

NATAYASHASTRA: FEMINIST QUESTIONS ARISE

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Abstract

'NATAYASHASTRA' is one of the only theatrical texts written by great Bharat Muni. In NATAYASHASTRA the whole 37th chapters are dedicated to theatre. The stated chapters described the existence of caste system like-Dalit, the handicapped, and women were discriminated by the society.

In this paper author raise few questions from perspective of women view point. In 25th chapter we can see the shlok no. 20th -23rd where all the qualities of ideal women (Anurakta naari) described it' Women who share their husband good qualities to their friends, Who gives all her wealth to him, Who gives respect to his friends, Who hates his enemies too, Always who feels happy to meet him. Who feels happy and content when she have physical relationship with him. Who goes sleep after her husband sleep, Firstly husband kissed to her after that she respond with same way. Who wake-up before her husband, who tolerate all the hardship for him, Who balance her condition in happy and sad equally in life and who never gets angry, Those women are called ideal.

In next shlok, non ideal women qualities were talked about like-Those women who is not dedicated to her husband .her mind, body and her soul have their own understanding and who never listen to their husband are called non ideal women (virakta naari). Like this way a men and women the difference is explained by Bharat muni or the later Intellectuals tried to show their difference. These intellectuals have talked about the women in patriarchal point of view, from their point of view they are divided in different names according to their definition of Ideal women. They gave the definition for the benefits of men's likes and dislikes. Those definitions are against the women and support the men patriarchy. This paper will try to raise a questions about patriarchal view.

Key words : Natyashastra of Bharatmuni, Patriarchy, Women, Male-Female.

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Historically, the patriarchal order of society started around 5500 BC in India. Vedic Aryans are considered the developed stage of patriarchy. We find applaud of alive as well as the dead one in Vedic literature. It is estimated that Aryan's society must have been patriarchal while they were in Middle Asia. They might be entered in the age of slavery after defeat at the hand of various tribal communities. But, their internal structure remained patriarchal. There were patriarchal relationships in their family while their districts were democratic. Seeing from this viewpoint, it becomes clear that patriarchy was not only a system but also life-style, perspective, attitude and ideology. The existence of patriarchal values even after the extinction of patriarchy is the concrete evidence of this. What is the reason for maintaining the continuity of patriarchal values in the life even after so many changes took place in the social system. In order to understand the flexibility and the continuity of patriarchy, we need to recognize the conditions when patriarchy took place.

Today, patriarchy is the integral part of life. When it developed, it had a great influence on literature, art and culture. It can be said that the patriarchy is actually attitude of life, a lifestyle and mother of values. The dominance of patriarchal values on literature and the process of literature-production have been in vogue for a long time. The creation of *Natyashashtra* was done in this way. Many things have been written in *Natyashashtra* on the lines of Vatsyayana's *Kamsutra* and Manu's *Manusmriti*.

Natyashashtra, written by Bharatmuni, is only a play meant for theatrical purpose. According to some scholars, this play was written during the time period of 2nd century BC to 2nd century AD. *Natyashashtra* is considered as the fifth Veda. According to scholars, it was written with some contribution from all four Vedas.

There have been said several ways related to theater in the 37 chapters of Natyashashtra, wherein at every juncture; dalits, differently-abled and women have been rendered a very lower state. Here, I want to put some questions in the context of women.

The 24th chapter of Natyashashtra tells 23 kinds of women. Here the author has compared the women, according to their virtue and vice, to the behaviour of God, Demon, Serpent, Bird, Tiger, Human, Monkey, Elephant, Camel, Pig, Buffalo, Goat, Cow and so many things. "A girls whose body parts are soft, eyes are calm and good-looking, be healthy, is filled with power and shyness, who is less-sweating, who possesses affection of others in every state, likes fragrance, interested in singing and playing musical instrument, passionate for beauty, should be considered a goddess-like women."ⁱ

"Contrary to this, he has told the characters of demon-like women- "Who is indulge in wrong activity, is annoyed for a long, whose behave is tough, who is non-vegetarian and drunker, who is arrogant, who is greedy, whose talks are tough (Man-like), who is jealous, should be considered as demon-like women".ⁱⁱ

It means, girls whose eyes are not soft, according to author, or often indulge in a tussle with men, could not maintain the love emotions in all situations will be seen as demon. In other couplets, he said that those girls who liked *Kandmool* fruit, who were full of flesh, talkative, interested in sexual intercourse, were akin to the characters of pig, buffalo and monkey. In this play, there is a focus on women's beauty, tenderness of her body, chastity and attractiveness. A large part of creative energy of Natyashashtra is centered on the face of women. After this, focus turns to breast area. This play mostly talks about the ideal face, hairs, eyes, nose, lips, breast, waist, buttock, thigh, nail, fingers, foot and so on and so forth of women. Actually, this play is inspired by Vatsyayana's *Kamsutra*.

While, heroes' characters are entirely different from heroines. This play is composed on the lines of patriarchal perception of male-female. From the viewpoint of patriarchy, woman means passive or ideal. This kind of

woman is normal. While, active male is thought normal. A male possesses the qualities of offensiveness, passionate, responsibility, originality, competitiveness and well-planned. Female is thought to be attractive, submissive, sympathetic, light-hearted, and good-looking. Bharatmuni is inspired by these qualities of man and woman in the process of writing his play.

See the couplet numbers 20-23 of 25th chapters where the characters of a loving heroine have been described- "A heroine, who tells the virtues of her lover to her friends, gives her property to him, respects hero's friends, disrespects hero's enemies, always nourish the feeling to meet him, becomes happy to see her lover, looks happy while speaking to her lover, goes to sleep only after her lover went asleep, make love when her lover makes love to her, gets up early in the morning prior to her lover, suffers a lot for him, remains unchanged in every situations, never becomes annoyed, should be understood as loving and ideal beloved."ⁱⁱⁱ

Next couplet deals with the characteristics of a non-loving heroine-"A heroine, who makes faces and turns while kissing, speaks in poisonous tone, always becomes angry even at tender words, becomes jealous with lover's friends and warm-welcomes lover's enemies, goes to sleep turning her face to other side, sleeps earlier to her husband, does not meltdown after too much requests, is nagging, does not bear difficulty in any way, neither looks to her husband nor welcomes, ought to be considered as non-loving."^{iv}

Likewise Bharatmuni, descent commentators have also told three kinds of heroines –

1. *Swikeeya*
2. *Parkeeya* and
3. *Sadharan Stri*.

Swikeeya is one who has the quality of simplicity, anxious to do house-work and is pure. Shyness is a jewellery for a woman. She should be free from attraction of other men. She should be unaware of obstinacy. These are the peculiarities of an ideal woman. These type of women do not have their

personal will, passion and expectation, rather they are squarely dedicated to their male-part. Rest two other kinds of women could not a place of honour in Natyashashtra. Sadharan Stri has been rendered the status of prostitute.

There are three kinds of women even in Swikeeya- 1. *Mugdha*, 2. *Madhya* and 3. *Pragalya*. The basis and axis of this classification is the sexual intercourse. Likewise, two kinds of women have been put in *Parkeeya* – 1. *Anya Viwahita* and 2. *Vivahita*. Sadharan Stri, who is for all people, is a whore. The category of Sadharan Stri is the lowest among three categories. If we think seriously, we will find that Sadharan Stri is creator, possesses her own identity, is master of her body and mind, but this type of women are, according to Bharatmuni and other commentators, condemnable and a prostitute.

The notion of intercourse is the prime among Swikeeya and Parkeeya; they are passive and artless. The only quality which they have is that they accept the authority of male. They dream through the dream of their husband. In contrary to this, a Sadharan Stri is expert in all 64 art forms, she is normal. She is such sort of woman who transgresses the boundaries drawn by male and challenges constructively the customs and traditions decided by men.

On one hand, one part of theory of patriarchal Natyashashtra is associated with hero, while on the other hand it related with heroine. Hero is a man who is almoner, intelligent, elite and well-off. He is suitable to emulate. Personality, youth, cleverness, courage, sharp-minded, etc. are peculiar qualities of a hero. That means, all the qualities of being active reside with men. On the other hand, an ideal heroine is who is passive, Bhogy, an object to enjoy and play with. The meaning of grandness for men is vigour, truth, greatness, courageous, affectionate, feeling of hatred with lower strata people and competitiveness with their colleagues. The meaning of grandness for woman is beauty, full of flesh, attractiveness, etc. Grandness extended with *Smarvilas* is called *Kaanti* and much extended kaanti has been said as *Dipti*. Being submissive in all conditions for a woman is named as sweetness – appearance of woman which is always nice.

In comparison to female, the meaning of grandness for a male is being

calm even in difficult situations. A male should have a stable vision during intercourse also. His walk should be like Deer and he should talk with smiling face. Facing all sorts of difficult situations is called courage for a man, while stable tendency is courage for a woman. The meaning of kindness for a man is giving alms and keeping equal attitude towards friend as well as foe, while for a woman it is keeping humble attitude forever. A woman should not speak even a word, frown and throw her jewellery on the ground when her lover commits some crime.

Bharatmuni tells us eight kinds of heroines in the 24th chapters and this classification is directly related to male. *Vasaksajja* is a heroine, “Who keeps on waiting for her lover adorning herself.”^v An heroine who is unhappy because her lover has not come in time is *Vihotkanthita*.^{vi} heroine whose lover is always with her is called *Swadhin-bhratrika*.^{vii} Thus, Bharat gives the categorization of heroines on the basis of treatment meted out to them by their lovers. He does not explain the life of heroines on the bases of their independent lives, struggles and social conditions. Can any female character be put in this frame provided by Bharat? Savitri of *Aadhey Adhurey* and Bedrey Bai, the heroine of *Khamosh Adalat Jaari Hai*, can’t be put at all.

Bharat tells heroine’s behave towards wicked hero in this chapter. He tells as how to treat hero when he comes back after having relationship with other woman and he possesses some spots on his body –“Heroine neither speaks roughly at this time and nor play prank with him cunningly. Hero should express her grief mixed with tears.”^{viii}

It becomes form this couplet that a man whatever he does is forgivable. A woman can’t even her anger rightfully. If she dares to do so, do it only in humble tone. What sort of dissemination is this through ancient play Natyashashtra? Bharat has followed religious literature, play and society where women were used to be considered as private property.

There are some explanations in the couplet number 144-149 of Natyashashtra which deal with as how to behave with women. According to Kamshashtra a king should behaviour with a woman in a specific way. This we

can find in the couplet number 150-155. Couplet number 156-162 deals with intercourse. Post-intercourse behaviour of a king has been told in the couplet 201-207. Here are only women not heroines. Bharat further explains 'heroines' *Abhisaran Prakar*'. Explaining *Vasak Upchar Vidhi* he tells- "If a woman is satisfied with little intercourse or she is not interested in having relationship or she often becomes angry, *Vasak Upchar Vidhi* should be employed to convince and tempt her to come ahead."^{ix} If heroine is not ready or she resists, according to Bharat we can tell a lie or persuade her applying any method whether it is right or wrong.

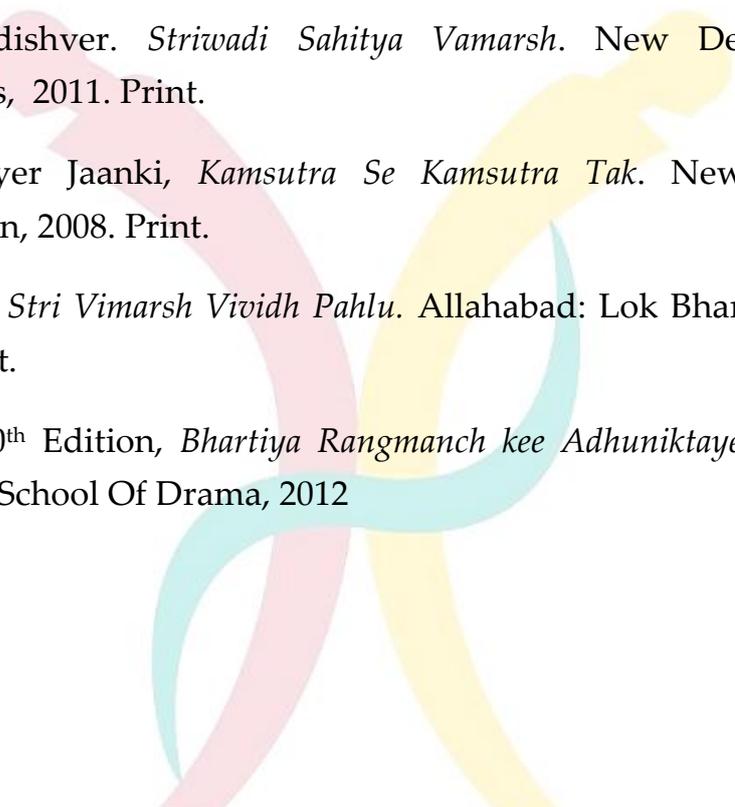
Here Bharat explains the behaviour of women in comparison to heroines which is mostly related with *Kaam* or sexual intercourse. He does not explain even one heroine who has her own identity and independent existence. He is mostly concerned with the objectification of women. If there is any description of a general woman, Bharat puts her in the category of prostitute.

ENDNOTES

- i Shastri, Babul Alka Shukla. *Natya Sastra of Bharat Muni*. Part Third, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 2009. Print. couplet numbers 101-102, Page no. 203
- ii IBID, couplet numbers 103-104, Page no. 204
- iii IBID, couplet numbers 20-23, Page no. 266
- iv IBID, couplet numbers 24-27, Page no. 267
- v IBID, couplet numbers 212, Page no. 232
- vi IBID, couplet numbers 213, Page no. 232
- vii IBID, couplet numbers 214, Page no. 232
- viii IBID, couplet numbers 276, Page no. 247
- ix IBID, couplet numbers 233, Page no. 237

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