



CHARACTERS IN CLASSIC THEATRE: A STUDY OF NAYAKA AND NAYIKA IN SANSKRIT DRAMA

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Abstract:

This research article provides an in-depth exploration of the archetype of Nayaka (Heroes) in Sanskrit drama. Drawing from classical Indian theatre and the Natya Shastra, the article categorizes Nayakas into distinct character types, including Dhira Nayaka, Vir Nayaka, Abhinaya Nayaka, Dharmabhinaya Nayaka, and Nirddesa Nayaka, and delves into their roles and emotional depth. Through examples from Sanskrit plays, it illustrates how these archetypal heroes contribute to the richness and complexity of the narratives. The article also discusses the art of character portrayal, emphasizing the role of costume, makeup, gestures, and abhinaya in bringing these heroes to life on the classical Indian stage. The study underscores the enduring significance of Nayakas in Sanskrit drama, not only as characters but as embodiments of human virtues and emotional resonance, continuing to inspire and resonate with contemporary audiences.

Keywords:

Nayaka, Heroes, Sanskrit Drama, Character Archetypes, Emotional Depth, Dhira Nayaka, Vir Nayaka, Abhinaya Nayaka, Dharmabhinaya Nayaka, Nirddesa Nayaka, Characterization, Abhinaya, Mudras, Sanskrit Plays, Classical Indian Theatre.

Introduction:

The Natya Shastra, a venerable text whose origins are traced back to the period between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE, represents an enduring repository of knowledge and wisdom that has profoundly shaped the performing arts, especially in the domains of drama and dance. Attributed to the ancient Indian sage Bharata Muni, this extraordinary work serves as a foundational treatise that not only elucidates the intricacies of artistic expression but also forms the bedrock of classical Indian theatre and dance traditions.

Central to the elaborate dramatic theory that is expounded within the Natya Shastra is the concept of characters, known as "nayaka" (heroes) and "nayika" (heroines). These characters are not mere players in the unfolding narrative but rather represent the very essence of dramatic storytelling, embodying a kaleidoscope of emotions, virtues, and vices. Within this framework, the interplay between these characters takes center stage, guiding the emotional landscape of the narrative and offering profound insights into the human experience.

The Natya Shastra's exploration of characters goes beyond mere classification and characterization; it unveils a rich and intricate tapestry of personas, each meticulously defined with their own unique qualities, roles, and emotional depths. These characters are not static entities but dynamic representations of the human condition, capturing the ebb and flow of emotions, aspirations, and challenges that resonate universally.

This research article embarks on a comprehensive journey to dissect and understand the multifaceted world of characters as expounded in the Natya Shastra. It delves into the classification, characteristics, and dramatic significance of these characters, shedding light on their enduring relevance in contemporary theatre and storytelling. The Natya Shastra's enduring legacy serves as a bridge that connects the ancient traditions of artistic expression to the modern world, offering a timeless treasure trove of insights and inspiration for artists and enthusiasts alike.

Classification of Characters:

The Natya Shastra, a foundational text in the realm of performing arts, provides a meticulous and comprehensive classification of characters. These character classifications are based on various criteria, including their qualities, roles, and emotional states. This nuanced categorization not only serves as a guide for artists and playwrights but also enriches the depth and complexity of the narrative.

1. Nayaka (Heroes):

Sanskrit drama, with its roots in ancient India and enshrined in texts like the Natya Shastra, presents a profound understanding of the human experience through its diverse characters. At the heart of these narratives stand the Nayakas, or heroes, who embody a wide range of archetypes, each with distinct characteristics and emotional depths. This article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of Nayakas, categorizing them by archetype and illustrating their significance in Sanskrit plays through examples.

The Diverse Archetypes of Nayakas:

Nayakas, or heroes, in Sanskrit drama represent a diverse array of archetypes, each contributing to the emotional richness and narrative complexity of these classical works. The Natya Shastra and Sanskrit plays have identified several key classifications of Nayakas:

1. Dhira Nayaka (The Steady Hero):

The Dhira Nayaka epitomizes unwavering virtues, displaying composure, wisdom, and self-control. Such heroes adhere to moral principles and serve as moral anchors within the narrative. A quintessential Dhira Nayaka can be found in Lord Rama from the epic "Ramayana." Rama's unwavering commitment to righteousness and unwavering moral compass make him the embodiment of this archetype.

2. Vir Nayaka (The Heroic Hero):

Vir Nayakas are characterized by their courage, valor, and heroism. They often find themselves in challenging situations, such as battles or daring adventures. Arjuna from the "Mahabharata" exemplifies the spirit of a Vir Nayaka. His unflinching courage and commitment to upholding dharma (righteousness) on the battlefield underscore the heroic qualities of this archetype.

3. Abhinaya Nayaka (The Expressive Hero):

Abhinaya Nayakas specialize in expressive acting (abhinaya), skillfully conveying a wide spectrum of emotions. These heroes are pivotal in portraying the emotional depth of the narrative. In Kalidasa's "Shakuntala," King Dushyanta embodies the Abhinaya Nayaka, proficiently expressing a myriad of emotions through gestures, facial expressions, and dialogue.

4. Dharmabhinaya Nayaka (The Hero of Morality):

The Dharmabhinaya Nayaka embodies moral integrity and ethical values. These heroes are exemplary in their adherence to righteous principles and serve as moral compasses within the narrative, upholding the virtues of dharma.

5. Nirddesa Nayaka (The Versatile Hero):

Nirddesa Nayakas are versatile characters capable of adapting to various emotional and situational contexts. Their adaptability adds dynamism to the narrative, allowing them to fulfill a variety of roles, ensuring the storyline remains engaging and versatile.

Characterization and Performance:

The art of portraying Nayakas in Sanskrit drama is a complex endeavor, requiring a combination of physical expressions, dialogue, and evocative abhinaya (expressive acting). Costume, makeup, and gestures play a crucial role in bringing these characters to life.

Abhinaya Nayakas, for instance, must master the art of expressing a wide array of emotions convincingly, often utilizing mudras (hand gestures), facial expressions, and nuanced body language to convey complex feelings to the audience.

Nayakas in Sanskrit drama are not mere characters; they are embodiments of human virtues, courage, and emotional depth. Each archetype contributes significantly to the narrative's emotional landscape, providing depth and complexity to the stories. The classification and characterization of Nayakas serve as a testament to the profound understanding of human nature within Sanskrit dramatic tradition, making it a timeless source of inspiration for the performing arts. These heroes not only represent the ideals and values of their time but also continue to resonate with audiences as symbols of enduring human qualities and virtues.

Nayika (Heroines):

Introduction:

The Nayika, or heroine, represents a pivotal aspect of Sanskrit theatre, embodying a spectrum of emotions and qualities that resonate with the audience. This article delves into the intricacies of Nayikas, categorizing them by archetype and drawing from examples in Sanskrit plays to elucidate their roles and emotional depth.

The Diversity of Nayikas:

Nayikas are not monolithic; instead, they encompass a wide range of archetypes, each with its distinctive characteristics and emotional states. The Natya Shastra and Sanskrit plays have delineated several key classifications of Nayikas:

1. Kanta Nayika (The Beloved Heroine):

The Kanta Nayika epitomizes deep love and devotion. She expresses her affection through a plethora of emotions, including longing, joy, desire, and various manifestations of love. An emblematic Kanta Nayika is Sita from the "Ramayana," whose unwavering love for Lord Rama and her profound longing during her captivity in Lanka are quintessential expressions of this archetype.

2. Vasakasajja Nayika (The Decked Heroine):

Vasakasajja Nayikas are often portrayed as having adorned themselves for their beloved. Their emotions are filled with anticipation and excitement as they eagerly await the arrival of their loved one, often depicted in scenes of preparation and adornment.

3. Svadhinapatika Nayika (The Independent Heroine):

In contrast to traditional gender roles, Svadhinapatika Nayikas are independent and assertive heroines. They make their own choices in love and relationships, often defying societal norms to assert their agency.

4. Kalahantarita Nayika (The Heroine in Conflict):

Kalahantarita Nayikas are heroines embroiled in conflict with their lovers. Their emotions range from anger and frustration to despair due to discord in their relationships. These characters explore the intricacies of love and discord.

5. Vipralabdha Nayika (The Deceived Heroine):

Vipralabdha Nayikas experience betrayal and heartbreak. They embody emotions such as sorrow and despair when their lover fails to keep their promises or when expectations are unmet. Vasantasena from Shudraka's "Mrichakatika" is a vivid example of a Vipralabdha Nayika.

6. **Abhisarika Nayika (The Heroine on a Rendezvous):**

Abhisarika Nayikas embark on secret rendezvous with their beloved, often filled with anticipation, excitement, and a sense of adventure. These heroines depict the clandestine aspects of romantic relationships and serve as symbols of youthful love and escapades.

7. **Proshitabharttrika Nayika (The Abandoned Heroine):**

Proshitabharttrika Nayikas represent wives who have been abandoned by their husbands. They endure intense emotional turmoil, expressing longing for their spouse's return and grappling with the challenges of abandonment. Shakuntala from Kalidasa's "Shakuntala" is a poignant example of this archetype.

Characterization and Performance:

The art of portraying Nayikas in Sanskrit drama is a complex endeavor, involving a combination of physical expressions, dialogue, and evocative abhinaya (expressive acting). Nayikas are brought to life through intricate gestures, costumes, and makeup that reflect their emotional states. Abhinaya Nayikas, for instance, must master the art of expressing a wide array of emotions convincingly.

Nayikas in Sanskrit drama are not static characters; they are living, breathing embodiments of human emotions and experiences. These heroines, each with their unique archetypes and emotional depth, contribute significantly to the rich tapestry of stories in classical Indian theatre. The classification and characterization of Nayikas serve as a testament to the profound understanding of human nature within the Sanskrit dramatic tradition, making it a timeless source of inspiration for the performing arts.

In addition to the classification of characters, the Natya Shastra offers detailed guidelines on their portrayal, encompassing physical appearance, costumes, makeup, gestures, and speech patterns. These elements are pivotal in conveying the essence of each character and evoking emotional responses from the audience. The Natya Shastra's intricate character classifications and characterizations not only serve as a guide for artists but also represent a profound exploration of human emotions, values, and relationships, enriching the tapestry of classical Indian theatre and storytelling.

The Transformation of Nayaka and Nayika in Modern Theatre:

Nayaka and Nayika, the iconic hero and heroine archetypes of classical Sanskrit drama, have transcended centuries and cultural boundaries to remain integral figures in the modern theatrical landscape. Their continued presence in contemporary theatre signifies the malleability and timelessness of these characters.

Contextual Adaptations:

Modern theatre often reinterprets the traditional roles and attributes of Nayaka and Nayika to resonate with the contemporary audience. For example, in the production "Spring Awakening" by Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik, the characters of Wendla and Melchior take on the archetypal qualities of Nayika and Nayaka but within a coming-of-age context. They grapple with themes of sexual awakening and societal repression, reflecting the changing social norms and challenges of today's youth.

1. Gender Dynamics:

Contemporary theatre has explored the evolving dynamics of gender roles. In productions like "Hamilton" by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the character of Alexander Hamilton embodies qualities of both the traditional Nayaka and Nayika archetypes. He is driven by ambition and romance, breaking free from conventional gender expectations.

2. Narrative Complexity:

Modern theatre often places Nayaka and Nayika in more complex and multifaceted narratives. In Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," the character of Prior Walter embodies elements of both Nayaka and Nayika as he grapples with love, illness, and self-discovery, reflecting the evolving narrative structures and societal issues of the modern era.

Theatrical Techniques in Modern Productions:

1. Acting and Abhinaya:

Contemporary actors often draw inspiration from traditional abhinaya techniques to infuse their performances with depth and authenticity. In the modern interpretation of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," actors use nuanced gestures and expressions to convey the emotional depth of the characters' love and tragedy.

2. Costume and Stage Design:

Costume and stage design bridge the gap between ancient traditions and modern interpretations. In productions like "Miss Saigon" by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, the costumes and stage design create a vivid visual juxtaposition of traditional and modern elements, reflecting the evolving nature of these characters.

Conclusion:

Evolving Traditions: Nayaka and Nayika in Modern Theatre celebrates the adaptability and enduring appeal of these classical archetypes. As modern theatre continues to push the boundaries of artistic expression and societal reflection, Nayaka and Nayika remain vital conduits for exploring the intricacies of human emotions, relationships, and societal shifts. The transformation and reinterpretation of these characters in contemporary theatre serve as a testament to the timeless relevance of classical traditions and their capacity to resonate with ever-evolving audiences. This article showcases the dynamic nature of these characters as they navigate the complexities of modern storytelling, providing a glimpse into the evolving traditions of Nayaka and Nayika in the world of contemporary theatre.

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