



STRUCTURE OF STAGE AS SEEN IN NATYA SHAstra AND SILAPPADIKAARAM

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ABSTRACT

Drama is an age old that can be traced back to very ancient time as old as *Treta yuga*. *Natya Shastra* is one of the oldest found literature on Dramaturgy written by Sage Bharata in Sanskrit. The word *Natya Shastra* also refers to a global category of literature encompassing this ancient Indian tradition of dramatic performance. This text given the detailed information about dance, music and theatre. Bharata explains about the description of *Natyamandapa* (Stage Construction) in the second chapter of this text. In *Silapadikaaram*, the Tamil Literature by Ilangovalikal an Epic in which the author records a great information about the art form – *Koothu*, the artistes, the musicians and the construction of the stage in the chapter called *Arangetrukaadai*. This study analysis all the above aspects in great detail.

KEYWORDS

Natya Shastra – *Ranga Manda* – *Ranga Mantapa* – *Rangasirsa* – *Rangapita* – *Prekshagrha* – *Nepathya Grha* – *Silapadikaaram* – *Koothu* – *Kol* – *Arangetrukaadai*

INTRODUCTION

Drama is the reflection of life, and it makes people aware of the past and the present. The drama theme can also be mythological, historical, or any creative story; it depends upon the writer thought. In Drama or any performing arts, the stage plays a significant role. It is a space for the performer to perform and a connected between the audience and the artist. The place where the performer is performing can be a street play, open theatre or any constructed theatre that is said to be a stage. It is an in-built feature of the theater and other productions since from ancient times in India the drama has been developed a lot. In Indian drama there are two types of origin. One is Sanskrit, and the other is Indian regional theatres.

STRUCTURE OF STAGE AS SEEN IN NATYA SHAstra

NATYA SHAstra

The Sanskrit theatre has a tradition that lasts five thousand years. It is believed that the earliest book on dramaturgy is *Natya Shastra*, written by Sage Bharata; from two thousand B.C to 4th Century A.D., the text *Natya Shastra* is a Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts.

ETYMOLOGY

The root word of *Natya Shastra* is “*Natya*” + “*Sastra*”. The root word of *Natya* is “*Nat*”, which means to “act”. *Natya* is a combination of Dance, Music and Theatre. The word *Shastra* means rules or science and generally in the Indian literature it has been used at the end of the any word to create a new word. *Natya Shastra* is a systematic codified text on *Natya*.¹

STRUCTURE

Natya Shastra is an ancient encyclopedia and a systematic codified literature on the arts, which explains about the dance, music and literary tradition in India. It contains 36 chapters with 6000 poetic verses. In these chapters, the author covered all the aspects of *Natya*, from dramatic compositions, the structure of the play and the construction of *Natyamandapa* to the descent of drama on the earth.

DESCRIPTION OF THE NATYAMANDAPA

The second chapter of *Natya Shastra* deals with a detailed description of the playhouse. In this, the author describes the stage as a holy place for performing artists. Also, he explains about the three types of the playhouses, architectural features of a theatre, positioning of the actors, movement on the stage, stage design etc.²

BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE NATYAMANDAPA

All types of theatre have some essential elements. The most significant areas of the theater are stage, where the performer will enact. In addition to this acting space, these may also be off-stage spaces. There are wings on either side of the stage. Where sets, props and scenery may be stored in the entrance, where the actress waits. In the opposite side of the stage there is a booth where lighting and sound personnel may view the show and they can operate the instruments. There are many other rooms where the artist can use it as for a costume, storage spaces, dressing room, props and rehearsal rooms. It is believed that the *Vishwakarma* divine architect constructed the playhouse.

SEATING AND AUDIENCE OF THE NATYAMANDAPA

In all the theatres there must be space for their audience. There are three seating arrangements: stalls, Balconies and boxes.

- Stalls: it is the same stage level or the lower flat area which is below the stage
- Balconies: it is the raised platforms towards the auditorium.
- Boxes: it is placed above the stage level in the front side and

Now let us see the types and structure of the *Rangamandapa*.

TYPES OF RANGA MANDAPA

There are three types of *Ranga manda* depending upon the shapes. They are *Vikrista* (rectangular), *Caturasra* (square), and *Triyasra* (triangular). Each type is subdivided into three according to their dimension *Jyestha* (large), *Madhya* (medium) and *Avara* (small). The measurement lengths of these three types are fixed in *Cubits* and *Dandas*.

Jyestha (large) - 108 *Hasta* long

Madhya (medium) - 64 *Hasta* long

Avara (small) - 32 *Hasta* long

The large playhouse is meant for God, the medium playhouse for long and the small for the rest of the people.³

THE TABLE OF MEASUREMENT

8 *Anus* = 1 *Raja*

8 *Raja* = 1 *Bala*

8 *Bala* = 1 *Liksa*

8 *Liksa* = 1 *Yuka*

8 *Yuka* = 1 *Yuva*

8 *Yuva* = 1 *Angula*

24 *Angula* = 1 *Hasta*

4 *Hasta* (cubit) = 1 *Danda*

SELECTION OF SITE AND CONSTRUCTION OF THEATRE

According to the author, first of all, a suitable place should examine by the experts for the erection of the *mantapa*. It must be hard, steady, even, and black or white. The whole field must be ploughed, and unwanted things like bones, skulls, nails, and other things are removed. This place should be cleaned and measured by white cotton unbroken string. The construction of the playhouse begins with the rituals like offering auspicious things like flowers, scents, fruits and all eatables of various kinds. After finishing all the ceremonies, the pillars within the playhouse should be raised in an auspicious tithi and Karana, under Pusya nakshatra with the accompaniment instruments. After these, the Acarya undertook a fast for three days. The next day he will erect the walls and pillars. The four pillars represent the four castes Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. The Brahmin pillars should be performed entirely with white articles like clothes, flowers etc. And they are purified with ghee and mustard seed; before the pillars are erected, golden ear ornaments should be kept in the pith. After this, the payasam should be distributed to Brahmins.

In the case of the Kshatriya pillar, the ceremony should be performed with red cloth and garland. In the pillar pith, they should put copper. Then the rice mixed with molasses should be given to the Kshatriyas as prasadm. The Vaisya pillar ceremony should be performed in yellow colour. In the pillar pith, they should put the silver, and for the Sudra dusk, colour should be used for the ceremony. In the pith, they should put iron. The pillars should be solid. The erection of pillars should be done with great care. After all the rules have been put into practice, all the musical instruments are placed.

The pillars should be raised with the muttering over them suitable mantras.

“Yata chala girimeru himavak ascha yathachalaha

Jayavaho narendrasya that thvachelo bhava”

Meaning: The above sutra explains that “stays immovable like Himalaya Mountain and brings victory to the king. According to Sage Bharata, the theatre must fulfill two conditions: it must have a stage that, in dimensions, would suit the story. The words and acting would be clear and natural in the auditorium. The site selection and pillars construction are applicable for three types of theatres.

RECTANGULAR THEATER

The rectangular theatre is 64 *Hastas* in length and 32 *Hastas* in width. Hence the playhouse is divided into three parts they are *Rangapita* – the stage

- *Nepathya Grha* - the green room
- The *Preksha* area – is the place where the audience is seated.

The length of 64 should be divided into two halves. We now have 32*32 for the auditorium and another 32*32 for the stage, which is lengthwise. One – four of the stage area, i.e., 8*32, is *Rangasirsa*. The remaining portion, 16*32, is *Nepathya grha*. Now let us see all the portions in detail.

Ranga Mantapa

After finishing all the auspicious ceremonies, the construction of the stage begins. According to the directions, the jewels like a diamond, gold etc... are to be laid underneath by the experts of builders.

Rangapita

The *Rangamandapa* should be provided with a plinth. The *Rangasirsa* should be higher than the plinth, the *Rangapita* is the stage, and *Rangasirsa* is the surface of the stage. The *Rangapita* is a wooden surface of one and a half *hastas* in height and covers eight *hastas* square portions. It is said that this place has an upraised trunk like an elephant. After finishing the make-up, the artist enters the stage from *Nepathya griha*.

Rangasirsa

The *Rangasirsa* is the surface of the stage in this one – four of the stage area is called *Sadaraka*. It is built of six pieces of wood where the musicians sit. The *Sadaraka* is the wooden wall separating the green room from the *Rangasirsa*. In the centre of the *Rangasirsa* is raised platform of about 8*8 *Hastas* is *Rangapita*. The *Rangapita* and *Rangasirsa* were positioned in two different parts because they were used for different purposes. The entire *Rangasirsa* and *Rangapita*, and the *Sadaraka* are raised to one and a half *Hastas* from the floor level of the auditorium so that it is convenient for the spectator.⁴

Nepathya Grha

The green room is called the *Nepathya grha*. It is closed on the four sides by the walls; it consists of 16*32 *Hastas* of space. On the four sides of the wall, it was decorated with mirrors, gold, emeralds etc... In

front of the wall, two doors are divided for the entry and exit of the performer according to the regions. On the back side, one door was provided for the troop entrance.

Mattavarani

Mattu means root, just like the performer will get to the character. On both sides of the stage, two big rooms are constructed almost equal to the size of the stage and its level. It contains four supporting pillars. It protects the performer from the attack of intoxicated persons from the audience hall. At the time of the pillar building on the plinth, the iron piece should keep strengthening the stage. Different kinds of garland, sweet scents, and clothes of different colours are offered to the pillars, as mentioned above. The *Mattavarani* is nothing but side wings, as we have seen in the present stage. The *Mattavarani* should be built up after observing all these rules.

DECORATIVE WORKS ON THE STAGE

After completing the plinth work of the stage, the decorative woodwork is done with ornamental carved figures of elephants, tigers and snakes to enhance the beauty of the stage. Many wooden statues should also be set on the stage. *Niryuhas* (windows) are provided for ventilation. As soon as the wooden works are finished, the builders should finish the walls. The stage should be made like a mountain carves and have two different floors and levels with lovely ventilation windows so that the audible sound of actors, singers and musical instruments is not lost. The walls are then plastered and carefully whitewashed. Finally, they are decorated with a painting of creepers, men, women, animals etc.

PREKSHAGRHA

The *Natya Shastra* states that there must be ten columns to bear the burden of the mandapa. Different castes of people sit in columns of various colours. Brahmins will sit in the front seat, which is very close to the stage; it indicates white colour. It is to be one cubit above the floor level. The red column seats are occupied by the Kshatriyas, behind the Kshatriyas vaishyas occupied seats which indicate yellow colour in the northeast direction and then at last Sudras indicates blue colour in the north-west direction respectively. There were other columns, too, to accommodate other caste peoples. The auditorium seats were arranged in the staircase form to guarantee visibility. The seats are made of wood and bricks, one cubit above the floor. The theatres in Ancient India were constructed and planned for the general public. The *Natya Shastra* states that the arrangement of the column should be capable of supporting the roof. The *Natya Shastra* prescribed various statuses of the society and the place value of the caste.

DOORS

According to *Natya Shastra*, the rectangular and square theatre has four doors in the theatre. A door is provided for the entry of the actor from outside to the green room. Another door is provided in the eastern wall to people enter the audience hall. Two doors in the partition wall separate the stage from the green room. In Triangle Theater, only three doors are provided.

YAVANIKA

On each wall was a door hidden by a thin cloth called *Yavanika*. This had many colours, according to the story theme; the colour of the *Yavanika* will be changed. For example, if it is a comedy play, white

yavanika was used; hence white stands for laughter. If the story theme is war, *yavanika* will be in red. According to the story theme, the *yavanika* colour will change. The *yavanika* will be lifted by two beautiful girls.³

SQUARE THEATRE

The ground is measured here in 32×32 hastas, which should be the equally divided length and breadth-wise eight equal parts, making 64 squares of 4×4 hastas each. The *Rangapita* and *Rangasirsa* occupy 16×8 hastas and *mattavarani* 8×8 , then *Nepathyagrha* 32×8 hastas. It consists of two doors leading to the *Rangasirsa* as mentioned in the rectangular theatre; the rest of the doors are present. All those mentioned above are to be measured during an auspicious time. Rules definitions and other ceremonies mentioned for rectangular theatre will also apply in the case of square theatre. The outer wall should be made with solid bricks very thickly set together. Ten pillars support the roof of the stage. A proper fastener should fix it, and he decorated it with the figurine of a woman with a tree (*salabanjika*). These are the rules where the square-type playhouse is to be built.

TRIANGULAR THEATRE

The triangle theatre is the equilateral triangle which means all the three sides have the same length. Each side it is divided into eight parts, and at each dividing point, parallel lines is drawn to the side of the equilateral triangle. Thus 64 triangles are formed. In the middle the *Rangapita* is built. With the five triangles the *Rangapita* is placed behind the *Rangasirsa*, and then *Nepathiya grha* is built with 15 triangles. The *mattavarani* is constructed with eight triangles. The remaining places the seats for the audience are arranged. In one corner of the theatre, there should be a door for the spectator entry and one for the entry from the green room to the stage.

At last, behind the green room is a door for the performer entry. The stage will be constructed after observing all rules laid down in the shastra. The rules regarding walls and pillars holding gold in the case of square theatre also apply to the triangular theatre. The author does not prescribe the exact measurement of the triangular theatre. After all the construction was over, the play preliminaries began, which is said to be a *Purva Rana*. As we saw about the stage construction as seen in *Natya Shastra*, now let us see the construction of the stage as seen in the *Arangettrukadai* of Silappadikaaram.²

STRUCTURE OF STAGE AS SEEN IN SILAPADIKAAARAM

TAMIL THEATRE

The identical historical period of Tamil Nadu is starts with the Sangam age. In this age, the development of fine arts like Dance, sculptures, Music, Drama, and Painting takes an essential role in the history of Tamil Nadu. The growth of sangam people fine arts was encouraged by the Tamil rulers., it showed the growth of sangam peoples in various fields, and through this the cultural life of the Sangam, peoples are visible. In the Tamil literature there are many references for the performing traditions, theories and modes. The most orthodox view holds that the Tolkappiyam, Pattupattu, and Etuthogai were returned in this period.

The origin of Tamil drama is closely associated with religious rituals and dance. Tolkappiyam is the earliest surviving literature found in the Sangam period. It is tough to date Tolkappiyam; many scholars accept it as the first century B.C. In Tolkappiyam, there are three divisions: Eluthu, Sol and Porul diagram. The last adhigaranm is Porul which contains Meipaddu, in which navarasa, poetry, and prosody are all explained. The author explains communicable emotions in his chapter, and Koothanool also mentioned aesthetic emotions. Literature of the Sangam period also abounds about drama. Many of the poems in Agananooru, Kurunthogai and Natrinai are in the form of dramatic monologues or dialogue found in dramas. The five great epics were written from the first century to the tenth century, which will come under Sangam Age. The five great epics are Silapadikaaram, Manimegalai, Sivakacintamani, Valayapathi and Kundalakeysi. Among these five, the Silapadikaaram is the foremost of Tamil works, with detailed information on music and dance that prevailed during that period.⁹

ETYMOLOGY

The word Silapadikaaram is derived from Silapu + Atigaram. The root word “SILAPU” are “Silampu which means “anklet”, Silapadikaaram literally means “The Epic of Anklet”.⁸

STRUCTURE OF SILAPADIKAARAM

The author of the Silapadikaaram is Ilango Adigal. He is believed to have written the epic in the second century. The Silapadikaaram is said to be “Iyal Isai Nataka Porul Thodar Nilai”, which means it is a poem connected by content which has the elements of poetry; drama and music are defined as Kappiyam in Tamil. The Silapadikaaram contains three chapters and five thousand two hundred and seventy lines of poetry. The epic was divided into three Kadam, Puharkaandam, Maduraikaandam, Vanchikaandam.⁵

PUHARKAANDAM

Puharkaandam is explains about the event in the Chola city of Puhar, where Kovalan and Kannagi started their married life, and Kovalan leaves his wife for the courtesan Madavi. This chapter contains ten divisions or cantos. The two commentaries of Silapadikaaram are Adiyarkkunallar and Arumpadavurai, which give much information on music, dance and literature in this book.

ARANGETRUKADAI

In the Puharkkadam, the third chapter in Arangetrukadai means “the formal introduction about the stage performance”. This chapter explains about the knowledge and skill necessary for a dance master, dancer, and composer of verses, instrumentalist, drummer, flautist, yazh and instrumentalist.

“Iruvagai kuthin ilakanamarindhu

Palavagai kuthum vilakkinar punarthup

Padhinor adalum pattum kottum

Vidhamaan kolgaiyin vilakam arindhu”

(Silapadikaaram, Puharkaandam, Arangetrukadai, Paadal Adigal: 12 – 15)

And also, there is an explanation of stage measurement, construction, varieties of the screen and other technical details.⁷

STAGE

According to the nature of the soil the site of the construction for the dance stage was chosen by well-established traditions. To measuring the stage, the Kol, (a piece of bamboo stick) taken from a holly hill, with the length of a span between every two of its joints and twenty-four thumb breadths, considered as its standard. The stage was eight rods in length (32 feet), seven rods (28 feet) in breadth and one rod (4 feet) in height. Above the platform the plank is placed and above the plank the four pillars placed with four rods, the space between the planks was four *Kol* (16 feet). The stage had two right doors for entrance and the other for exit. The four pictures of the demons were placed above the stage. They are Vajhra dheygum, Vajra dhathan, Varuna, and Rathakeysuran for the worthy of worship. The elegant lighting has to be used so that the auditorium will not be darkened. In the stage there is a separate place allotted for a single-side screen, a double-side screen, and a hidden hanging screen. All over the ceiling, it had a finely-painted and the garlands of pearls are hanged all over. The site choice and the stage fixing must follow the prescriptions of the *shilpashastra* only.⁶



CONCLUSION

There are many types of theatre; each theatre is unique. It can be categorised according to the structure of theatre. Though the structure is different, the usage and purpose of the stage are the same. Which place the performer is performing is a stage? It can be a proper auditorium, open space and any platforms, etc. a stage can be an open space by laying a carpet and arranging a seat for the audience or spectators. There are many stages, but we use the most common proscenium stage or end-stage. These stages are similar to the Vikrista of Bharatha Natya Shastra and the stage mentioned in Silapadikaaram, *Arangertrukadai*. Because all of these are rectangular in shape, the audience was seated on one side of the stage, and the remaining sides were hidden. The main thing of constructing this type of theatre is to focus the full attention of the spectators on the production, and for the actors also, it will be comfortable. They can easily simplify the scenes and special effects according to the theme.

According to the director or choreographer creativity, the stage settings, props, lighting, costumes, and the total *Aharya* abhinaya will change, which is very important to give life to the performance. Whatever things can be used on the stage, the artist entrance and exit should not disturb any extent. By seeing the performance, the spectator should enter a different world. They should travel along with the artist in the theme of the content called *Rasanubhava*. The seating arrangement of the spectator rises typically in elevation as it moves away from the stage so all the spectators can easily view the stage. So, because of these abilities, the spectator to see well is also influenced by the distance they are from the stage, and this will be helpful for the spectator to create the illusion.

Although many modern choreographers and directors wish to bring new concepts into the performing art to challenge how spectators view it, they want to remove the illusion of the performance. But the most surprising thing is that they cannot entirely remove the illusion. However, the main aim of the performing art is to evoke *rasa*, which can be in any period. The theme can differ but not the emotions. This is what Sage Bharatha has mentioned in his *Natya Shastra* that I mentioned basic things according to your creativity and needy things you can develop your art. This is quite a nature....

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