artists and the spectators, their intimate relationship during the performance. The general approach of the texts is to treat entertainment as an effect, but not the primary goals of arts. The primary goal is to lift and transport the spectators unto the expression of ultimate reality and transcendent values.

Methodology: To prepare this paper, both analytical and descriptive methodology is applied and help of some reference books is also taken as secondary sources.

Significance of Classical Poetics with reference to Indian and Greek tradition: The theories and concepts given by the ancient poetics are still relevant in the 21st century. However, several concepts have undergone changes and eventually lost their significance in the modern day theatre. Just like the Greek drama, which has performed a part of the ritual of Dionysis, the performance explained in "Natyashastra" were performed in temples, palaces or any other consecrated ground. According to scholar Bharata Gupta, the author of Dramatic concepts: Greek and Indian, a Study

of Poetics and Natyashastra, both classical Greek and Indian theatre strove for sacred action, that is, 'hieropraxis'. They both promulgated worship, philosophical understanding and theatrical representation at the same time. They pleased gods and men, used semiotised gestures, music, dance and dialogue to create a theatricl reality.

However, with the passage of time, the very discourse of drama is changed. Drama has undergone a tremendous transformation with the increasing influence of Christianity. The idea of 'hieropraxis' has no relevance in the later day art of drama. According to Bharata Muni, 'natya' is a world, where things happen that are beyond nature. It Schechner's words, the aim of theatre is not to "reactualise on stage what has happened elsewhere", but to create a world of its own in theatre. However, this concept is also challenged in the later day theatre, especially in the 21st century. Modern theatre is geared towards realism, the presentation of real and possible event. There is also a shift from hieropraxic to secular.

In the ancient poeties, drama is defined as an art which aesthetically arouses joy in the spectator, through the medium of actor's art of communication, that helps connect and transport the individual into a super-sensual inner state of being. The function of drama and the art of theatre, as envisioned in Natyashastra, is to restore the human potential, man's journey of 'delight at a higher level of consiousness' and

a life that is enlightened. This concept is still there in the practice of theatre. Despite undergoing several modernization, the basic aim of theatre remains the same throughout the ages.

Both the ancient Greek and Indian poetics describes the several means of communication between the actor's and audience. In the Greek model, we have words, ethos, pathos, logos etc and Indian model, we have four specific means such as-words, gestures, dresses and aharya (make-up and cosmetics); all of these should be harmonious with the temperament envisioned in drama. If we take an example of modern drama. We can still find these characteristics which were mentioned in ancient treatise on the art of drama.

It has been customary to say here that though "Natyashastra" prescribed four means to communicate with the audience, but as far as technology is concerned, the ancient drama were most probably unable to communicate clearly through words and dialogues because of the lack of good sound system. This particular means is seen to be flourished completely in the modern day theatre only. To bring the argument close home, lets imagine Shakespeare producing *Hamlet* in the time of Bharata Muni. The message it has, couldn't be communicated with the audience as it would have been in today due to the advanced technology.

Both the Greek and Indian system of poetics began semiotically, but in the later application, they are tempered into the lexicon. The multi-channeled discourse was changed into a word-centered performance. During the British occupation of India, realist-naturalist-spoken word centered theatre was flourished immensely. It was so heavily imitated in the urban stage that even the classical Indian plays were produced in the naturalist mode. The ancient Indian system of multi-channeled performances, however, survives strongly in the traditional theoretical forms like 'Kudiyattam', 'Kathakali' and 'Astapadi' dances such as 'Bharatnatyam', but these forms have not been able to enter the urban theatre production. Thus in a way, we can say that the well defined relationship between speech and gestures did not exist in the later-day European drama. Thus, the well known rules of performance in both

Greek and Indian traditions have no significance in the modern traditions of drama in the 21st century. In the modern drama, speech succeeded in making gesture totally subservient. In the Greek poetics, the essential thing in a dramatic character was 'ethos', that is the ability to make a choice. Character is defined as that "which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids". This concept is challenged in the modern day theatre. European dramatists, while keeping a character's capacity to choose, invested a character with so much personal idiosyncrasy. While the ancient dramas were meant to please man as well as Gods, the modern drama strives for realistic representation of possible events. Modern drama have taken the responsibility to reflect the social change and the pros and cons of society.

In respect of music and musical instrument, we cannot deny the influence of "Natyashastra" introducing the musical scale 'Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa'. The music theory in the "Natyashastra" centres around three themes-sound, rhythm and prosody applied to musical texts. The text also discusses which scales are best for different performance. Music has been an integral part of performance as in the Hindu tradition since its Vedic times. As far as the concept of music is concerned, the modern theatre or modern music owe a lot to the "Natyashastra". It is not that the concept of music has remained unchanged since the age of "Natyashastra", but the various 'gramas', 'ragas' are still the basic edifice of Indian music even today.

Unlike the Greek poetics which told little about the concept of music, except the concept of 'chorus', the "Natyashastra" and other hindu text such as "Yajnavalkya_Smriti" assert that arts and music are spiritual. They have the power to guide one to 'moksha', through empowering the concentration of mind for liberation of the self. The aim to guide human being to a spiritual understanding of life and reality is the sole purpose of drama of today. If we are talk about modern cinema even of 21st century which can also be included in the spectrum of drama, we can see several such songs which has the power to guide one to 'moksha' which empowers the concentration of mind for liberation of the soul.

There are several such examples available in the context of modern cinema. For instance, the recent song 'Kar har maidan fateh' from the bollywood film "Sanju". It is a motivational song which does the same job as to guide one attain something good or in ancient term , to attain 'moksha'. Thus we can say that the concept of incorporating such songs in films is influenced by the "Natyashastra".

"Natyashastra" enshrines both the male and female actors in any performance art to be the most important. At this venture, we must point to the fact that in Western theatre, the introduction of female character is a comparatively new phenomenon. In this case, "Natyashastra" gets the credit of being a liberal and non-biased treatise on dramaturgy. The modern drama of today also has special place for the female actor. The roles assigned to male and female are still maintained in the drama of 21st century.

Thus, to conclude, we can say that both the ancient Greek and Indian poetics have had laid the very foundation of the art of performance. Their rules regarding the stage, performance, communication, concepts of song and music still bear significance, however slightly in the modern drama or modern art of performance of the 21st century.

References:

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