The Influence of Information and Communication Technology on the Natyashastra: A Digital Age Perspective

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Abstract

The *Natyashastra* is a dramatic art form that includes a variety of elements like music, dance, dialogue, costume, tune, body language, and many more. It was envisioned by Bharata Muni, an ancient Sanskrit poet. The eight *rasas* are incorporated and have influenced contemporary art forms with integral cultural values. In the digital age, the *Natyashastra* finds itself in competition with a more communicative and popular mass culture, which includes a variety of new media tools like TV, radio, video, films, OTT platforms, and teleserials. These platforms not only entertain but also provide energetic infotainment by leveraging digital platforms to share experiences.
The *Natyashastra* has influenced changes in audience attitudes and behaviors and enhances affirmative action,

performance styles, and artistic amusement. It preserves the history, culture, traditions, and values of heritage in this digital era. Many theatre groups continue to keep dramatic culture alive in this satellite age. Today, all types of actors and audiences depend on various communicative tools to watch and perform the *Natyashastra*. Multimedia devices like laptops, tablets, smartphones, personal computers, digital cameras, tripods, video projectors, multiple software applications, social media, and more are now used to host live performances directly via several interactive platforms. SEO and other search engines are engaging with both digital and analog technologies.

        Keywords: Natyashastra, Sadharanikaran model, modern theatre, mass media, communication technologies, artificial intelligence, relevance of Natyashastra

Introduction

        Natyashastra is a Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts, attributed to Sage Bharata Muni. It consists of 36 chapters with a total of 6,000 poetic verses and is composed of two words—*Natya* and *Shastra*. In Sanskrit, the word *Natya* means *nata*—to act or represent. The word *Shastra* means rules, manual, book, or treatise, and is used as a suffix, i.e., practice with knowledge. The *Rasa* and *Bhava* theory is the core element of Natyashastra. Precisely, Bharata views that *rasa* is a kind of sentiment, and the audience receives the sentiment from a piece of creative work. The realization of *rasa* comes from a particular *sthayibhav*. According to him, *sthayibhav* (permanent emotion) transforms into *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure), or in other words, *rasa* manifests through *sthayibhav*. *Rasa* is an interaction between the work of art and the audience. It signifies aesthetic pleasure or the thrill of joy invariably

accompanying a skillful enactment of a play, rendered highly appealing through excellent poetry, music, and action (Adhikary, 2014).

Sage Bharata Muni mentions in *Natya Veda* the aspects of literature, food habits, art, costumes and ornaments, health, and nourishment. According to him, the *Natyashastra* was created by Brahma at the request of the gods. *Natya* was the fifth Veda, which was open to all. When *Natya Veda* was ready, the gods expressed their inability to receive and practice it, and Brahma passed it to Bharata and advised him to use it with the help of his 100 sons. Lord Shiva is considered the "Lord of *Natya*." The present *Natyashastra* imbibes insights from all three schools: Sadashiva, Brahma, and Bharata. The sage allowed female characters to perform on the stage.

Definition

1. "There is no branch of science, no craft, no knowledge, no art, no wisdom, no endeavor which does not appear in a *Nataka*."
   — Sage Bharata Muni

2. "*Natyashastra* consists of invaluable information for the study of geography, ethnography, language, literature, costumes, ornaments, art, economics, and psychology."
   — M. M. Ghosh

3. "*Natyashastra* represents a discipline of knowledge that comprises a tradition rich in both theory and practice, that was systematized and condensed."
   — Nirmala Mani Adhikary

Natyashastra as a Communication Tool
Table1
Four Types of Language Mentioned in the 18th Chapter of the Natyashastra

SN	Type of Language	Communication Nature of the Language
1	*Ati Bhasha*	Superhuman language for the gods
2	*Arya Bhasha*	The noble language for kings
3	*Jati Bhasha*	The common language for stage forms
4	*Yonyantari Bhasha*	The language for other animals

Table 2
Nine Rasas Introduced in the Natyashastra

SN	Bhava	Rasa	English Meaning	Color	Deity
1	Rati	Shṛingara	Love-Erotic	Light Green	Vishnu
2	Hasa	Hasya	Laughter-Comic	White	Pramatha
3	Shoka	Karuna	Sorrow-Pathetic	Grey	Yama
4	Krodha	Raudra	Anger-Furious	Red	Rudra
5	Utsaha	Vira	Energy-Heroic	Yellowish	Indra
6	Bhaya	Bhayanaka	Terror-Terrible	Black	Kala Krishna
7	Jugupsa	Bibhatsa	Disgust-Odious	Blue	Shiva
8	Vismaya	Adbhuta	Astonishment-Marvelous	Yellow	Brahma
9	Santa	*Santa*	Silence-Tranquility	Kesari pink	-

Objectives of the Study
- To explore the relevance and influence of modern technologies on the *Natyashastra*.

- To analyze modern trends and the role of mass media and search engines.
- To examine the use of digital platforms in performing the *Natyashastra*.

Study Methodology

In this study, two types of secondary sources are used. One includes printed materials based on online sources; the other comprises digital platforms such as websites and electronic publications found on internet forums. All published materials on *Natyashastra* are reviewed, and the results are summarized qualitatively. This study applies the method of a systematic review to examine the secondary sources.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to collecting information and conducting analysis based on major prominent websites related to theatre, *Natyashastra*, and popular culture. Additionally, only selected online publications were reviewed for this content.

Sources for Reviews

Two comprehensive secondary databases were used to conduct the analysis. These included a wide range of online and offline sources. Over 8 to 10 websites and online publications were studied. A focused research and review were conducted based on the *Sadharanikaran* model of communication.

Sadharanikaran Model

Nirmala Mani Adhikary's SMC is one of the important theories of communication related to the *Natyashastra*. It is a dramatic model of communication from the perspective of *Bharatavarsiya* tradition. It was developed by the renowned scholar Nirmala Mani Adhikary

in 2003 (Adhikary, 2009, 2014). SMC represents the communication process from a Hindu philosophical perspective. It is a systematic description, in diagrammatic form, of a process for attaining mutual understanding, commonness, or oneness among people. The SMC envisions communication as communion. Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* is a principal source for this model. Most of the concepts are drawn from sadharanikaran, sahridayata, rasaswadana, sakshatkara and related ideas.

Natyashastra to Modern Theatre

The fifth Veda is known as *Natya Veda*, which explains classical Sanskrit literature that comprises treatises on the art of dance, music, and drama. In the *Natyashastra*, Bharata Muni describes the purpose of such representation as one of imparting instruction to people to follow the moral code of life and living, as well as providing wholesome entertainment. The second chapter of the *Natyashastra* provides a detailed description of the theatre or the playhouse (*Rangamanch*). In ancient times, the *Natyashastra* was performed on theatre platforms, where both audience and actors communicated, watched, and enjoyed through offline means.

Modern theatre began in the second half of the 19th century. In the present-day scenario, theatre is competing with all popular mass culture and media, including television, video, music, and radio, which has aggregated the audience in India among the largest in the world. Therefore, materially and economically, the consumption also differs, and the definition of post-independence Indian theatre remains a historically demarcated field.

After the discovery of the internet, all audio and video content and other topics related to the *Natyashastra* are now accessible through mass media.

Table 3

Digital Adaptation of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication

Sarani(Channel or Medium)	*Natyashastra* includes many topics such as the Rasa-Bhava Theory, Sanskrit drama, poetics, traditional dance, etc., and is now being shared with audiences through satellite communication technologies such as the internet, OTT platforms, search engines, mass media, digital libraries, internet archives, and more.
Dosa (Barrier or Noises)	In addition to personal, semantic, climatic, and organizational barriers, technical issues are widely observed in the modern era. Today, most actors and learners study the *Natyashastra* through online sources, where digital limitations can affect communication.
Pratikriya (Receiving Feedback)	The feedback process has evolved in the modern era, allowing audiences to submit their responses by filling out feedback forms either online or offline, with the help of satellite communication, after the performance.

Natyashastra and Modern Media

Earlier, people used to watch, learn, listen to, and enjoy *Natyashastra* performances through radio and television. All India Radio (AIR) was a very popular station where audiences listened to *Natyashastra*, which was

presented in the form of drama and music in an oral format. Doordarshan also telecast *Bhartiya Natyashastra* in the form of movies, dances, and other visual representations. This channel aired a well-known two-volume movie titled *Bhartiya Natyashastra*, created by Padma Subrahmanyam, an Indian classical Bharatanatyam dancer. Each volume contains a 13-episode series. *Natyopasana* is another example of a classical dance performance related to *Bhartiya Natyashastra*, performed by Leela Venkataraman.

Satellite communication is a remarkable achievement of science and information technology. The discovery of the internet has given rise to digital platforms, upon which audiences and educators have become increasingly dependent. Today, all of *Natyashastra*'s audio and video content is available through mass media. Educators in Sanskrit and literature departments are also using digital platforms and mass media sites to spread knowledge about *Natyashastra* across the globe. In this way, it is gaining popularity worldwide.

- www.natyasutraonline.com: This website offers online lessons on *Natyashastra*, providing a platform for learners to explore various classical and traditional dances. Learners can participate in webinars and workshops and have 24x7 online access to personalized lectures, tutorials, classes, and performances related to Indian culture. The website aims to preserve India's rich art and cultural heritage for future generations.

- www.noopurabhramari.com: This website, related to *Natyashastra*, offers a variety of features, including the *Noopura* journal, academic courses, publication wings, awards and honors, as well as programs and conferences.

- Internet Archive: The Internet Archive is a non-profit organization based in the United States that operates as a digital library. Founded in 1996 by Brewster Kahle, it

offers free access to a wide range of digital collections, including websites, software applications, music, audiovisual content, and print materials related to *Natyashastra*. The Archive is committed to promoting a free and open internet.

- The Wayback Machine: The Wayback Machine is a web archive that contains billions of web captures. Additionally, it oversees many book digitization projects, making it one of the world's largest book digitization efforts. The archive also hosts a wide range of movies, including *Bhartiya Natyashastra* Volumes 1 and 2 by Padma Subrahmanyam. This film series, containing 13 episodes, is part of the Cultural Resources of India collection and was published in 2010.
- Other websites: Some other websites, such as In Arch Centre, Online Courses Swayam 2, and *Noopura Bhramari*, offer online certificate and academic courses on *Natyashastra*.
- YouTube: YouTube is another popular social media site that allows people to create and upload videos for others to watch. Numerous audio-video lectures, movies, dance, and music performances related to *Natyashastra* are available on the platform.

Communication Technologies and Natyashastra

In the digital era, platforms and media literacy have made learning the *Natyashastra* more accessible through hybrid modes. Virtual technologies have proven to be fast and effective, transforming into excellent tools for learning. Search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Meta allow users to quickly locate information online. These engines have become vital in modern scholarship, including the study of *Natyashastra*. They help educators, students, and audiences navigate a wide range of resources related to the history, origin, authorship, and structure of the *Natya*

Veda, as well as concepts like the theory of *rasa*, types of playhouses, songs, acting techniques, body movements, ancient dance forms, makeup, costumes, and more.

Recent trends in the entertainment industry have led to the growing popularity of live streaming, enabling wider access to video content related to *Natyashastra*. OTT (Over-The-Top) streaming platforms such as Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, Peacock TV, and BBC iPlayer are increasingly featuring content rooted in traditional performance arts. Many institutions and channels now regularly live-stream *Natyashastra*-inspired events. These include Vidya Mitra (2017), Doordarshan, Flame University, AMPA (Academy of Music and Performing Arts), AUMSYC, Handsdhwani, and the Natyashastra School of DMCE, among others. Additionally, numerous YouTube channels dedicated to Indian classical performance arts have gained millions of followers by producing episodic content based on the *Natyashastra*.

Natyashastra, AI, and Popular Culture

A team of researchers from Anna University in Chennai has successfully used cutting-edge computer methods to identify and classify 108 fundamental Bharatanatyam dance poses. By employing machine learning techniques, they achieved a significant advancement in the field of human action recognition—particularly in the categorization of classical Indian dance forms such as Bharatanatyam. This innovative application of artificial intelligence holds promise for modeling and preserving other traditional performing art forms as well. The study not only deepens our understanding of Bharatanatyam but also has broader implications in fields such as healthcare, sports analysis, and animation, through the use of advanced computer vision and 3D modeling techniques.

Most of the Indian cinema are influenced by the rasa theory. The eight rasas play a vital role in Indian films, helping to establish an emotional connection between the audience and the performers. This connection enhances the artistic impact, emotional depth, and realism of cinema. Hogan (2003) observed, "The most common primary rasas in Indian cinema are the romantic and the sorrowful/pathetic." He argues that the most fundamental human emotions are love and sorrow, which is why the dominant Rasas-Karuna (compassion) and Shringara (romantic love)-are prominently featured in Indian films, often expressed through melodrama and romance.

One of the earliest examples of this cultural influence is the film *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. It was India's first silent film and was based on Hindu mythology. Advances in science and information technology have further contributed to the global dissemination of Indian classical arts and literature. In this way, *Natyashastra* has become an integral part of popular culture, spreading across the globe through satellite communication and digital media in the modern era.

Impacts and Influences of Natyashastra on Indian Arts

Indian classical dance and theatre continue to evolve but remain rooted in the principles outlined in the *Natyashastra*. The text is considered a comprehensive guide to the art of theatre, covering various aspects such as stage design, costumes, music, dance, and acting. It is a seminal work that has influenced the development of Indian classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, and Odissi. It has also impacted popular cultural expressions such as cinema, television serials, and reality shows based on mythological content.

The *Natyashastra* influenced other arts in ancient and medieval India. Its principles have had far-reaching

effects. For instance, the 108 dance forms described in the *Natyashastra* inspired Shiva sculptures from the first millennium BCE, particularly in the Tandava style. The elaborate rituals of the *Brahmins* served as the foundational blueprint for various art forms, including architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, and drama. Artists interpreted and embodied these rituals by shaping them through stone, sound, line, or movement.

This centrality of emotion in Indian arts, including cinema, is directly linked to the rasa theory's significance in Indian tradition. The availability of international cinema through online and DVD access has further exposed Indian filmmakers—especially those in experimental and independent cinema—to alternate narrative styles. Notably, most of the lead actors in *Mahabharat* underwent acting workshops that introduced them to the acting principles outlined in the *Natyashastra*. Many successful television shows across popular genres—especially social and mythological dramas—reflect its influence. Every actor and director working in India is, consciously or unconsciously, following the prescriptions of Bharata Muni.

The Relevance of Natyashastra

The *Natyashastra* is a representation of the events taking place in the lives of gods, demons, kings, families, men, and sages who possess spiritual knowledge. A term used to describe this art form—one of the most famous Indian Sanskrit classical texts on the performance of arts—is *Natyashastra*. It not only explains the structure of drama but also covers dance techniques, acting, body movement, makeup, costumes, musical shells, instruments, etc. According to Bharata Muni, "Just as well-disposed persons, while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices, enjoy the taste, and attain pleasure and satisfaction, so the cultured people taste the dominant states as they observe them being

represented by an expression of the various states with words, gestures and temperament, and derive pleasure and satisfaction."

In other words, it "deals with all possible subjects linked with drama—architecture, postures, movements and gestures of actors, songs to be sung, dances to be performed, speeches to be delivered, dresses to be worn, musical instruments to be played." According to Thirumalai (2001), "This work is of great significance for fine arts too. It is a work of sociolinguistic information of the past and the present." *Natyashastra* has relevance for the study of geography, ethnography, language, literature, economics, costumes and ornaments, arts, and psychology. In addition to dance, drama, and music, the treatise consists of insights for painting and sculpture too.

Natyashastra has relevance for the study of geography, ethnography, language, literature, economics, costumes and ornaments, arts, and psychology. In addition to dance, drama, and music, the treatise consists of insights for painting and sculpture too. The *Natyashastra*'s scope includes linguistics, literature, arts and crafts, costumes and ornaments, mythology and legend, geography, as well as erotica, psychological sciences, and economics.

Significance of the Study

1. *Natyashastra* actively competes with various modern media platforms such as television, radio, video, films, OTT platforms, and teleserials. These platforms not only provide entertainment but also offer meaningful infotainment.

2. It contributes to changing people's attitudes and behaviors while preserving the history, culture, traditions, and values of heritage in the digital age.

3. Sage Bharata permitted female characters to perform on stage. Inspired by this inclusion, contemporary

theatre, screenplays, street plays, folk media, and teleserials have increasingly begun to allow female participation.

4. AIR (All India Radio) and Doordarshan (DD) channels remain popular among audiences for watching and listening to content based on the *Natyashastra*. These channels have broadcast *Natyashastra*-inspired content through episodic teleserials, movies, and dance performances.

5. Today, *Natyashastra* is accessible on major digital platforms such as YouTube, live streaming services, artificial intelligence-based applications, social media, and online learning platforms like SWAYAM.

Conclusion

Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* is considered the first significant work in Indian performing communication. Its aim is to familiarize readers with Indian forms of communication, wherein the art of communication is mastered through *Natyashastra*. The SMC model, based on Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*, was constructed and developed by Nirmala Mani Adhikary. The *Natyashastra* is the result of several centuries of theatrical practice and is regarded as the most comprehensive guidebook on theatre and dance, intended to preserve theatrical traditions for future generations. It is a living, classical text in aesthetics and the performing arts.

Nowadays, this art form is in fierce competition with popular culture and mass media. *Natyashastra* is widely regarded as one of the most influential tools in performance art. It offers entertainment, much like cinema, television, and OTT platforms. However, it also uniquely fosters shared experiences between the audience and the characters. Research shows that watching live performances based on the *Natyashastra* can influence the mood, tastes, interests,

lifestyles, mindsets, cultures, and behaviors of audiences. This ancient treatise and performance art is also being used as a medium for education, entertainment, awareness, and community empowerment.

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