

Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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Lecture - 56
Indian Drama

Hello friends. We are into the 12th week of our course and this is the final week of our course Elements of Literature and Creative Communication. And I cannot help but look back and see the gamut of topics we have covered and the range of things that we have learnt in this course. I am sure it has given you a sense of pride as well, of course, apart from the sense of satisfaction, it should also give you a sense of pride because in the course of such a short span less than 3 months. Well, you have been able to pick up what an average student learns in about a year. Of course without even realizing the pressures and the loads that generally academic courses entail with it, if we can learn so much that is an extraordinary feat in itself. So, again this is a week where we discuss drama, and to be precise - Indian Drama. Remember we have already established a pattern if you can quickly recall we began with an overview of poetry, discussed various elements of poetry, discussed contemporary world poetry, and discussed Indian English poetry. And similarly, for fiction, we did something like that and in drama as well we are following some kind of a pattern. So, in the last class, we discussed *A Doll's House* which can be called the inaugurator of a new style of drama, realistic drama - a very significant moment in the history of Western drama as such. So, in this class again we are going to pick up another very interesting play for discussion, but before that, we need to understand a historical overview of Indian drama and then probably we can pick up a play for discussion. In fact, the play we plan to pick up for discussion is *Hayavadana* by Girish Karnad. So, maybe in the next couple of days, you can as well read the play and come ready for a very interactive discussion of the play.

Let us take a very quick look at the historical origins of Indian drama. When we say Indian drama of course, before we even come to drama written in the various regional languages -when we say Pan Indian drama, of course, it has Sanskrit roots we do not need to highlight that. So, it is a Sanskrit root of drama as well. So, we can refer to it as a Classical Indian drama.

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Classical Indian Drama

- Classical Indian Drama refers to the tradition of **Sanskrit Drama** which existed in the subcontinent almost two thousand years ago
- This tradition was heavily influenced by particular forms and styles - Dance and Music to be specific. The Sanskrit **Dance Drama** was the normative style of theatre during that age, and the actors were expected to '**perform**' to music and the narrative. The '**Rasa Theory**', as theorized in **Natyashastra**, was conceived to elaborate on this intimate transference of emotions from the actor to the audience during these performances

Well, Classical Indian Drama as written in Sanskrit existed in the subcontinent for about two thousand years. In fact, literary historians have identified some somewhere in the second century BC as probably the rough starting point for classical Sanskrit drama and from there it moves on. So, that is the first point. Drama, elsewhere in the Indian context too finds its connotations in the religious traditions, especially where you find it goes along with dance and music. In fact, our earliest performances had an invariable correlation between dance and drama. Therefore, you can say that dance and music were invariably integral parts of a drama. And whenever we discuss Indian drama, generally speaking, of course, the first point of discussion is *Natyashastra* and of course, Rasa Theory. Before we delve deep into what Rasa theory is and what Natyashastra is we need to know that these are what you can call - keywords, the first keywords that you can encounter when you come to Classical Indian Drama.

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NATYASHASTRA

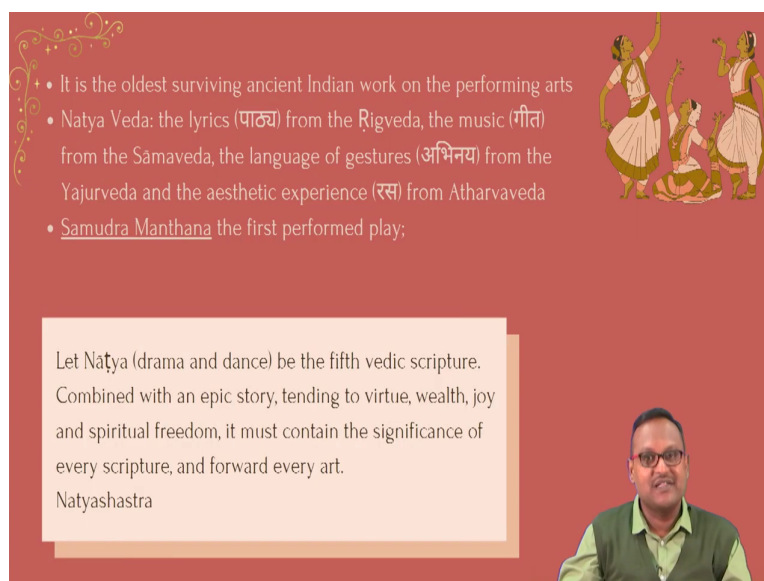
- Ancient Sanskrit Treatise (200 BCE - 200 CE) on performing arts and dramatics by Bharata; 36 chapters and 6000 verses
- Gods led by Indra pray Brahma to create something to keep them engaged and entertained: (क्रीडनीयकमिच्छामो दृश्यं श्रव्यं च यद्भवेत्)
- Act as: good counsel for people in pursuit of purushartha: essence of all scriptures; foundation for all arts
- Creation of Natya Veda, the fifth Veda

Natyashastra is our first step. In fact, *Natyashastra* is considered as the first Sanskrit treatise believed to have been written somewhere between 200 BCE to 200 CE . Remember we did not have the concept of history in the western sense of the term, we have already identified that. So, based on certain textual evidence we can locate the text, we can locate the historical origin of the text somewhere between 200 BCE to 200 CE. And this is one of the most ancient and authoritative texts on performing arts and dramatic arts written by Bharata Muni like Aristotle's poetics, but a little earlier or maybe you can say a little more expansive in scale than Aristotle's poetics, *Natyashastra*. It is said that it has about 36 chapters and about 6000 verses. So, *Natyashastra* the ancient Sanskrit treatise that deals with performing arts and dramatic arts talks about various dramatic techniques, various performative aspects of drama and things like that, in about 36 chapters using 6000 verses. There is a beautiful story concerning the birth of *Natyashastra*. Remember myths and legends are extraordinary ways of understanding the consciousness of a society, the collective consciousness of a society that is why if you can recall in the introductory video we said that we are a mythic people. Myths run deep in our veins and whatever we touch we turn them into stories, myths, legends, songs things like that, there is a reason why we said that. So, even behind *Natyashastra*'s origin you have an extraordinary story. Once it so happened - after Krita Yuga and before the onset of Treta Yuga these are our societal concepts of epochs, of various ages .

So, Gods went under the leadership of Indra. They went and met Brahma and they said that things are deteriorating on the earth as well as things are not as they used to be. Therefore,

they request the God of creation Brahma to create something extraordinary such that people everywhere, be it Gods in the heaven or demons in their hell, or even human beings on earth they can be engaged and they can also be entertained. The purpose is something simple. Now, look at this. So, they request God to create something that engages both their sight and sound. Something that appeals to their sense of sight and sense of auditory organs. So, now Brahma thinks deeply and then he thinks he could create something so that it could just act as a good counsel for people in need and people who are in search of or in pursuit of 'purushartha'. Remember purushartha plays a very important concept in Indian philosophy: you have dharma, artha, kama, moksha. These are the four pillars of purushartha. And all our life is in pursuit of achieving a kind of a balance there. And when Gods requested Brahma to create something like that, Brahma goes ahead and says why let me add something more to this not just something in pursuit of purushartha, I will also give you something which is an essence of all the scriptures, all Vedic scriptures which can act as foundation for all the arts. Therefore with that intention Brahma created Natya Veda. So, he picks up, out of the four Vedas, he picks up parts from various Vedas and creates the fifth Veda and calls it Natya Veda, or the performance. Now, looking at this particular aspect should reveal the kind of importance dramatic arts and various of the performing arts enjoyed in India, they almost enjoyed the status of Veda. That is why they have come to be called the fifth Veda.

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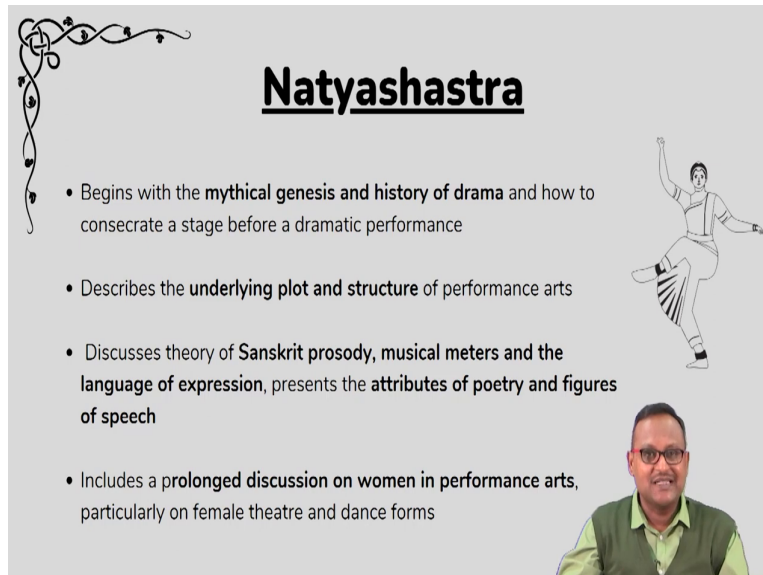
- It is the oldest surviving ancient Indian work on the performing arts
- Natya Veda: the lyrics (पाठ्य) from the Rigveda, the music (गीत) from the Sāmaveda, the language of gestures (अभिनय) from the Yajurveda and the aesthetic experience (रस) from Atharvaveda
- Samudra Manthana the first performed play;

Let Nāṭya (drama and dance) be the fifth vedic scripture. Combined with an epic story, tending to virtue, wealth, joy and spiritual freedom, it must contain the significance of every scripture, and forward every art.
Natyashastra

And how does Brahma create Natyashastra as an extraordinary scripture related to performing arts and dramatic arts. He picks up words from Rigveda, one of the ancient Veda.

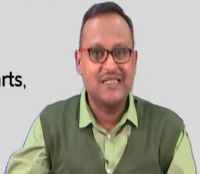

He picks up the story line, he picks up the story line or the word 'pathya' from Rigveda. Then he picks up musical elements from Sama Veda - 'Gita', and from the Yajurveda he picks up 'Abhinaya' - the language of gestures, expressions. And from the fourth Veda Atharvaveda he picks up 'Rasa', or the aesthetic experience and thereby he creates the fifth Veda called Natyashastra. So, this is an excerpt from Natyashastra. Natya which is a combination of drama and dance, Natya has both the connotations - nataka and natya narthana, both have the same root words in Sanskrit. That is why it is a dramatic performance or a dance drama, whatever you can call it. It is the fifth Veda. Now, again the Natyashastra in the very beginning it is also narrated that, now that Brahma has provided an extraordinary fifth Veda. So, now, he asks Bharata Muni to use the Veda that he has created. He asks him to create the first play therefore, the first play comes into existence. And according to Bharata and according to Natyashastra the first play that was performed was 'Samudra Manthan' the churning of the great ocean. That story is where Amrita comes out of it - out of the great churning that is a collective effort between the deities and the demons, the great Amrita comes out of Samudra Manthan, that is the performance. So, that is supposed to be the first play. So, this is the story behind the birth of Natyashastra. I hope you enjoyed it .

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Natyashastra

- Begins with the **mythical genesis and history of drama** and how to consecrate a stage before a dramatic performance
- Describes the **underlying plot and structure** of performance arts
- Discusses theory of **Sanskrit prosody, musical meters and the language of expression**, presents the **attributes of poetry and figures of speech**
- Includes a **prolonged discussion on women in performance arts**, particularly on female theatre and dance forms





So, not just a story behind the birth of Natyashastra. Natyashastra also describes in detail the underlying plot and structures governing any dramatic performance. I mean performance not just that of course, he also says that actors who perform in this kind of performative arts

should be the perfect example, something like being connoisseurs of art. Therefore it is said that these are semi divine beings - Gandharvas and Apsaras, that we talk of divine damsels. They were created as actors, they are the first actors, and Gandharvas are the first music company. So, it also discusses in detail Sanskrit prosody, the meters with which you compose it and what is the ideal language of expression, what kind of poetry you make use of it or what are the various attributes of poetry that should get into the making of a drama, what are the various figures of speech, what is the amount of various figures of speech that needs to get into there. All these things are very prolonged and also include a detailed discussion of the role of women in the performing arts. That is why it is said that it is a very detailed compendium, the scope of this particular book is a little bigger than Aristotle's poetics. This is Natya Shastra for us.

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Rasa Theory

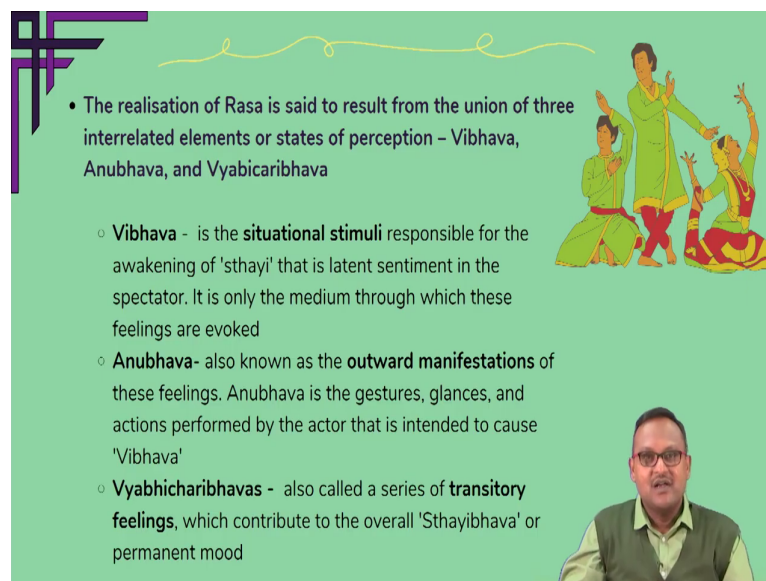
- 'Rasa' can be translated to "juice, essence, or taste" and refers to the aesthetic flavor or essence evoked in a reader from any visual or literary work of art
- These 'flavors' emerge out of the drama enacted by its artists and can be enjoyed by the 'sensitive' spectator who is open to the full breadth of meaning and sensations from the text
- After Natyashastra, Rasa Theory was further fully explained in the works of Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta



And it goes ahead and proposes for the first time Rasa theory that is why whenever we talk of Indian dramatic tradition we invariably begin with Natyashastra and Rasa theory. Rasa theory is the first theory, an aesthetic theory that is proposed wherein briefly I mean roughly speaking rasa stands for the essence of emotion, it stands for essence or aesthetic flavor. What it refers to roughly is not an emotion, it is not even a feeling, but an aesthetic flavor you can call it. And when you watch a play being performed then according to this theory well it gives birth within the spectator various rasa's. Of course, there is an inherent rasa within the audience and when you watch a play there is some kind of catharsis that takes place between the two rasa's between the two bhava's.

And that gives birth to a kind of an extraordinary feeling of purgation or what we call in the Indian context moksha. So, these are something that can be kept in mind. Well based on the detailed discussion of rasa's in fact, when Bharata proposes rasa theory he comes out with eight rasa's connoting different eight emotive states. And then later Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta expand it and add the ninth rasa and discuss rasa theory and take it to a next level, this is something that we can be that can be kept in mind. In fact, the nine rasa's are exemplified through the facial expressions here.

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- The realisation of Rasa is said to result from the union of three interrelated elements or states of perception – Vibhava, Anubhava, and Vyabicharibhava
 - **Vibhava** - is the **situational stimuli** responsible for the awakening of 'sthayi' that is latent sentiment in the spectator. It is only the medium through which these feelings are evoked
 - **Anubhava**- also known as the **outward manifestations** of these feelings. Anubhava is the gestures, glances, and actions performed by the actor that is intended to cause 'Vibhava'
 - **Vyabicharibhavas** - also called a series of **transitory feelings**, which contribute to the overall 'Sthayibhava' or permanent mood

So, and again how is rasa generated when you watch a play? This is where it gets very interesting. In fact, here the text identifies three states of perception or three interrelated elements of perception they call it Vibhava, Anubhava and Vyabicharibhava. These are various states of perceiving them. Now, what happens now it says that - Vibhava, Anubhava along with Vyabicharibhava, together create or give birth to rasa. So, when they come together the fusion of all the three results in the creation of rasa. Then what is a Vibhava? Vibhava is a stimuli. When we watch I mean the moment we see something it evokes a certain feeling in me. It evokes a certain sentiment in me that can be called a Vibhava. What is an Anubhava? Anubhava is a manifestation of an internal feeling through facial expressions, through gestures how do we do these internal states of perception manifest. How do they manifest onto our face or through our body, how do they manifest they are called Anubhava.

And Vyabhicharibhavas are also called transitory feelings, maybe they are not permanent bhavas which are also called Sthayibhavas. So, these are transitory feelings . So, when we watch, maybe there is a trigger. So, a healthy combination of all these things result in the birth of rasa. This is what Natyashastra discusses . So, a combination of these three states of mind, these three states of perception ok.

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LET'S LOOK AT THE DIFFERENT RASAS

- **Sringara** - Rasa of Love and Romance. Its deity is Vishnu, and Color is **Green** 
- **Hasya** - Rasa of Laughter and Mirth. Its Deity is Ganesha, and Color is **White** 
- **Raudra** - Rasa of Anger and Fury. Its deity is Rudra, and color is **Red** 
- **Karunaya** - Rasa of Compassion and Empathy. Its Deity is Yama, and color is **Grey** 

Now, let us take a look at the ashta rasa that Bharata Muni proposes in Natyashastra. The first is sringara; Sringara rasa which can be translated as an emotion of love or romance. So, here now look how scientific it is. So, with each bhava, with each rasa a particular deity is associated, a particular colour is associated and a particular symbol is associated . And a lot of psychological studies have happened between these kinds of connections . Of course, this is not a place. I mean this particular class does not provide us a scope to discuss the psychological dimensions of these things, but for our understanding we can search it elsewhere maybe . Sringara, the emotion of love and romance is associated with the colour green. You have Hasya which can be construed as a mirth, an element of ecstasy you can call it ecstasy or laughter . Again the deity or the God associated with it is Ganesha and the colour is white. Raudra is an element of anger, a rasa of anger and fury. The deity is; obviously, Rudra and the colour is red. You can make out that connection.

Karunaya is an element of compassion, empathy, remember and its deity is Yama and the colour is Grey. It is not a paradox that Yama is the deity associated with compassion and the colour is grey here.

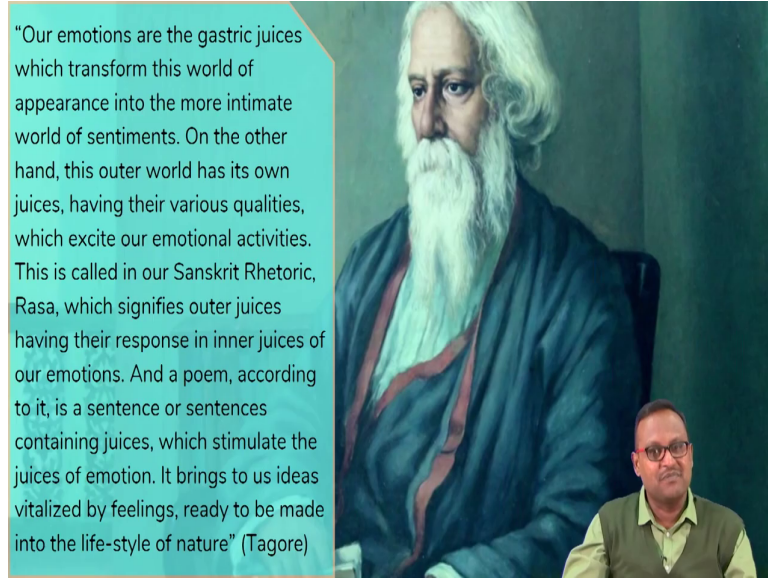
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- **Bibhatsa** - Rasa of Disgust and Repulsion. Deity - Shiva. Colour - Blue
- **Bhayanaka** - Rasa of Terror and Horror. Deity - Kala. Colour - Black
- **Vira** - Rasa of Heroic feelings. Deity - Indra. Colour - Orange
- **Adbhuta** - Rasa of Amazement and Wonder. Deity - Brahma. Colour - Yellow

Summoning these Rasas in through performance of 'Bhavas' is thus known as 'Rasa-abhinaya'. And this is the theoretical and aesthetic underpinning of all classical Indian performative and Dramatic traditions like Bharatnatyam, Kathakali, Odissi etc

And then we have Bibhatsa, a rasa associated with a sense of disgust and repulsion. And the deity associated with it is Shiva and the colour is blue. Then you have Bhayanaka corresponds with terror, horror and the colour is black. Then Vira rasa - linked to heroic feeling, the rasa of heroic feelings or courage its colour is associated with orange. And Adbhuta an amazement, a sense of amazement and wonder. The deity is Brahma and the colour associated with it is yellow. And later of course, along with these eight you have the ninth rasa that was added sometime in 8th century AD al. And again that is a Shanta rasa and Shanta rasa is a state of equanimity, a tranquil perfect tranquil state, and the colour associated with that is of course, white. Hasya and Shanta white. So, these are some things that can be kept in mind. So, when we watch a performance that is why most of the times our performances are called Rasa abhinaya, because abhinaya is capable of evoking in us various rasa's . Through abhinaya performances certain rasa's are evoked therefore, performative arts are also called Rasa abhinaya. That is why when you watch either Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Odissi, or anything of various art forms, various dance forms they are capable of evoking these feelings in us, rasa and abhinaya ok. These are some things that can be kept in mind while discussing Natyashastra and its rasa concepts.

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Of course, the influence of Bharata's Natyashastra and especially rasa theory does not end with Sanskrit drama and poetics. Remember it has a Pan Indian presence even to this day when we discuss the concept of Indian drama we can trace certain elements, certain shades of Sanskrit drama and poetics even in our contemporary regional plays and regional dramatic performances as well. Acknowledging the importance of Bharata's Natyashastra on his own shaping up of the poet in him Tagore makes a wonderful remark here. Now, look at this he says "Our emotions are the gastric juices which transform this world of appearance into a more intimate world of sentiments because the rasa's are not merely they have a physiological presence, they are not just merely mental constructs, they have a physiological presence. Therefore, they have the ability to make the world around us a little more a place of more intimate sentiments. On the other hand, this outer world has its own juices or various qualities which excite our emotional activities. This is called in our Sanskrit Rhetoric, Rasa, which signifies outer juices having their response in the inner juices of our emotion. And therefore, when you write a poem a great writer is aware of what kind of rasa the poem is evoking. And when an actor performs or when a player writes, composes their plays they are aware of the nature of stimuli that their work dramatic works or poetic works are capable of evoking in the readers or in the audience. This is what Tagore says considering the importance of Natyashastra and of course, the concept of rasa theory.

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From Tagore, let us go and discuss Sanskrit drama in detail. Generally, speaking Sanskrit drama, that is the I mean when we say Indian drama of course, it has its roots in Sanskrit drama we discussed this. The rise of the regional theatres, the rise of drama in the regional languages is of a much later origin. So, until that point of time you have Sanskrit drama. The 1st phase is said to be the golden age of classical Sanskrit drama, the 1st phase is the golden age. You have some remarkable dramatists and plays such as Kalidasa here. In fact, remember Kalidasa has attained an iconic status like Vyasa and Valmiki, Kalidasa has attained an iconic status in the collective consciousness of Indian society. So, beginning with Ashvagosha in fact, literary historians identify Ashvagosha as the first play, though we do not have many plays that are written by Ashvagosha, now they are lost in time. Various other plays refer to Ashvagosha. Ashvagosha is the well known Buddhist monk who is the author of this epic poetry called *Buddhacharita*, you must have read that in translation *Buddhacharita*. So, Ashvagosha and from there you go to Bhasa and Sudraka then you have Kalidasa and Visakhadatta. So, spanning 500 years roughly speaking 500 years the 1st century AD to about 5th century AD. Then from the 6th century onwards it is called the silver period of Sanskrit drama. You can call it because already Sanskrit drama is slightly on the decline because you do not find anybody that can match the stature and grandeur of plays and dramatists such as Kalidasa and Bhasa here.


Some of the important names here stand for Harsha, Bhavabhuti especially *UttaraRamacharita* you can think of those names. Rajashekhara again *Rajashekhara Charita*

and all that Bhatta Narayana, Kshemeshwara these are some well known names. Then from the 11th century onwards it is the declining period of Sanskrit drama and probably in the next 200 or 300 years you find the entire tradition almost dried up. Dried up not entirely because the influence of Sanskrit drama starts flowing in an indirect way through regional drama, regional theatres and all that ok that can be kept in mind . So, you have a Sanskrit drama being discussed in these two phases.

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Kalidasa



- Kalidasa was a famous Sanskrit poet and playwright whose works have been dated back to around 100BC - 400AD
- He is widely known for primarily 3 of his plays - **Abhijñānaśākuntalam** , **Mālavikāgnimitram**, and **Vikramōrvaśīyam**
- Kalidasa is considered an iconic figure in Classical Literary History alongside Veda Vyasa and Valmiki





The first playwright is Kalidasa. Kalidasa is a very well known Sanskrit poet and also playwright . And again remember we the historical reference to Kalidasa is still mired in lot of ambiguity , it still shrouded in lot of ambiguity because scholars have identified a couple of Kalidasa's from the one who existed in sometime around Kanishka during the times of Kanishka 1st century BC and all that to 5th century. Some later historians have even spotted his presence in the 7th century during the reign of Bhojaraja and others and some associate him with Vikramaditya. So, we do not exactly know which Kalidasa it is, but obviously, there must be writers such as Kalidasa the author of some remarkable plays such as Abhijnanasakuntala, Malavikagnimitra and Vikramorvasiya.

Remember Abhijnanasakuntalam, the influence of Kalidasa is not just on the Indian subcontinent. We have already identified while discussing Goethe and world literature how after having read Shakuntala by Kalidasa in translation Goethe seems to have remarked on such an extraordinary imagination in Indian literature and how that in turn shapes his poetry, his plays and all that.

So, therefore, Kalidasa's has had a huge global presence. sometime in the 17th century you find translations of Kalidasa in many European languages including German, French, English and all that . So, that is why Kalidasa comes first for us, an extraordinary iconic play.

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Abhijñānaśākuntalam

- An ancient Sanskrit play dramatizing the story of Shakuntala from the epic Mahabharata
- Being one of the first Sanskrit dramatic texts to be translated to European languages - this play received widespread recognition abroad during 17th century
- Shakuntala was conceived as the ideal of Indian womanhood, her integrity and blamelessness going down as important virtues
- Goethe's Faust was immensely inspired and adopted numerous theatrical conventions from this text while Schegel was planning to translate the text before his death.



And when it comes to Kalidasa of course, we cannot, but think of Abhijnanasakuntalam. And most of his plays are vignettes from the Mahabharata . They are taken from some Upakatas and various subplots of Mahabharata. Sakuntalam too talks of the union between Shakuntala I mean daughter of Vishwamitra and the divine nymph and Dushyanta. And of course, the name Bharata; Bharata that we have today is attributed to their son Bharata, the greatest ruler who has his presence in our traditions. myths and legends and all that. Bharata out of which this Bharata Kanda seems to have emerged. So, this is the story about Shakuntala and Bharata.

So, in this class we began our discussion with classical Sanskrit drama, identified Bharata's Natyashastra as the first great treatise that discusses in detail various components of performing arts and dramatic arts. And the concept of rasa, concept of Rasa Abhinaya and of course, various perceptual states vibha bhavas. When it comes to bhavas you have Vibhava, Anubhava, Vyabicharibhava and how a combination of all that results in the creation of rasa's and all these. The next class we can pick up the remaining components of Sanskrit drama and then we can come to Indian English drama. Please remember we would not be able to discuss all the regional dramatic traditions here for want of space and want of time.

So, after a discussion of Sanskrit drama we straight away moved to Indian English drama. So, see you in the next class.