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**COMMUNICATION OF WOMEN'S DISCRIMINATION & SEXUALITY IN
NATYASHASTRA**

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Abstract

This paper will deals with various forms of discrimination and suppression of women in *Natyasastra*, which has been major source of dramaturgy and presentation style of Sanskrit theatre of ancient India. *Natyasastra* is defined itself *fifth Veda*. It describes various aspects of theatre along with the comments on sexual behavior of male and female characters. In these descriptions Bharatamuni tells widely about types of male and female as characters and their ways of interaction. Most of the characters, *Rasa* development, plot and other dramatic devises of Sanskrit plays follow *Natyasastric* recommendations and rules. The paper arises questions on *Natyasastric* portraits women as secondary and sexual object and even it has given freedom to men to synchronizing the women's sexual sphere and advised to use power and violence against women. Here, descriptions and recommendations of *Natyasastra* will be taken as a sign of the patriarchal strategy through those the women discrimination and suppression conceptualized in the Sanskrit theatre and continued for a long time more than thousand years. With the help of feminist analysis methods, this paper will explore the

relationship between patriarchy and theatre that how it was working and what was its impact on the society and aesthetics making.

Key Words: Natyasastra, Sexuality, Sexual Purity, Women, Kamasutra, Brahminical aesthetics, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Natyasastra is the only available treatise which presents a wide description on the Sanskrit theatre of ancient India. It is believed that it was written in between 500 B.C. to 1st century (Dwivedi, 2004, p. 103) by men who were gurus of theatre arts known as Bharatmuni (Sharma, 1971, p. 6-7). *Natyasastra* describes almost all techniques, rules and conducts on the aspects of drama and theatre presentation of Sanskrit drama. Author comments on all aspects of theatre; dramaturgy, characterization, *Rasa* composition, auditorium, music, lyrics, musical instruments dance, and even about audience and success of the play along with comments on sexual behavior of male and female characters. In these descriptions Bharatamuni talks widely about types of characters and their ways of interaction between male and female as characters. According to *Natyasastra* the main aim of the play is to give sentimental satisfaction to the audience and its medium is plot which has to be presented by actors and actresses. The description about all men and women is too much wide and the concern area of this paper is women's discrimination, so this paper will keep focus on types of actresses and Nayika's character.

Being as character

Nayaka (the hero) and *Nayika* (the heroin) are the focal point in *Natyasastra* in the way it describes and explains about characters. Four kinds of *Nayakas*; *Dhiralalit* (mostly will be king), *Dhiraprashant* (will be Brahmin), *Dhirodatta* (Kshatriya, this is the hero of 1st rupaka-Nataka) and *Dhiroddhata* (mostly will be Kshatriya) have been described in this treatise. These all kinds are divided again into some other kinds, according to their characteristics and age. *Nayikas* has been divided into three kinds; *Swakiya* (the wife), *Parkiya* (Beloved or other's wife) and *Samanya* (the prostitute). All these kind of *Nayikas* are again divided into some more types; *Mugdha* (very youth), *Madhya* (youth), *Pragalbha* (elder), *Dhira* (having patience), *Adhira* (don't have patience), *Dhira-adhira* (having patience and losing it some of the times) and others. In total, 144 kinds of *Nayaka* and 384 kinds of *Nayikas* have been

mentioned in the *Natyasastra* (Dwivedi, 2004, pp. 322-330). In this sphere, many kinds of *Nayika* are categorized on the basis of their age, characteristics, behavior and their position in love affairs.

Hence if one looks at *Nayika-Bheda*, it will be clear that *Natyasastra* also has divided the types of *Nayikas* in the same manner of *Manusmriti* and *Kamasutra* that the woman's sex is available only for one man, more than one man or for all, as Kumkum Roy formalizes in her article 'Kamsutra par Nai Roshani' (John & Loknita, 2008). *Swakiya* is wife (available for one), *Parkiya* is beloved or other's wife (can be available for more than one) and *Samanya* is sex worker (available for the one who can pay).

In *Natyasastra*, some more kinds are added separately along with the three types of *Nayikas* some of which have been mentioned before. In the 24th chapter of *Natyasastra*, 8 kinds of women are categorized and based upon their position in love affairs and in the 25th chapter of *Natyasastra*, women are categorized again into three types; *Uttama*, *Madhyama* and *Adhama*.

Women in *Natyasastra*, who are having relation with men, described entitled as 'Eight kinds of *Nayikas*'— *Wasaka-Sajja*, *Virhotkanthita*, *Kalahantarika*, *Swadhinbhartrika*, *Khandita*, *Vipralabdha*, *Proshitbhartrika* and *Abhisarika* (Shastri, 2009, p. 231). Let's have a review of some of these- ***Khandita***- means broken. She is described as a woman whose husband is engaged with the other women. And the heroine is looking for him but her desires for physical intercourse is not full filled (Shastri, 2009, p. 231). Here, question arises that why Bharatmuni calls her broken? It means *Natyasastra* is suggesting that women should have to be with their husbands. ***Swadhinbhartrika***- means independent. She is a woman, whose husband lives with her because of sexual attraction and never looks at other woman, thereby stand completely devoted (Shastri, 2009, p. 232). It is clear in *Natyasastra* that an independent woman is with husband and a broken one is without. Here women don't have separate identity except as wife and as beloved of a man. *Virhotkanthita*, *Kalahantarika*, *Vipralabdha* all are tying that they should have *Nayaka* a man. In the *Natyasastra*, all activities, works and anxieties of all these women are for only having a man and make them sexually satisfy.

Types of *Nayikas* are again divided as *Uttama*, *Madhyama* and *Adhama*, on the basis of their traits. The woman who never speaks harsh word to husband (even also to whom she may is not fond) or lover, never shows anger and is expert in the arts and sculpture, belongs to a high caste, clever in physical discourse, beautiful and honest, without jealousy is called *Uttama*.

Woman who longs for man- a sex partner, clever in physical discourse with man, has and exposes jealousy with enemies (it means towards her husband's other wives or mistress), gets angry for a while and can be gained by a very small effort is called *Madhyama* woman. Woman, who gets angry without a proper reason, is bad in nature, proud and fickle is to be understood as *Adhama* (degenerate) women (Shastri, 2009, p. 231).

In this stratification of women, the portrait of *Uttama* woman is presented as woman who has assimilated the ideal values of the woman defined by the patriarchal system. This is the ideal of high caste or Brahminical patriarchy. In *Natyasastra*, the defined characteristics, have been described to highlight the qualities of a good woman are very similar to the descriptions of 'Patni Dharm' (wife's duty) of Manusmriti (Loknita & Arya, 2011).

In the 25th chapter named by *Vaishikopachar*, *Natyasastra* has suggested four strategies; *Saam*, *Pradan*, *Bheda* and *Danda* (battering, pretence, warning and including of some types of violence like binding with rope or beating) which men can use against women. These have been mentioned as ways to making women agree for sexual intercourse (Dwivedi, 2004, p. 279). For that situation, if women disagree or disobey of physical intercourse *Natyasastra* has given freedom to men to synchronize women's sexual sphere and advised men to use power (both, physical and economic) and violence. By this way *Natyasastra* provides *Saam*, *Pradan*, *Bheda* and *Danda* as a legal and valid medium as those described in *Kamasutra* and *Manusmriti*: (It is recommended in the chapter V-164, VVI-371 of *Manusmriti* that, the woman who does not obey the men or not keeping *Patni Dharm* (wife's duty) should be beaten, award with other punishments or can be thrown away in front of dogs.).

In the description of *Premavastha*-conditions of making love, *Natyasastra* supposes the meeting situation of hero and heroine. The author, *Bharatamuni* suggests that if man comes with the signs of having relation with other women, then the heroine can hurt him with speech, she should say, 'go, go to yours another one why u came here?' and can use harsh words up to a level. She should speak with tears but if *Nayaka* holds her by using physical power or if *Nayaka* gets ready to go back than she should take back her words and try to make him happy and should go with him to make love or sex.

It can be said that, controlling of women's sexuality is an important issue discussed in *Natyasastra*. It never gives freedom or space for women to protest against men's arbitrariness. The other noticeable thing is that in this process of synchronization, author is

aware about women's contribution to patriarchy and they should act as agent and do all with their happiness.

After analyzing the above descriptions about women characters, some major points emerge as the follows:

- Kinds of *Nayikas* are divided according to their productive role of their present social system. But, kinds of *Nayikas* are divided on the basis of their relationship with men. In the context of *Natyasastra* women's conditions are same with *Kamasutra*. (John & Loknita, 2008) does not consider women's role in the production sphere, though a society without women's participation has never been existed in the whole of human history. Because of this, women get a secondary position. Their space is synchronized only inside the house and their roles remain only around the heroes.
- Because of not having any separate identity except as wife or beloved of a man and facing marginalization from all spheres of the society, the concept of domesticization of women became strong and set in the audience mental scape. Along with this the concept of living under any man's patronage became prominent.
- *Natyasastra* considers the *Nataka* as a supreme type of *Rupakas* and suggests using *Divya Nayika* in that. *Divya* means *Uttama* (passive in sexual desires, bears any man and be an obedient as compared to *Madhyama* who have some of these qualities but not so worse like *Adhama*- according to Brahminical patriarchy. In this the good surely belongs to the upper caste). *Natyasastra* represents only high caste women and marginalize all other lower caste women. It does not give space to the women who do not fit in the Brahminical aesthetics in the world of arts and theatre. Even it does not consider any other sexual relation except that the heterosexual one.
- It shows that woman agrees with all the man, no matter one who is the wrong and the woman keeps *Brahmacharya* (virginity) in the absence of the man in the *Premawastha* -in condition of love. It is the way to educate people about women's duty. It educates audience for sexual purity of women, so that the patriarchal system can be ran properly, because sexual purity is the basis need of patriarchy. These, a woman's work are only secondary to the position of others and her primary task is to be a good sexual object for the man.
- Some descriptions about women's nature are nowhere to be found in the drama composition of Sanskrit theatre. So it is not limited to creating characters on stage but

it seems that all these descriptions are written to tell that how should one behave or for educating readers and practitioners about men-women interaction within the male dominant society. As *Natyasastra* declares itself as 'Fifth Veda' and will be available for all *Varnas*.

- In this view *Natyasastra* supports Brahminical patriarchy and synchronizes women's space within the house in which their role remains that of woman who provides sex for their husbands or lovers. The important thing is that inside the house sphere there is no reorganization about women's reproductive role and ability in *Natyasastra*. In *Nayika Bhed* (kinds of heroine) there is no suggestion of protagonist as a mother. These, decrease their importance in the society and as a result woman recognizes herself as a sex object and consider these only job to make their husbands (man) happy.

Being an actress

In the recommendations and descriptions about the female's acting commodification and suppression of women can be seen clearly in *Natyasastra*. In *Natyasastra*, it is written about the actress that, "woman who have youthful age with physical beauty, good qualities (according to the patriarchy-obedient, never opposes or questions to man) generosity, feminine charm, patience and sweetness, who possess a soft and charming voice, varying notes in their throat, who are expert in the presenting passion *Hela* and feeling *Bhawa*, know well of representation of temperament, are skilled in playing musical instruments, have knowledge of notes, *Tala* and *Yati*, association with master of the dramatic arts, clever, skilled in acting, capable of using reasoning, positive and negative are known as actresses" (Iravati & Narain, 2003, p. 63).

From the above note on actress some important points emerge;

- If we see the needful to be an actress, it is found that the first thing is having attractive body and second is to have all the qualities of a good woman (patriarchal aesthetics). Women's body is supposed useful in the cultural form like theatre. Bharatamuni supposed feminine or patriarchal meters as requirement for being actress and that she should be beautiful in physical appearance. Thus by showing the icon of women in the form of an actress, and uphold the ideal patriarchal image and impression of the woman in the cultural mindset of mass.

Conclusion

Natyasastra describes about women according to feminine qualities. And in this description sexual body emerges as essential for being an actress. The image of woman which is presented before the audience- who is very erotic for man, but whose her own sexuality is marginalized, who is sweet and advised to bear man's every action even violence and her only anxiety is to make man happy. Their will works according to men. Her importance is only for her attractive body. This is the heroine of *Natyasastra*. Heroine means the ideal woman, who can be presented before the audience. And this aesthetics and culture of Brahminical patriarchy is transmitted to another social group or generation highlighting the qualities of an ideal woman.

There are two points to be emphasized. The first, *Natyasastra* is declared as 'fifth Veda' by its own authors. And the second thing, *Natyasastra* is acclaimed as a first authorized treatise for Indian poetics (Upadhyay, 2008, p. 99). It means this is the founder of Rasa doctrine as well as poetics of aesthetics. It can be said that the role of *Natyasastra* was that of an aesthetic guru for arts and literature and as a grammar guru for drama and theatre of Sanskrit era. So, manifold implication on sphere of arts and literature.

Every patriarchal social system of this world has set some legal codes for state and ethical codes of conduct for the cultural space. In India, texts such as legal codes like *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti* had been written for maintaining and continuing suppression of women's sexuality in the gendered society of the Sanskrit era (Loknita & Arya, 2011, pp. 242-253). The need was also moral and not simply. So, values of patriarchal sexuality could be continuing through cultural adaptation, if people would get free from these legal codes. These needs are attempted to be fulfilled in *Natyasastra*. And it has worked in assisting women's suppression on two levels. On the one hand it bought the secondary position in the system, suggested domesticization of women in the kinds of heroines as being a character and on the other hand it commodified the women's body along with requirements of youthfulness and a beautiful body to be an actress. I would like to conclude with a point that, *Natyasastra* has played the role of women's suppression and subjugation in the cultural mindscape of Sanskrit Theatre.

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