

Bharata and the Bard: A Study on the Aesthetic Interplay using the Concept of Neta from *Natyasastra* with Major Female Characters from the Plays of William Shakespeare

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Abstract

Indian drama and theatre have one of the finest, richest and the longest tradition in the history of dramaturgy, and the success of any literature, be it a text or a play hugely depends upon the playwright, plot and characters. A play needs a Neta or a Hero; who can lead not just the characters on stage but also the audience and inculcate different Rasa along the journey as it reaches its denouement. The concept of Neta and his basic characteristics and the emotions produced by the characters are crucial to fully comprehend the play. Bharata Muni, the Father of Indian theatrical art form, very explicitly mentions the importance of Rasa in his book *Natyasastra*. The facial and body expressions are major aspects when it comes to staging a drama, it is the essence of the play, which will enable the audience to incorporate different Rasas produced by the characters. Through this paper one can understand the presence of Indian aesthetics and significance of *Natyasastra* proposed by Bharata Muni in the 1st Century which is relevant even today.

Keywords: Rasa, Emotions, Indian Aesthetics, Drama, Shakespeare

Contribution/Originality: The paper aims to compare the concept of Neta with the Bard's dramatic and effective female characters which enhances the human life.

Introduction

Terry Eagleton's definition of literature is "any kind of writing which for some reason or another somebody values highly" (Eagleton 8), whereas according to Longinus, "it is something that echoes greatness" (Tilak, 2013a) and Arnold calls it "the criticism of life" (Tilak, 2013b). English literature, from the birth of mystery and miracle plays aims to instruct people and serve as a moral compass for the public. However, the idea of mystery and miracle plays can be traced back to ancient Indian texts along with the concepts contained inside them. For any work to gain success it should have three constituent elements; (i) Vastu/Plot; which could be principal/adhikarika or accessory/prasangika. (ii) Neta/Hero; according to *Natyasastra*, a Neta is a character having multiple ingredients; The Neta or the hero, according to the definition prescribed in *Natyasastra*, is always depicted as vineeta, taptaloka, dharmika, utsaha, madhura priyamvada and so on. However, the most important of all characteristics being Dheerodatta. (iii) Rasa/Emotion; the drama uses nine basic emotions attempting to resolve them in the ninth holistic feeling of peace. Bharata Muni is considered the founding father of Indian dramaturgy and he has described drama as the fifth Veda. *Natyasastra* proves to be the first attempt to develop the art of drama in a systematic and organised structure. Bharata Muni says in *Natyasastra*: "The drama as I have devised will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all" (111-112). *Natyasastra* serves as a moral compass and provides a platform where it advises the readers not just about what is to be portrayed in a drama but also explicitly paints the zones on how the portrayal is to be executed. *Natyasastra* is the perfect formula that deals elaborately not only in the theoretical but also in the practical angle of traditional Indian drama such as, voice, theatre architecture, costumes, music and other related dimensions. It contains minute details for both playwrights and actors. Bharata Muni's theories can be seen in the Modern English period from 1500 AD. It is to be noted that England was entertained with many theatres' and plays and there were many playwrights that inculcated the emotions or Navarasas in their works. The University Wits along with William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and William Congreve incorporated many forms of Rasas into their works during the Elizabethan period in British literature. The milestone of English drama is William Shakespeare and his plays were categorized as tragedy, comedy, romantic comedy, tragic comedy and so on.

This paper aims to take into account the concept of hero or Neta as put forth by Bharata Muni and equate it with few female Shakespearian figures. Through this process one can understand the significance and presence of *Nataysastra* even in world renowned literatures.

According to Bharata Munni, a Neta/Hero is always depicted as Vineeta; modest, Madhura; sweet tempered, Tyagi; sacrificing, Daksha; capable, Priyamvada; civil in talks, Taptaloka; belonging to a noble family, Suchi; pure, Vagmi; articulate, Sthera; consistent, Yuva; young, Buddhi; endowed with intellect, Utsaha; enthusiasm, Smrthi; good memory, Kola; aesthetics, Maana; pride, Shura; brave, Dridha; strong, Tejaswi; energetic, Pandita; learned and Dharmika; pious (Deepak, 2011). “Dheerodatta,” or one who is both bold and magnificent, is the major category into which the hero of Sanskrit theatre often belongs. When it comes to the Bard, he is the one who brought in a change in English drama. His characters are diverse, inspiring, unique and effective; from protagonist(s) to antagonist(s) he crafts them with utmost perfection. Below are the heroic traits proposed by Bharata Muni and applying them with few Bard’ian characters.

- **Cordelia for Vineeta rasa-** Cordelia’s chief characteristics are devotion, kindness, beauty, and honesty. The audience is always thinking about Cordelia, and she is reverently depicted in holy terms. Her modest behaviour has landed her in praise as well as in criticism.
- **Miranda for Madhura** - Miranda is one of the youngest of the Shakespearean characters, at the age of three she was taken away from her kingdom and later on at the age of 15 the audience gets to see her living off an island with her father Prospero. She is portrayed as a sweet tempered and naive character, which is evident from her initial interaction with Ferdinand.
- **Juliet for Tyagi** - Juliet, who fell in love with Romeo and later had to sacrifice her life for love, for no fault of her own. The tragic scene that ultimately unites the lovers evokes so much pain to the audience.

- **Lady Macbeth for Daksha** – Lady Macbeth is one of the strongest females lead from the Elizabethan theatre. Even though she brings with her different shades of grey, she is highly capable in tearing down a whole kingdom.
- **Isabella for Priyamvada** – Isabella is a very virtuous and chaste young woman who faces a difficult decision. It's through the way she handles the issue, with her style of articulation, she is able to free her brother from a predicament.
- **Cleopatra for Taptaloka** – Cleopatra is an ever-shinning figure in the Egyptian history, she is part of the royal family and as both the story and history goes, she has gone to all limits to protect her throne.
- **Desdemona for Suchi** – Desdemona is a character who is very virtuous and pure, from the beginning to its end. Her loyalty is highly remarkable and one truly feels sorry for her tragic death.
- **Portia nd Isabella for Vagmi, Dharmika & Pandita** – Portia, even though she disguises herself, this character changes the bandwidth of the play. She checks being both Vagmi and Pandita in the court room scene.
Isabella, is a Dharmika character, as she is devotional to God and wishes to be a nun.
- **Viola for Sthera** - Viola exhibits strength of character, quick wit, and resourcefulness, thereby making her a consistent character from the play, in spite of her disguise.
- **Miranda for Yuva** – Miranda is one of the youngest of the Shakespearean characters, at the age of three she was taken away from her kingdom and later on at the age of 15 the audience gets to see her living off an island with her father Prospero.

- **Portia for Budhi** - Portia even though she disguises herself, this character changes the bandwidth of the play. In the court room scene, the intellectual skills in which she was able to tackle the Jew was mesmerising.
- **Puck for Utsaha &Tejaswi** – Puck, a small little goblin is the epitome of Utsaha and Tejaswi, he is seen along with Oberon inside the forest conducting various pranks with the young lovers and Titania.
- **Portia for Smriti** – Portia even though she disguises herself, this character changes the bandwidth of the play. In the court room scene, the intellectual skills in which she was able to tackle the Jew was mesmerizing.
- **Cleopatra for Kola** – Cleopatra is labelled a wrangling queen, an Egyptian dish; she is called Salt Cleopatra and an enchantress who has made both Antony and Caesar fall in love with her.
- **Lady Macbeth for Maana** - Lady Macbeth is one of the strongest female leads from the Elizabethan theatre. Even though she brings with her different shades of grey, she is highly capable in tearing down a whole kingdom. She is seen with much pride from her first soliloquy (reading the letter Macbeth sends her)
- **Cleopatra for Shura & Dridha** - Cleopatra is deeply erotic, charismatic, theatrical, volatile, temperamental, and generally unclassifiable. She takes a strong stand for herself and her country, and promises never to be a slave and would even take her own life she things happen otherwise.
- **Dheerodatta** - All the Shakespearean characters above mentioned exhibits this trait.

Table:1

<u>Neta traits by Bharata Munni</u>	<u>Shakespeare's Characters</u>	<u>Corresponding lines from the text</u>
Vineeta	Cordelia; <i>King Lear</i>	I love your majesty According to my bond, no more nor less. (Shakespeare, Act1 Scene I)
Madhura & Yuva	Miranda; <i>The Tempest</i>	If by your art, my dearest father, you have Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them. (Shakespeare, Act1 Scene II)
Tyagi	Juliet; <i>Romeo & Juliet</i>	O God, I have an ill-divining soul! Methinks I see thee now, thou art so low, As one dead in the bottom of a tomb. (Shakespeare, Act 3 Scene V)
Daksha & Maana	Lady Macbeth; <i>Macbeth</i>	I laid their daggers ready; He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled My father as he slept, I had done't. (Shakespeare, Act 2 Scene I)
Priyamvada & Dharmika	Isabella; <i>Measure for Measure</i>	I have no tongue but one: gentle my lord, Let me entreat you speak the former language. (Shakespeare, Act 2 Scene IV)
Taptaloka, Kola, Dridha & Shura	Cleopatra; <i>Antony & Cleopatra</i>	My salad days, When I was green in judgement, cold in blood. (Shakespeare, Act 1 Scene 5) Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale Her infinite variety. (Shakespeare, Act 2 Scene 2)
Suchi	Desdemona; <i>Othello</i>	His unkindness may defeat my life But never taint my love. (Shakespeare, Act 4 Scene II)
Sthera	Viola; <i>Twelfth Night</i>	Lady, you are the cruel'st she alive If you will lead these graces to the grave And leave the world no copy (Shakespeare, Act1 SceneV)
Budhi, Vagmi, Smriti & Pandita	Portia; <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	Tarry a little; there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood (Shakespeare, Act 4 Scene1)
Utsaha & Tejaswi	Puck; <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	I am that merry wanderer of the night. I jest to Oberon and make him smile When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile, Neighing in likeness of a filly foal. (Shakespeare, Act 2 Scene1)

Conclusion

From the above analysis, one can infer the presence of Bharata Munni's concept of Neta, which comes under the magnum opus *Natyasastra*, which is employed in a selection of characters from the varied works of William Shakespeare. Even though all these works were from different times, one can evidently see that, *Natyasastra* has stood the test of time, by being a vital part in building up and formation of some of the highly celebrated and often quoted texts in world literature. This reaffirms the need to simultaneously take in Indian aesthetics studies as it clearly serves to be the solid core for the rise of some of the world-renowned literatures.

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