

Parallels and Disparities in *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Poetics*

Kaumodaki: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
[A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; Indexed in NepJoL]
ISSN: 2822 - 1567 (Print); ISSN: 2822 -1583 (Online)
Published by Research Management Cell, Vinduwasini
Sanskrit Vidyapeeth (Campus)
Nepal Sanskrit University, Pokhara, Nepal
<https://ejournal.vsc.edu.np>

Churamoni Kandel

Department of English, Vinduwasini Sanskrit Vidyapeeth (Campus), Pokhara, Nepal

Article History: Submitted 26 Sep. 2022; Reviewed 28 Oct. 2022; Accepted 10 Nov. 2022

Corresponding Author: Churamoni Kandel, **Email :** churamoni39@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/kdk.v3i1.52088>

Abstract

This paper interprets the parallels and disparities in Nāṭyaśāstra and Poetics. The former treatise of drama is set by Bharatmuni from the East; the latter by Aristotle from the West. Hence, these dramaturgies form the bases for the eastern and western plays, respectively. Despite the time and spatial differences between the two, they contain similarities as well as differences. They share the common dramatic elements like gestures, dance and music; rhythm, poet and mimesis; plot, sub-plot and supernatural elements; art and imitation; rasa (evocation of emotion) and catharsis. Likewise, they contain the elements of disparities like language-style differences, semiotic and semantics, abhinaya (acting) and art, the absence of tragedy in the former, Rasa to the former and plot and character to the latter. This researcher explores how these elements of parallels and disparities in the two theories of dramas fit to the eastern and western plays, despite their spatial and temporal gaps. This research is exploratory and explanatory.

Keywords: Disparities, dramaturgies, *nāṭya*, parallels, *rasa*

Introduction

This paper explores the parallels and disparities in *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*NS*) and *Poetics* (*PT*). These dramaturgies form the bases for writing the plays of the East and West. Bharatmuni's *NS* owes credit for the origin of the theory of Sanskrit drama. Keith examines, "the origin of Sanskrit drama is preserved in the *NS*, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama" (12). Literary criticism in India lies in the earliest known works in Sanskrit like the *Vedas* or the *Itihāsas* (*Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*). However, a systematic exposition of the principles of drama lies in Bharatmuni's *NS*. It claims for the drama "divine origin and a close connection with the sacred *Vedas* themselves" (Keith 12). Brahmā is the creator of universe. Eswaran asserts, "This universe comes forth from Brāhamāna, exist in Brāhmāna, and will return to Brāhmāna verily, all is Brahman" (127). So, Gods approach to the Brahmā to produce something to give pleasure to the ears and eyes to the *Sūdras*. In

Copyright 2023 © the Author(s) and the Publisher



Kaumodaki : Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, Vol. 03, January 2023 [pp. 11 - 17]

response, he composes *Nāṭyaveda*, taking the element of recitation from the *Rigveda*, song from the *Sāmaveda*, mimetic art from the *Yajurveda*, and sentiment or emotion from the *Atharvaveda*.

Aristotle's *PT* is a base for the origin of western plays. It studies the origins of 'comedy' and 'tragedy'. It is "a systematic discussion of the treatise on poetry" (Adams 49). It is a fundamental text for the play. House supposes, "it is the earliest surviving treatises to record and distinguish systematically one poetic "kind" from another" (13). Literatures of Europe find *PT* as a source to distinguish its 'kinds' like tragedy, comedy, epic, and lyric. Literary criticism in the West lies in Homeric hymns, while a systematic study starts with the writings of Plato and Aristotle. This researcher attempts to draw parallels and disparities between *NS* and *PT*. Thus, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- (a) What are the parallels and disparities in *NS* and *PT*?
- (b) How do these dramaturgies form the bases for eastern and western dramas?

This study analyzes the parallels and disparities in two theories, employing the comparative theory of literature. Common elements in literary arts help to draw parallels. Events and elements that do not come in term to one another help to draw disparities. Comparative events need elaborations to understand the affinities and chasms. Events and elements do not match until they fall to single category or class. For instance, dramaturgies on *NS* and *PT* abound certain commonalities and contrasts which dramaturgies on novels and dramas do not. The two dramatic theories get better clarified when comparison reveals differences rather than similarities, to understand each system better. The following elements analyze the parallels between the two theories, *NS* and *PT*.

Gestures, Dance, and Music in *NS* and *PT*

The origin of Sanskrit drama lies in religious ceremonies. The ancient religious rites and rituals confirm to this fact. Indian dramaturgy makes a study of music, dance and gesture that transforms the object of imitation. Bharatmuni calls it either *lokadharmi* or *nāṭyadharmi*. Keith notices, "the religion of Kṛiṣṇa, and the rough dramatic sketches performed at Almora at the Holi festival" (45), are religion bound. To reach close to the inception of eastern drama, Śekhar finds it a "semi-religious origin from the art of dancing" (48). Kālidāsa sums up his conception of *Nāṭya* in the first Act of *Mālavikāgnimitram*:

*devānāmidamāmananti munayah kāntam Kratuma Cākṣuṣāma
rudrenedamumākritavyakare Svānge vibhaktam dvidhā
traigunyodbhavamatra lokacaritam nānārasam drsyate
nāṭyam bhinnarucher janasya bahudhāpyekam samārādhanam
(Mālavikāgnimitram, Act I)*

'Sages look upon this as a sacrifice that is pleasing to the eyes of the gods; Rudra has divided it into two parts in his own person which is blended with that of Ūmā. Herein are to be observed the actions of the people prompted by

the three qualities, and exhibiting various sentiments: the dramatic art is the one chief amusement of the people, albeit they have diverse tastes.' (Devadhar 9-11)

Kālidāsa analyzes *Nāṭya* as a sacrifice that soothes the eyes of the gods. Dance in a drama amuses the gods, demons, and earthly people, despite of the various tastes they keep. It is a balanced visual rite of the gods. Its wild and gentle modes appear in Śiva's androgynous body; and human action arising from the three strands of nature produces its various forms of *rasa* (evocation of emotion).

NŚ and *PT* are the arts of sacred drama. They please both gods and men. They use "semiotised gesture, dance, music, and dialogue" (Gupt i) to create an ornate theatrical reality. Rājan asserts, "*NŚ* claims a divine origin for itself" (29). The historical evolution of both the theatrical traditions originates from 'dance'. She further thinks, "Sanskrit drama leans heavily on dance-technique" (35). The origin of Greek drama lies in the ritual of primitive religion and play acting of children. Śekhara asserts, "In Greece the drama is said to have originated in the mass singing of chants at the gay festival of Bacchus" (48). It evolves from ancient Egyptian and Greek rituals. The performance of ceremonies in the same way again and again has a propitious effect on the relationship between the people and their gods. Aristotle postulates, "all poetry being a form of Imitation, closely linked in this to Music" (qtd. in House 38). Entertainment to audiences through dramatic artists is the feature of a drama. "The origination of drama from the Dionysian religious rites in Greece has remained as a communal rite" (Iwuchukwu 13). All these instances demonstrate the importance of dance and music in the eastern and western plays. In *NŚ* and *PT*, the theatres space is divided into areas meant predominantly for speech activity, dance motions and musical expressions.

Rhythm, Poet, and Mimesis in *NŚ* and *PT*

Rhythm is the common basis for speech, meter and song in the dramatic traditions of East and West. A juxtaposition of Greek musical theory with the Indian musical system called *Gandharva*, is identical. Both theories introduce "theatre as the business of transforming reality, not of depicting it" (Banuand). It provides a deep emotional arousal and a consequent psychological relief to the audience. The Greek word 'poet' stands for 'maker', which matches to Sanskrit notion of a poet as *prajāpati*. *Kavikāntadarśī* and *nanriśi kavi* identify to Latin word for the poet, *Vates*, meaning 'seer of foreseer'. This notion of the poet as 'semi-divine' is same in both the theories. *PT* is aesthetics in relation to poetry. *NŚ* concerns to the fundamentals of art; it devotes attentions to the details of the process. Its concepts of *Hitopadesajnanam* (instruction), *Visrantijananam* (relief), and *Vinodajananam* (entertainment) constitute the aim and function of art. Aristotle expresses 'mimesis' (imitation) that coincides to the term of treatment of *anukaranama* by Bharatamuni.

Plot, Sub-plot, and Supernatural Elements in *NŚ* and *PT*

NŚ analyzes 'plot' as the body of drama. It has two divisions: *ādhikārika* (main plot)

and *Prāsangika* (sub-plot). The former concerns to the main characters and the latter with characters other than the hero and heroine. *NŚ* introduces kings and heroes of the history as its subjects. As with Greek tragedies, Sanskrit plays include mythical persons and the subject of epic poetry. Supernatural beings play important roles in them. “Of the two-principal type of dramas, the *nātaka* plays feature stories about kings and divine beings. The *prakaraṇa* plays introduce stories that revolve around middle-class characters” (Theatre). *Abhijnānaśākuntalam* (“Śakuntalā Recognized by a Token”) and *Mālavikāgnimitra* (“Mālavika and Agnimitra”) by Kālidāsa fall under the category of *nātaka* plays whereas *Mṛcchakaṭikā* (“Little Clay Cart”) by Śūdraka and *Mālatī-Mādhava* (“Mālatī and Mādhava”) by Bhavabhūti fall under the category of *prakaraṇa* plays. Aristotle introduces 'plot' as an intrinsic element of a play. He finds "the structure of the plot as requisite to a good poem" (qtd. in Adams 50). He analyzes it as an arrangement of the incidents, the series of events that give a story its meaning and effect. He finds it more important than the character, for all the human happiness and misery takes the form of action. *PT* considers plot as an element of tragedy only.

Art as imitation in *NŚ* and *PT*

The classification of drama into prologues, acts and epilogues; the way in which actors make their entrance and exit; the themes, characters, constitute the dramaturgies of the East and West. *Prastāvanā* in Sanskrit plays resemble prologue in *PT*. In both the cases, the subject of drama is set forth before the audience prior to actual beginning of the play. This is done by the *sutrādharma* in Sanskrit which has no such name in Greek drama. *NŚ* classifies characters into superior, middling and inferior. *PT* typifies them as above the level of goodness, or beneath it, or just as others are. Both theorists agree to the fact that an art is an imitation of reality. *NŚ* demonstrates the imitation of action on the stage. *PT* finds the art of poetry imitating the imaginative inspiration in language.

Rasa and Catharsis in *NŚ* and *PT*

NŚ explores *rasa* (evocation of emotion) as an aesthetic experience of the spectators. It is a clinical, spiritual and aesthetic concept that goes parallel to catharsis in *PT*. *NŚ* categorizes *rasa* (evocation of emotion) into nine: *Rati* (love), *Hāsya* (laughter), *Śoka* (grief), *Krodha* (anger), *Utsāha* (heroic), *Bhaya* (fear), *Jugupsa* (odious), *Vismaya* (marvelous), and *Nirvaidā* (detachment). *PT* introduces catharsis to excite the emotions of pity and fear. Aristotle points out, “it is the effect of tragedy on the emotions” (qtd. in House 16). The excitation accomplishes catharsis (purgation of impurities) of the emotions, which means tragedy excites these emotions only to purge them of their baser and disturbing element. Having differences of language, time, place and culture in the two theories, *rasa* (evocation of emotion) and catharsis have similitudes, and dominate the aesthetical and literary criticism even after the lapse of centuries. These two dramaturgies stand apart to one another too. The following elements constitute the disparities between the two theories.

Language-style differences in *NŚ* and *PT*

The eastern theory of drama proposes characters to speak Sanskrit language. “The theory of drama as laid down in the *NŚ* prescribes the use of Sanskrit by characters belonging to noble class” (Bhat). They employ lyrical verses for conversations. For instance, in *Abhijnānaśākuntalam* (“Śakuntalā Recognized by a Token”), the king, sages, generals, ministers, chamberlains, and occasionally women of learning use classical Sanskrit language. Keith finds “Prākṛita appears mainly in the dialogue, Sanskrit pre-eminently in verses” (73). Inferior characters speak in the vernacular known as Prākṛita. Characters in the western plays employ verses for high and grave matters. For instance, in *As You Like It*, Duke Frederick dismisses Orlando in verse, as he asserts, “Thou shouldst have better pleased me with this deed / Hadst thou descended from another house. / But fare thee well” (Act I, Scene II). Similarly, he speaks in verse when he banishes Rosalind, “Within these ten days if that thou be’st found / So near our public court as twenty miles, / Thou diest for it” (Act I, Scene III). Thus, language-style differs in the comedy in the East to comedy in the West.

NŚ for semiotic whereas *PT* for semantic

NŚ is diametrical opposite of *PT* in certain aspects. The practice of different cultures leads to the emergence of disparities between the two theories. Gupt asserts, “*NŚ* is semiotic through and through whereas *PT* is semantics” (i). ‘Semiotics’ is the study of sign process and meaningful communication. In other words, it is the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behavior; the analysis of systems of communication, as language, gestures, or clothing. *NŚ* analyses *abhinaya* (acting) of characters with an “emotional and contextual import of the presentation” (Jānaki 529). They perform *abhinaya* (acting) through costumes, ornaments; paintings of men and women; body movements and facial expressions; voice in songs, dialogues, chanting; temperament or emotions; etc. As Sanskrit plays demonstrate most of the actions through *abhinaya* (acting), so, *NŚ* is semiotic.

‘Semantics’ in *PT* is the study of meaning and interpretation of words, signs, and sentence structure. It expresses the role a ‘word’ plays in the language. In other words, it is the study of ‘word’ that can be manipulated to influence human thoughts and actions. Aristotle finds a poet an “imitator and a creator” (qtd. in Adams 49), who makes the meaning of events through a medium of “words” (49). His *PT* makes a study of dramaturgy of poetry that analyses tragedy, comedy, epic poetry, dithyrambic poetry, music of the flute and of the lyre “in their general conception modes of imitation” (qtd. in Adams 50). Amongst the principles of tragedy, he analyzes ‘diction’ as “the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose” (54). He attempts to reduce drama to its language, and the language itself to its least poetic element, the study. So, *PT* is semantics.

Abhinaya* (acting) in *NŚ* and Art in *PT

Indian approach creates an entirely artistic universe independent of the one we live in. "Sanskrit drama leans heavily on dance-technique" (Rājan 34). Greek theorists preoccupy with gauging art in terms of the worldly objects and experiences. Gestures, dialogues are the means of presenting or representing the actions. *Abhinaya* (acting) and its theory in *NŚ* does not comply with Greek's gestures, dance and choreology of the *PT*.

Absence of Tragedy in *NŚ*

Eastern plays end in delights. Bhattachārjī makes a study of Sanskrit drama that "evades the graver issues of life" (6). It avoids murdering, killing, and kissing on the stage. Śekhara analyzes the absence of tragedy or violence in it is due to "the object of all art in India was the attainment of eternal bliss through the triple agencies of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma*, precluding all the possibilities of tragic plays" (58). Bhattachārjī explores the reasons for its absence as, "life to the Indian is not one but many; what remains unfulfilled in this life is completed in the next" (58). They believe, "we are all potentially Brahman, not so many imperfect individuals with private frustrations and suffering" (58). *NŚ* asserts happy ending of plays. It popularizes comedy. So, 'tragedy' is absent in it. In contrast, *PT* makes a study of it at length. Aristotle introduces the six formative elements of tragedy: 'plot' as the combination of incidents, 'character' as the personalities of the dramatis personae, 'thought' as the reasoning which determines their actions, 'diction' as the verse they speak, 'melody' as the chanting of the verse, and 'spectacle' as the appearance of the actors.

Rasa* to *NŚ* and 'Plot' and 'Character' to *PT

NŚ explores *rasa* (evocation of emotion) importantly than 'plot' or 'character'. *PT* asserts 'character' and 'plot'. *NŚ* introduces characters speaking languages according to their social status. Rājan suggests, "Sanskrit plays have a rich variety in speech" (36). *PT* does not make such divisions. The themes chosen for Sanskrit plays are usually from history or epic legend, which are not so of *PT*. *NŚ* finds death as a passage to another form of existence. *Mokṣya* (liberation) is of time as an endless continuum, is related to the view that good and evil are both essential to the cyclical process of life. *PT* asserts humanist approach to truth, viewing man as an end in himself as the ultimate value. Death is finality.

In magnitude and content, *NŚ* and *PT* are diagonally different. *NŚ* has come to be known much before the extant plays have come to be written. *PT* is written well after the best has been achieved in classical Greek theatre. *NŚ* avoids references to plays of importance beyond elucidating *Nāṭyaveda*. It is primarily concerned with formulating principles of performance. On the contrary, *PT* while stating the general features of tragedy and comedy also provides a stance on literary criticism and instances of the best plays. *NŚ* regards "theatrics" (Banuand) as a major subject and treats other arts as a part of it. *PT* deals with "dramatics and theatrics" (Banuand) as a part among other arts. *NŚ* doesn't delineate chorus which is instrumental in the Greek plays. The former has not classified plot into simple and complex whereas the latter analyses it. The former expresses the role of a hero and a heroine along with minor characters, but the latter is concerned with a hero only.

Conclusion

NŚ and *PT* form the bases for the eastern and western plays, respectively. Bharatmuni's *NŚ* promotes *rasa*, ends plays happily. Aristotle's *PT* explores tragedy as well as comedy. Despite the spatial and temporal gaps between these dramaturgies, they contain the elements of parallels and disparities. Gestures, dance, music; rhythm, poet and mimesis; plot, sub-plot and supernatural elements; art as imitation; *rasa* (evocation of emotion) and catharsis form the parallel elements between them. The language-style, semiotic and semantic, *abhinaya* (acting) and art, comedy and tragedy-comedy, *rasa* (evocation of emotion) and plot/character form the disparate elements between them. As per the principles of a comparative theory of study, it does not analyze all the contents of the texts comparatively. It explores, whether the overall study of it is comparative. Likewise, this comparative study is not exhaustive in itself. It happens to stimulate future researchers and general readers to delve deeper into these dramaturgies. They may explore the elements like the absence of three unities in *NŚ* which *PT* takes it as a concern, the blending of tragic and comic incidents in *NŚ* which Athenian stage ignores, and a facial painting and expression in *NŚ* which contrasts to mask wearing in *PT*.

Works Cited

- Adams, Hazard, editor. *Critical Theory since Plato*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College, 1992.
- Banuand, Rajina and Subbiah S. *Classical Theories of Drama- A Comparative Critique*.
<http://www.springmagazine.net/v2.n2/v2n201.pdf> Accessed 19 July 2021.
- Bassnett, Susan. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers, 1993.
- Bhat, Aswari. *Glimpses of Nāṭyaśāstra*. <http://www.hss.iitb.ac.in/courses/HS450/notes2.htmv> Accessed 9 October 2021.
- Bhattachārjī, Sukumāri. *Sanskrit Drama and the Absence of Tragedy*. 1978. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23334390> Accessed 10 September 2021.
- Devadhar, C.R., editor. *Works of Kālidāsa*. Motilal Banarsidass, 2002.
- Easwaran, Eknātha. *The Upaniśads*. Jaico, 2010.
- Gupt, Bharat. *Dramatic concepts, Greek and Indian: A study of the Poetics and the Nāṭyaśāstra*. D.K. Print World, 2006.
- House, Humphry. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Kalyani Publishers, 1970.
- Iwuchukwu, Onyeka. *Elements of Drama*. National Open U of Nigeria, 2008.
- Jānaki, S.S. *Abhinavagupta's Contribution to Sanskrit Drama Tradition*. 1987.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41693343> Accessed 8 September 2021.
- Keith, A.B. *The Sanskrit Drama: In its Origin, Development Theory and Practice*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1998.
- Rājan, Chandra, editor and translator. *Kālidāsa: The Loom of Time*. Penguin Books, 1989.
- Śekhara, Indu. *Sanskrit Drama: Its Origin and Decline*. Brill Archive, 1978.
- Theatre in India*. http://www.yavanika.org/theatreinindia/?page_id=280 Accessed 24 August 2021.