Relevance of Bharata Muni's
Natyashastra in Digital Era

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Abstract: This article examines the relevance of Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* in the digital era through qualitative methods such as textual analysis and interpretation. It investigates *Natyashastra*'s principles, theories, and concepts, assessing their applicability to modern digital communication, content creation, and effective presentation. Using primary sources like translated Nepali texts, previous research works, and secondary scholarly interpretations, the study highlights parallels between *Natyashastra* and contemporary digital practices. *Natyashastra*, a foundational text for performing arts, communication, and human behavior, provides comprehensive guidelines on philosophical, spiritual, emotional, and technical expression. It emphasizes the emotional essence (Rasa) and the art of expression (Abhinaya), which are crucial for digital communication. By exploring theatrical elements and holistic storytelling techniques, *Natyashastra* can inspire innovative digital content production and presentation, enhancing authenticity and engagement. This article

underscores the enduring significance of *Natyashastra*, enriching modern communication and artistic practices, and fostering deeper connections with audiences in the digital landscape.

Keywords: Bharata Muni, Bharatavarsha, Communication, Digital Era, Eastern philosophy, *Natyashastra.*

Introduction

The Vedas serve as the main and foundational texts of Eastern philosophy. They consist of four main volumes - Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. Following the Vedas are scriptures such as the Upanishads, which further elucidate and expand upon the Vedas' contents, including aspects of knowledge and ethical education not explicitly covered in them; these are collectively referred to as Vedanta. *Natyashastra* is also included as Vedanta literature. Some scholars refer to Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* as Pancham Veda or Natya Veda. If there was a period of *Natyashastra* after the Purana period, it would have been called Natyapurana instead of Natya Veda. By naming it as the fifth Natya Veda without saying that, it seems that it was created immediately after the Vedic period (Bhattarai, 2020, p. 14). Philosophy rooted in the Vedas is known as Vedic philosophy, and civilizations shaped by this philosophy are considered Vedic civilizations. The Vedic civilization is the earliest civilization in Bharatavarsha history of which we have written records. It began sometime in the 2nd millennium BC and continued up to the 6th century BC. It is named after the Vedas, the early literature of the Vedic people (Pruthi, 2004, p. 1).

The Digital Era is characterized by technology which increases the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover within the economy and society. Evolutionary theory, as an explanation of the system we live in, states that sustainability relies on knowledge

turnover (Shepherd, 2004, p. 1). In the digital era, Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* remains highly relevant despite its ancient origins. The main characteristics of the digital age appear to be sharing the emotions, mutual understanding, debate, argument, agreement, and fostering collectiveness. From this perspective, there is a deep connection between the fundamental aspects of communication in the *Natyashastra* and the digital age. Summarizing the communication-related concepts inherent in Eastern texts such as *Natyashastra* and *Vakyapadiya*, Adhikary (2019) has discussed: it has also been concluded that the purpose of the communication process is to share emotions, achieve mutual understanding, reach agreement, facilitate collective action, and ultimately, the higher purpose is to attain Moksha (p. 75).

It encompasses various aspects of communication, storytelling, and expression that resonate profoundly with modern digital mediums. Scholars all over the world are gradually beginning to agree that ancient literature of Bharata is a store-house of knowledge of all disciplines (Kuthiala, 2014, p. iii). One key aspect is its emphasis on the emotional connection between the message disseminator or performer and the audience. *Natyashastra*'s exploration of theatrical elements like set design, costumes, and lighting can inspire innovative approaches to digital content production. *Vakyapadiya* and *Natyashastra* are presented as source treatises for theorizing Hindu conceptual communication, presenting examples to show that Hindu Manishis have thought a lot about both verbal and non-verbal communication since ancient times (Adhikary, 2019, p. 75).

Its holistic approach to storytelling, aesthetics, music, and overall presentation enhances digital communication, making it more authentic and engaging. Ancient Eastern philosophy encompasses a vast and intricate tapestry of ideas, woven together by the shared pursuit of understanding life, human nature, and the universe.

Emerging from diverse cultures and civilizations ...depth ancond wisdom, profoundly influencing both thought and action (Sułkowski, Pikiewicz & Woszczyna, 2024, p. 14). Integrating *Natyashastra*'s principles into digital content creation can significantly enrich modern communication practices. We live in a world where everything is going digital, so it is not surprising that the digitization of ancient artefacts is becoming a common practice. The question is not if ancient artefacts should be digitized, it is how (Land, 2013, p. 9).

Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this article is to explore and interpret the ongoing relevance of Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* in the digital era. Specifically, the article aims:

- **To analyze applicability**: Examine *Natyashastra*'s principles, theories, and concepts to determine their relevance and application in modern digital communication, content creation, and presentation.

- **To identify parallels and comparisons**: Investigate the similarities between the ancient Bharatavarsha treatise and contemporary digital storytelling methods, highlighting how they align.

- **To enhance and integrate**: Demonstrate how *Natyashastra*'s holistic approach to expression and emotional connection can enhance digital content, and evaluate the potential for integrating its elements to enrich audience engagement, convey messages, and share experiences in digital media.

This article employs a qualitative approach, utilizing content analysis and interpretation to explore the relevance of Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* in the digital era. Primary sources, including the *Natyashastra*'s translated and edited Nepali text and secondary scholarly interpretations, provide the foundation for analysis. The study involves an in-depth examination of *Natyashastra*'s principles

and their application to modern digital communication and content creation. Comparative analysis is used to highlight parallels between ancient classical treatise *Natyashastra* and contemporary digital practices.

The *Natyashastra*

Natyashastra, an ancient treatise from Bharatavarsha, serves as the foundation and fundamental source not only for performing arts but also for communication and nearly all-social human behavior. It is believed that the *Natyashastra* was written around 500 BC by Bharata Muni. Before that, it is believed to have been initially developed and established from the oral tradition of storytelling and listening. Adhikary (2014), mentioning Nagar & Joshi (2003: 5), has stated:

> According to the account given in Bharata's *Natyashastra* itself - Brahma created Natya as the fifth Veda which was open to all irrespective of their cast and creed. Before creating the fifth Veda, Brahma entered into Yogic trance and recalled the four Vedas. He drew the Recitative (pathya) from the *Rigveda*, Songs (geeta) from the *Samveda*, Histrionic Representation (abhinaya) from the *Yajurveda* and Sentiments (rasa) from the *Atharva Veda*, which are the four main constituents of Natya. (pp. 24-25)

It is noted in this context that Natya Veda was prepared by collecting various knowledge and summaries from the four Vedas. Remembering all the Vedas, Natya Veda was compiled by summarizing the organs of the four Vedas (Shiksha, Kalpa, Vyakaran, Nirukta, Chhanda and Jyotish). The textual part was collected from the Rigveda, the lyrical part from the Samaveda, the acting part from the Yajurveda and the rasas from the Atharvaveda (Battarai, 2020, p. 20).

Natyashastra serves as a comprehensive guide covering various aspects of expression, conveying messages, and performing

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arts such as dance, music, drama, and aesthetics. It provides guidance toward a holistic vision of expression, encompassing not only technical aspects but also emotional, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions of communication and artistic performance. If we try to interpret it only literally, it can be understood that *Natyashastra* is just a normal book of drama genre. However, all the dimensions of drama have been explained, analyzed and interpreted mainly; this treatise (Grantha) is a synthesized store-house of multi-faceted knowledge that guides the entire human civilization, lifestyle, behavior and knowledge. Comprising 6000 couplets in Sanskrit and spread over thirty-six chapters, *Natyashastra*'s focus was on dance and drama, with music as an aid. The title is a combination of two Sanskrit words - Natya and Shastra. Natya refers to technique of dance and drama, and Shastra refers to science or a specific treatise (Adhikary, 2014).

Adhikary (2014) emphasized that *Natyashastra* is not only an ancient, authentic and fundamental work in the field of art-literature or aesthetic thought, but it is a generalized and multi-faceted, multi-knowledge and multi-disciplinary treatise that is more or less relevant in every field of social life. In fact, Bharata's treatise not only presents systematic and generalized descriptions and explanations of communication acts, but also predictions and control of the communication phenomenon (p. 1). He further writes: *Natyashastra* also represents a discipline of knowledge that comprises a tradition - rich in both theory and practices - that was systematized and condensed in the Bharata's work. Even in Bharata's treatise, there are instances where the word *Natyashastra* is used to refer to the Shastra in general, rather than to the text itself in particular (Adhikary, 2014, p. 23).

It is mentioned by Adhikary (2014) that there are 59 geographical regions including Nepal, India and some other regions in *Natyashastra*, 5 rivers, 7 mountains including Himalayas and 12

Tribes mentions including Kirat. He also discusses about the four languages in the 18th Adhyaya of *Natyashastra*:

1. Ati-Bhasha (super-human language)

2. Arya-Bhasha (the noble language)

3. Jati-Bhasha (the common language)

4. Yonyantari-Bhasha (the language of other animals). (Adhikary, 2014, pp. 64-65)

Kuthiala, the former vice chancellor of Makhanlal Chaturvedi national university of journalism and mass communication, Bhopal, India, states in Adhikary (2014): It is also being realized that this store-house of knowledge is holistic in nature and does not perceive the nature of living and non-living as separate disciplines (p. iii). Adhikary (2014) states, drawing his bitter conclusion: the present day popular perception about Bharata's *Natyashastra* does not seem comprehending the scope of the treatise as much as it deserves (p. 83).

Natyashastra and Communication Model

Dr. Nirmala Mani Adhikary, a communication theorist from Nepal, has developed some unique communication models by theorizing indigenous intellectual treaties. Of them, the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC) has been globally appreciated (Adhikary, 2003, 2009; Dhal, Kafle and Poudyal, 2024). Adhikary (2019) has shed light on the context in which he constructed the SMC by synthesizing primarily the key aspects of *Natyashastra*'s communicative aspect, including some aspects of *Vakyapadiya* as well:

In 2003, a research dissertation (Adhikary, 2003) explored both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication based on *Natyashastra* and *Vakyapadiya* and presented a Sadharanikaran model of communication. In the context of the Sadharanikaran model, communication has been

analyzed as a process of achieving Sahridayata, and the Aadhibhautik, Aadhivedic and Spiritual dimensions of the communication process have also been analyzed. Communication according to the Hindu concept can become a tool for harmony, coordination and unity as well as for Moksha. (p. 74)

Adhikary (2014) has presented elaborate discussion about the SMC, which was introduced by him in 2003 and sketch revised in 2020. He has constructed the model by analyzing and synthesizing the communicative aspects of *Natyashastra*, in line with the Rasa Theory, which was developed from the Rasa-Sutras of *Natyashastra*, using the Vedas and the Upanishads as a basis. He writes: Sadharanikaran, as the communication process, consists of Sahridayas as the communicating parties. As a 'technical term', the word refers to people with a capacity to send and receive messages (p. 321). He further write: they are the parties engaged in communication, and capable of identifying each other as sender and receiver of the process. A Sahridayata is a person in such state of emotional intensity which is coequal or parallel to that of other(s) engaged in communication" (ibid.).

Adhikary (2014) clarifies the relevance of *Natyashastra* to the communication process by highlighting various components of communication that are derived from *Natyashastra*:

The model comprises the following elements: 1. *Sahridayas* (Communicating parties taking roles of *Preshaka*, i.e., sender, and *Prapaka* i.e., receiver pertinently) 2. *Bhava* (Moods or Emotions) and *Rasa* (Sentiments or Feelings) 3. *Abhivyanjana* (Expression or Encoding) 4. *Sandesha* (Message or Information) 5. *Sarani* (Channel or Medium) 6. *Rasaswadana* (a process of wide range including receiving, decoding and interpreting the message and finally achieving the Rasa) 7. *Dosha* (Barriers or Noises) 8. *Sandarbha*

(Context) 9. *Pratikriya* (Process of feedbak). (p. 321)

Adhikary (2014) summarizes the essence of *Natyashastra* and the SMC model, presenting its theoretical and philosophical concepts, and concludes: as the SMC illustrates ...the attainment of Moksha by means of communication. ...Vedas, Upanishads, Brhmasutra, and different philosophers have varying approaches on the concept of Moksha. However, it does not mean that there is no coherence (pp. 336-337).

The Digital Era

According to today's general experience, the computerized or digit-based electronic system, which works with the combination of its physical or hardware and logical or software structure, is known as a digital system. Any computer-aided work can be considered as part of the digital system. Computerized equipment can be found in various forms such as desktops, laptops, notebooks, iPads, tablets, mobile phones, etc. Pečiulis (2016) define digitalization and highlight its characteristics:

> The speed of change in the digital era is incredibly high. The following technologies and their products emerged and spread in the first decades of the 21st century: high-speed and mobile internet, blogs, podcasts, RSS, Google News engines, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, iTunes, mobile phone apps, touchscreens, HD, 3D, Wi-Fi, GPS systems, iPod, iPad, iPhone, smart-phones, tablets, e-readers, Internet television, and image storages (media libraries). Information transmission technologies underwent rapid change. (p. 238)

Shepherd (2004) clarifies the digital era, its characteristics, and nearly all its aspects:

> The digital era is characterized by technology, which increases the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover within the economy and society. Evolutionary theory,

as an explanation of the system we live in, states that sustainability relies on knowledge turnover. In parts of the system which are relatively stable, knowledge turnover is low, and new variation, when produced, is rarely retained. In other, less stable parts of the system, faster knowledge turnover is advantageous as new knowledge is produced more frequently allowing for adaptation to the changing surrounding environment. Mixing and matching rates of knowledge turnover makes for a dynamic but ever-lasting world. The Digital Era can be seen as the development of an evolutionary system in which knowledge turnover is not only very high, but also increasingly out of the control of humans, making it a time in which our lives become more difficult to manage. (p. 1)

The digital era refers to a period marked by the widespread adoption and integration of digital technologies in various aspects of human life, including communication, commerce, entertainment, education, and governance. The digital is something we use and are used by on a daily basis but do not quite comprehend. This familiar stranger has become our constitutive other, our new dwelling (Zhang, 2019, p. 13). This era is characterized by the rapid advancement of digital equipments and platforms, such as the computer-aided operations, internet, computerized devices, web technologies, social media, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics, which have profoundly transformed how information is created, shared, accessed, and utilized.

Introduction to the digital era encompasses the transition from analog methods of communication and information processing to digital formats, enabling unprecedented speed, efficiency, connectivity, and scalability. It has revolutionized the way individuals and organizations interact, collaborate, innovate, and conduct business globally. Many researchers and scholars have emphasized

that digitalization holds greater importance and relevance in the field of communication and journalism as well, compared to the many other aspects of society and human life. Citing Broersma and Peters (2013: 2), Steensen and Ahva (2015) mention:

> Early discussions revolved around the question of whether digitization was bringing about radical changes or minor variations to journalism. However, recently there has been a move beyond discussing the symptoms of the alleged crisis of journalism towards more fundamental issues of digital journalism, such as what "the changing nature of the object itself" is. (p. 1)

Numerous studies, analyses, and research endeavors have explored the digital age, its capabilities, and the transformative changes it has ushered in. Researchers have delved extensively into the trends of digital media, as well as the opportunities and challenges it presents. Turner (2018) writes:

> Stuart Cunningham and David Craig (in press), for instance, suggest that we need to distinguish between what happened in the news and information sector and what happened in relation to what they call social media entertainment (SME). In their analysis of SME - that is, user-generated online entertainment - Cunningham and Craig describe a hybrid sector of pro-am production, distribution and consumption that has remained largely outside the control of the mainstream media companies. (pp. 3-4)

The digital era has democratized access to information and opportunities, bridging geographical boundaries and empowering individuals to express themselves, connect with others, and access resources and services remotely. It has also spurred disruptive changes in industries, driving digital transformation, automation, and new communication and business models as well. New generation is essentially different from previous generations because of

their constant and frequent use of digital technologies (Gallardo-Echenique et al., 2015, p. 164).

As society becomes increasingly reliant on digital technologies for everyday tasks and experiences, the digital era raises critical questions and challenges regarding digital literacy, privacy, cybersecurity, ethical use of data, digital divide, and societal impact. Navigating the complexities of the digital era requires continuous adaptation, innovation, and responsible stewardship of technology to harness its full potential for positive transformation and sustainable development.

Natyashastra and Digital Era

The digital transforms our mode of existence, reconfigures our patterns of consciousness, and reshapes our collective unconscious (Zhang, 2019, p. 13). In the digital era, *Natyashastra* remains highly relevant despite its ancient origins. When the *Natyashastra* encompasses various aspects of communication, storytelling and expression that resonate profoundly with modern digital mediums. One key aspect of *Natyashastra* is its emphasis on the emotional connection between the message disseminator or performer and the audience. As it is mentioned in *Natyashastra*: there is no such knowledge, no craft, no lore, no art, no yoga, no action, which is not seen in this *Natyashastra*. In this *Natyashastra*, all scriptures, all arts and various kinds of works have been collected and organized (Bhattarai, 2020, p. 58).

Additionally, *Natyashastra*'s exploration of different theatrical elements such as set design, costumes, and lighting can inspire innovative approaches to digital content production. Incorporating elements of visual spectacle and theatricality can elevate digital storytelling and capture audience attention in a crowded online space. *Natyashastra* does not just focus on the narrative but also on aesthetics, music, and overall presentation.

Its detailed guidelines on body language, gestures, and facial expressions are incredibly relevant in digital communication.

The digital age is one in which the validity and relevance of certain Deleuzean concepts, such as deterritorialization, rhizome, the virtual, and voyage in situ, become obvious (Zhang, 2019, p. 19). The characteristics, characteristics, trends, possibilities, and challenges of the digital age are limitless. Many academic studies have been conducted on this topic worldwide. In a similar study conducted in USA a decade ago, it is written:

> A lot of scholarship and public intellectual effort has been spent tracking down the ways these specific technologies have, in some way, changed our relationship to rhetoric, or to each other (the Facebook effect), or to knowledge (the googlization of everything), or have, in broader terms, tried to argue that "digital media" - whatever it is, and whatever it encompasses - is, in broad strokes, good or bad for people. (McKain, 2012, pp. 14-15)

Another aspect of *Natyashastra* that resonates with the digital era is its holistic approach to storytelling. With the rise of video content and virtual communication platforms, understanding non-verbal cues and expressions is essential for effective communication. Integrating *Natyashastra*'s principles into digital content creation can enhance the authenticity and engagement of the content. In today's multimedia-rich digital environment, this holistic approach is key to creating immersive and captivating stories across various platforms. The relationship between rhetoric like *Natyashastra* and the digital age has been intensively studied for decades, and this trend has naturally increased. In this regard, Porter (2009) wrote in one of his research articles:

> With the emergence and, now, ubiquity of internet-based communication, it is long past time to revive the rhetorical canon of delivery. Not your father's Oldsmobile but an

updated vehicle, an expanded and retheorized notion of delivery designed for the distinctive rhetorical dynamics of internet-based communication. (p. 207)

In today's digital landscape, where content consumption is highly interactive and participatory, this emotional connection is crucial for engaging audiences. Techniques such as Rasa Sutra in *Natyashastra* can be applied to digital storytelling, enabling creators to evoke specific emotions and create impactful experiences for their audience.

Conclusion

A basic principle that must be kept in view is this: the advent of new technologies is not merely an opportunity to do old things in new ways, but an invitation to re-consider what might be done (Land, 2013 p. 10). In today's digital era, where technology has revolutionized how we create, consume, and interact with communication media, art, and culture - *Natyashastra*'s insights offer valuable perspectives. This concept finds resonance in digital storytelling and content creation, where creators strive to evoke emotional responses and engage audiences on a deeper level. Steensen and Ahva (2015) have stated:

Many scholars have argued that we need better ways of conceptualizing what journalism is and how it develops in a digital age. There is, however, a lack of knowledge regarding what the theoretical trends within the interdisciplinary domain of journalism studies are today and to what extent contemporary inquiries into journalism are framed by emerging theories and perspective. (p. 1)

The study of Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* in the digital era is not just a nostalgic look back at ancient traditions, but also a subject of dynamic exploration that continue to enrich and inspire contemporary communication and artistic practices

in the digital landscape. *Natyashastra*'s timeless principles of emotional connection, non-verbal communication, holistic storytelling, and theatrical aesthetics make it highly relevant and adaptable to the challenges and opportunities of the digital era. By integrating *Natyashastra*'s insights into digital content creation and communication strategies, creators can enrich the digital experience and forge deeper connections with their audiences.

Pečiulis (2016) write his concluding remarks about digitalization: the most frequently mentioned characteristics of the digital era are interactivity, momentariness, mass authorship, and declining physical spaces. Open access allows one to easily use endless information with the help of hyperlinks (p. 244). Along with dynamic times and natural changes in society, the weapons, tools, equipment, and technology used by people, as well as their methods of use and relevance, keep changing. Consequently, people's and society's lifestyles, customs, work styles, and habits also change. With this change, today's people and society have reached the digital age. Distinctive features of the new communication are hybrid nature and convergence, which manifest themselves through the variety in forms of content (ibid.). The relevance, purpose, and application of *Natyashastra* are very different from mythological assumptions; however, they are completely aligned with its developed digital form according to contemporary relevance, purpose, and application.

The *Natyashastra* itself is an important source of thought, theory, and philosophy. Although it was created in a very old era, its guidelines -mainly in the fields of communication, art, and life skills - along with its methods, beliefs, interpretations, formulas, theories, and philosophies are timeless. In fact, Bharata's treatise not only presents systematic and generalized descriptions and explorations of communication acts, but also predictions and control of the communication phenomenon (Adhikary, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, the importance and relevance of *Natyashastra* are as significant now as

they were in the past; in the digital age, they are not diminished but rather enhanced.

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