

Indian concept of performance

Bharat Gupt

Natya Shastra.

No account and analysis of performing arts would be complete without taking into consideration the backbone and the science of all performing arts genres, the Natya Shastra. Hence we must discuss the contents of the compendium on Indian arts attributed to legendary author Bharata Muni.

NS has an applicability, together with its modern relevance in the arts, including filmmaking and television.

Gupt mentions that there are many forms of entertainment today, but as in theatre, music and other arts, “all our ways of thoughts have greatly changed in the last 150 or 200 years.”

They would not have changed as much over such a period in earlier times, he reasons, “and therefore we have also developed some kind of a disconnect with our past. For instance what does natya mean? Is natya only natak? Natya is something that comes out of a nat. Who is a nat? A nat is somebody who is able to speak to you through his or her total polish — through *angik*, *vachik*, *aharya*, *satvik* (means of expression) and by all the subtle expressions of movements of hands and body of any kind. Then a dancer, a poet is also a nat, a film actor like Amitabh Bachchan is also a nat and Bhimsen Joshi is also a nat. So all those people who present something to a set of listeners or audience using the four genres is a nat. The Indian definition of Natya therefore is not just drama, not just music, theatre or poetry, it is everything, all of it together and therefore whatever activity the nat does is Natya.”

The second word, “Shastra”, he explains elaborately with reference to our country. “*Shastram iti sashanopayam*” Shastra is a method, a way of doing something and achieving the result. He explains the lack of methodology and governance in our country and how everything is under “supreme confusion and there is *nosashanopayam*, and that’s why we are not achieving anything. There are disasters one after another.”

Gupt expresses disappointment that modern education has made us think that shastras written in Sanskrit are forms of “backwardness” and for pundits only and “several generations have been raised to look down upon the classical texts, particularly the Shastras or Smritis, and because we lost the system of thinking logically we are in a confusion. This confusion prevails not only in politics but in artistic life also.”

For human beings to be “effective”, and for their actions to become “predictable”, there has to be a “connection between an action and the reward,” says the scholar. “Shastra is that methodology which ensures that when you do these things in such a manner then the result will be ensured. There will be ‘siddhi’. The audience will be pleased, the Gods will be pleased and the art would have succeeded. So that is Shastra. Hence the two words Natya Shastra. So the method of achieving an effective performance, predictable performance, in the field of any performing area is Natya Shastra,” Gupt establishes.

“The Natyashastra is a very clear science and included various performing arts which today are separated. There are 36 chapters and it is the first text which talks about each of the arts in a

fundamental manner laying down the principles of the art," he says. "The Natya Shastra tells *kathas* whose inner meanings rest on the fact that a performance is not just for one set of people, it has to be for all, unlike the 'A' category films now."

Similarly, he says, "Great Indian films in the late '60s and '70s were for all. Now they are only for rickshaw-wallahs. Today the box-office means something else. Or they are for certain categories. There are no samachar on the television, only *durachar*."