

THEATRE/ THEORY / THEATRE

THE MAJOR CRITICAL TEXTS
from Aristotle and Zeami
to Soyinka and Havel

Edited with introductions by
Daniel Gerould

 **APPLAUSE** 
NEW YORK • LONDON

BHARATA

BHARATA is the most complete and yet the most elusive of theatre theorists, whose identity—and dates and place of birth and death—are lost in the mists of legend. He is the most legendary of theorists and the most directly tied to actual theatrical practice, the most exalted and the most practical, both a god and a stage manager.

Theatre was created when the world passed from the Golden Age to the Silver Age. The celestial *Nāṭyaśāstra*, or holy book of dramaturgy, was brought from heaven to earth for benefit of people as the fifth Veda or sacred text.

The author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was divinely inspired by Brahma, the god of creation. Seeing the need for a noble form of diversion in a world of mortals given over to sensual pleasures and jealousy, anger, desire, and greed, Brahma summoned the great sage Bharata and his 100 sons, appointed them the first actors, and taught them the arts of the theatre. The first performance was to represent the defeat of the demons by the gods. The drama, with its origins in ritual, is always performed on consecrated ground, and the theatre structure itself must be sanctified to keep away the evil spirits who plague actors.

Theatre has often been theorized as originating in a struggle of diabolic forces. Augustine, Tertullian, and the early Christian church fathers saw the theatre solely as the work of demons and therefore an evil to be abhorred. Sanskrit theory discovered the wisdom of encompassing one's enemies and making the demonic element part of the theatrical event. Brahma summoned the demons, explaining that no class can be excluded from the theatre, not even one's diabolical enemies. In its goal of educating and entertaining, the all-inclusive Sanskrit theatre rejects no subject—except death, which always takes place offstage and is never mentioned directly. The defeat of the demons is celebrated not as the extinction of one's enemies but as their transformation.

Because he was the father of actors, Bharata has come to mean "actor" in general as an occupational group. Traditionally Bharata is said to have ascended to heaven, where he oversees the daily theatrical productions acted by celestial spirits for the gods. At the same time in the legends evidence of

prejudice and discrimination against actors is also apparent. Bharata and his sons were cursed by the respected sages who took offense at being caricatured by actors. On the verge of suicide, the desperate and outcast actors were granted royal patronage by Kings in order to preserve their art from extinction. Actors may be divine in origin, but respectable society has never accepted them.

Bharata presents a complete poetics of the theatre addressed to playwrights, directors, and actors, consolidating and codifying in infinite detail the various traditions in dance, mime, and drama. It is a vast handbook telling how the desired reactions can be produced in the audience. Success is measured by causing the spectators to weep, shout, and have their hair stand on end (horripilation).

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* sometimes resembles a cook book in telling how to mix aesthetic flavors and combine tastes—*rasa*—in a Sanskrit culinary theatre. At other times it resembles an Indian love manual in its specifications of the erotic inclinations of different male and female character types. No theorist is more concerned with the creative spirit of sexuality than Bharata. But at the same time he insists that decorum be observed. Families attend the theatre together; nothing shown on the stage should make any member of the audience blush.

NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA

1. [*Origin of Nāṭyaśāstra.*] Once Ātreya and other sages came to Bharata, the great scholar and expert on Nāṭya (= drama + dance + music). It was holiday time. Bharata who had finished his daily ablutions was sitting in the midst of his sons. Joining the group, the sages asked Bharata in all politeness about the Nāṭyaveda he had composed, "It is said to be well composed and equal to Vedas," they said, "could you tell us how you came to write it and for whom? What are the subsidiary subjects? What about its authoritative-ness? How is it to be applied?"

Bharata, in reply to their curiosity, said "Nāṭya was created by Brahma. I shall tell that story. Listen to me in all humility and attention."

"Long, long, very long ago," said Bharata, "People of this world of pain and pleasure, goaded by greed and avarice, and jealousy and anger, took to uncivilized ways of life. The world was then inhabited by gods and demons. Various lords were ruling. It was the gods among them who, led by Mahendra, approached God Brahma and requested him thus: "Please give us something which would not only teach us but be pleasing both to eyes and ears. True, the Vedas are there but some like the Sūdras are prohibited from listening to and learning from them. Why not create for us a fifth Veda which would be accessible to all the castes?"

Brahma agreed. Dismissing the petitioners, he meditated in solitude and finally decided to compose a fifth Veda incorporating all the arts and sciences and enlightening too. This he did by taking words from Ṛgveda, music from Sāmaveda, movements and make-up from Yajurveda, and emotional acting from Ātharvanaveda. Then he called Indra and others and said, "Here is the Nāṭyaveda. Let the gods practice it. It requires persons who are smart, intelligent, observant and self-controlled." [...]

Then Brahma said: "I have created the Nāṭyaveda to show good and bad actions and feelings of both the gods and yourselves. It is the representation of the entire three worlds and not only of the gods or of yourselves. Now Dharma, now Artha, now Kāma, humor or fights, greed or killing; right for the people going wrong; enjoyment for those who are pleasure-seekers;

restraint of the ill-behaved or tolerance of the well-behaved; putting courage into cowards or the exploits of the brave; knowledge for the unknowing or the wisdom of the wise; enjoyments of the rich or fortitude of the grief-stricken; money for those who want to make a living and stability to disturbed minds: Nāṭya is the representation of the ways of the world involving these various emotions and differing circumstances. It gives you peace, entertainment and happiness, as well as beneficial advice based on the actions of high, low and middle people. It brings rest and peace to persons afflicted by sorrow or fatigue or grief of helplessness. There is no art, no knowledge, no yoga, no action that is not found in Nāṭya."

Then he asked the gods to perform a sacrifice on the stage according to proper rites by reciting mantras, offering *bali* and food and drinks. "Never start a show without worshipping the stage." [...]

2. [*Choice of site and foundation.*] The Producer should first consider the locality, then decide about the measurements, and select a site accordingly. It should be on a level, firm and hard ground; the soil must be black, not white. It should be cleared by a plough of bone-pieces, skulls, wooden pieces, grass, roots etc. And then it should be measured out. [...]

[*Walls and pillars.*] After laying the foundation on an auspicious day at a convenient moment, the raising of walls should commence. When that is finished, pillars must be raised on an auspicious day and at an auspicious moment on a star-day. The priest, under strict discipline, should fast for three nights and at sun-rise on the fourth morning he should start the work. [...]

6. [*Rasa.*] Let me begin with the explanation of Rasa first, because there is no Nāṭya without Rasa.

Rasa is the cumulative result of stimulus, involuntary reaction and voluntary reaction. For example, just as when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste (different from the individual tastes of the compounds) is felt, or when the mixing of materials like molasses with other materials produces six kinds of tastes, so also along with the different Bhāvas (emotions) the "eight fundamental emotions" become a Rasa or taste.

But what is this thing called *Rasa*? Here is the reply. Because it is enjoyably tasted, it is called *Rasa*. How does the enjoyment come? Persons who eat prepared food mixed with different condiments and sauces, if they are sensitive, enjoy the different tastes and then feel pleasure; likewise, sensitive spectators, after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through words, gestures and feelings feel pleasure. This final feeling by the spectators is here explained as *Rasas* of Nāṭya.

[*Relation between Rasa and Bhāva.*] A question is asked here. Are the *Bhāvas* produced by *Rasas*, or *Rasas* produced by *Bhāvas* [emotions]? Some are

of the opinion that their relation is symbiotic. That however is not correct. It can be clearly seen that *Rasa* is produced from *Bhāvas* and not vice versa.

Here are the verses in support of the above.

1) Theatre-producers say that a *Bhāva* is called as such because it leads to a *Rasa* arising out of various kinds of acting.

2) Many materials of different kinds produce a distinctive flavor; likewise, a flavor is produced by the *Bhāvas* through acting.

3) There is no *Rasa* (Flavor) without a *Bhāva* and there is no *Bhāva* without *Rasa*. Through acting, mutually they lead to a distinct result.

4) Condiments and herbs (i.e. vegetables) render food tasty; so is the mutual relation between *Bhāvas* and *Rasas*.

5) Out of a seed grows a tree, out of a tree a flower, out of a flower a fruit, so *Rasa* is the seed of all *Bhāvas*.

[*Origin, color and deities of Rasas.*] Now we shall describe the origin, the color and the deities of the *Rasas*. The source (i.e. basic) *Rasas* are four: viz. the Erotic, Heroic, Terror, and Disgust. Further, Humor is derived from the Erotic, Compassion and Pathos from Terror, Wonder or the Magical from Heroics, and Dread from Disgust. Humor results when Love (the Erotic) is parodied, a terrible thing or situation produces pity, a heroic deed appears marvelous, and anything disgusting or repulsive produces fright. [...]

8. [*Acting of the subordinate parts of the body.*]

[*The eyes.*] First, from the point of view of the look of the eyes, the author mentions thirty-six varieties. Of these, eight convey eight *Rasas*, the next eight express the eight fundamental emotions, and the remaining twenty the other *Bhāvas*. The eight fundamental emotions are what the actor feels as demanded by the character and the context; so the look for love is described as affectionate. The acting for this is a sweet or graceful inviting look with tears of glistening joy. Now this look has to convey a *Rasa*, viz. the erotic or romantic sentiment, to the audience. For that purpose, not only the eyebrows are contracted but the eyes look sidelong. [...]

Raised brows, sidelong glances, distended eyes, unwinking look, closed and half-closed eyelids, looking down the nose, drooping brows, contracted eye-corners, laughing look, contemptuous look, thoughtful look—these are the looks which give us the different thirty-six looks. Roving pupils, steady pupils, moist pupils, winking and unwinking eyelids, contracted eyelids, raised eyebrows, lowered eyebrows, contracted eyebrows and knitted eyebrows—all these change the look. In this way, the author had described a total of thirty-six looks and given a name to each of them.

[*The nose.*] Here it is the nostrils which determine the expression of grief, impatience, strong smell, fragrance, laughter, contempt, etc. They might be quivering slightly, flinched, drawn back, breathing, distended, an normal. So the author distinguishes six varieties. [...]

20. [*Ten kinds of plays.*]

[*Nāṭaka.*] That which has as its theme a well-known story, a well-known hero of exalted nature, which concerns the story of a royal sage and his family, in which there are superhuman elements, which speaks of the various aspects of glory, grandeur and success of love-affairs and which has acts and prologues is a *Nāṭaka*. In a *Nāṭaka* there is the story of kings, various *Rasas* and emotions and sorrows and pleasures.

The seed or the beginning must develop from act to act in a *Nāṭaka*. *Aṅka*, or act, is the usual word which is so called because, connected with sentiments and emotions and according to certain rules, the story develops from part to part. An act is that in which an episode is complete, but not the beginning which should still cling to it. In an act, the direct exploits of the Hero with various ups and downs must be drawn out. An act must contain more than one *Rasa* (arising out of the words and acts) of the hero, the Queen, the attendants, the religious leaders, the ministers, the merchant and so on.

A *Nāṭaka* or a *Prakaraṇa*, must have five to ten acts. At the end of an act all the characters must exit.

Anger, grief, pronouncement of curse, flight or panic, marriages and miracles must be directly shown in the act.

Battle, loss of a kingdom, death, siege of a city should not be referred to in the act but in the Interludes.

Neither in an act, nor in an Interlude, nor in a *Nāṭaka* nor a *Prakaraṇa*, should there be killing of a hero.

Death or conclusion of peace or capture (of the hero) must be suggested in the Interlude by various acts.

An act should cover events of a single day. [...]

In a *Nāṭaka* or a *Prakaraṇa* there should not be a crowd of characters. There could be four or five necessary ones.

Chariots, elephants, horses, aerial chariots are not to be brought on the stage. Either by shape or costume or by distinctive gestures and movements, actors should represent them. Or their models, like those of weapons, may be made. This applies to mountains also.

If, for any reason, a regiment of an army is to be brought in, this may be represented by four or six actors. In the case of kings, there should be a very small number of servants, attendants, horses, etc. and their movements also may be few or for a short distance, since, in a play, all the detailed splendor of kingship need not be shown. In a play, the actions must be like the tip of a cow's tail—the significant and high emotions coming at the end. (It is the tip that is used as a fan.) Similarly, it is in the end that the *Rasa* of the play, out of the various emotions, must emerge. [...]

23. [*Costumes and make-up.*]

[*Make-up for different characters.*] One should paint the body according to the region, custom and age of the character. [...]

Gods and others, snakes and the other animals, mountains, rivers,

Drama. Human beings who dwell on the seven continents are to be painted in the color of burnished gold. And even in Jambūdvīpa, except the North and the Kuru regions, all others dwelling in the other regions must be given the complexion of burnished gold. In Bhadrāśva the people have white complexion, in Ketumāla blue, but pale red everywhere else.

The Bhūtas will be of many colors; they may be dwarfs with ugly (deformed) faces, and even with faces of a boar, a ram, a buffalo, or a deer.

Now I shall tell you the color of people in Bhārata-Varsa. Kings should be of pale red or dark blue or lotus colored. Persons who are happy should also be given pale red complexion. Those who do vile deeds, or are possessed by evil spirits, or diseased or engaged in miseries or of inferior birth, should be not fair. Sages must always be given the color of a plum and also sages practicing penance. If necessary, or if the author feels like it, color may be varied, but in accordance with region, custom and age. [...]

[*Beards and mustaches.*] After painting the face and parts of the body as above, one should set about providing beard (and mustache) according to region, profession and work. To suit various ages and conditions four kinds of beards much be provided, viz. white, black, mixed (or grey) and bushy. Beards of sages, religious mendicants, ministers and religious leaders must be white; those of persons of unfulfilled vows, of people in sorrow, or ascetics and of people in calamities should be black; those of celestial persons, of Kings and princes and officers of Kings, or gallants and persons proud of their youth, must be mixed; and the beards of sages and ascetics and persons observing a long-time vow, and of those seeking and bent on vengeance, must be bushy. This is about the beards.

[*Costumes for different occasions.*] Now I shall speak of costumes proper for different occasions. Costumes are of three kinds: clean or pure or white; of mixed colors or middling clean, etc.; and soiled.

While going to the temples or observing a vow or during an auspicious occasion, at marriage ceremonies and also while carrying out a religious duty, men and women should wear clean costumes. [...]

Intoxicated persons, lunatics, travelers, those in calamity should wear soiled clothes.

Even among the three varieties, an expert producer should observe the quality of the cloth (i. e. soiled, more soiled, etc.) [...]

Those employed in harems should wear clothes made of pieces of dark red cloth. Those born in a good family, women in special conditions should have appropriate costume. Warriors should wear costumes convenient for fighting and should have armor, different weapons, and bow and arrows. The costume of the King must always be multicolored except when he is engaged in a rite to ward off an evil star, for which he should wear white. [...]

24. [*Basic representation.*]

[*Desire, the source of all.*] Almost all feelings have their source in Kāma, desire. This desire is varied, e.g. desire for justice, for wealth, etc.

The union of a man and a woman is a proper union. It may end either in happiness or sorrow. Many a time, even in misery, it is observed to cause happiness. When this union leads to a sexual act, that is called Love. In this world, everyone craves happiness, and women, though they have various natures, are the source of that happiness. [...]

[*Erotic behavior.*] In a drama, achievement of love is of two sorts; one inner, i.e. within the rules of social propriety, and the other, external, i. e. outside the normal ways of society. In a drama love affairs of Kings are inner; but external is a love affair with courtesans and that should be treated in a Prakaraṇa.

There are three kinds of women with whom a love affair is possible: a woman of good family; a courtesan; and a mixture of the two, viz. a woman who is pure.

Kings should have love affairs only with a woman of good family and not with a courtesan; but they can do so if the woman is a divine courtesan. Other (i.e. common) people can have love affairs with courtesans. The courting of a virgin is the same as that of one of a high family; the same applies to courtesans also.

In the case of men and women of high, low or middling status, the sex-desire is aroused by many causes; i.e. hearing, seeing, physical beauty, graceful gestures and sweet words. Therefore, a man or a woman in love should closely observe the signs and indications. [...]

[*Acting of these heroines.*] The four heroines whose lovers are absent should express their condition by anxiety, sighs, lassitude, talking with their female friends, referring to their lot, weakness, depression, tears, anger, throwing off the ornaments, rubbing their hands, sorrow and weeping.

A woman with her husband (lover) under her control should have brilliant and beautiful costumes, her face beaming with joy and looking extremely beautiful.

Whether a courtesan, or a lady of noble birth, or a maid servant, a heroine who is going to meet her beloved in a tryst should act as follows:

If a courtesan, she must deck herself with various ornaments, and, in the company of her servants, must walk slowly. If a highborn lady, she should cover herself with a veil and walk timidly and with downcast eyes in a lurking manner. If a maid servant, she should walk with uneven steps, eyes beaming with joy, gesturing and babbling under the influence of intoxication.

If the lover is in bed and asleep, she should awaken him in the following manner. A high born lady should awaken him with the sound of her orna-

ments, a courtesan by her scents, and a maid servant by fanning him with her clothes.

[*Union of lovers.*] When, either out of fear or anger, the woman is not willing, the lover should try to consummate the union under some pretexts. A man not getting his beloved for union will not be in the control of love; but once he achieves the union, he is doubly delighted. At the time of the union, there should be graceful gestures, sweet words and sportive behavior between the lovers who are looking at each other with loving eyes. A woman also should prepare for the union which would give pleasure and wait for her lover to come. She should keep in readiness for her lover scents and flowers and scented pieces of cloth and also make herself up. At the time of the union, too many ornaments are not advised; but jingling ones, like girdles and anklets, may be retained. [...]

25. [*Men and women.*]

[*Certain prohibitions when showing the erotic on stage.*] There should be no sleeping on the stage; under some pretext the act must be brought to a close. If the context requires it and one has to sleep, either alone or with someone else, then kissing, embracing, any other private acts, biting the lips (of one another), marks of nails (on the woman's breasts), loosening the front knot, crushing the lips or breasts should not be shown on the stage. Nor should eating, or sporting in water, or anything which makes the audience blush be shown. For a drama is seen by a father, a son, a daughter-in-law, a mother-in-law (all sitting together); so these must be avoided. In a drama, words must be pleasant to hear, not harsh, they must be sweet, not cruel; they must convey good advice. [...]

26. [*Acting-miscellaneous.*] There are some particulars about expression through gestures, which have not been mentioned. They could be called "Expression of miscellaneous ideas or things."

[*Gestures for natural phenomena.*] For example, morning and evening, day and night, seasons and dark clouds, wide expanse of water, the different quarters, the big stars and many such things which are far and wide and fixed (i.e. permanent) may be indicated by the hands in the Swastika gesture and on one side, and head raised and eyes looking up (or in the distance). With the same gestures of hands and head but eyes looking down, anything on the ground may be indicated.

To indicate moonlight, happiness, air, taste and smell, gestures used for touch and horripilation may be employed. Hot ground and heat of the sun may be indicated by movements suggesting search for a shady place. By covering one's head and face by a cloth dust, storm and smoke could be indicated.

Looking up with half-shut eyes, the midday sun is indicated. Similarly, sunrise and sunset may also be indicated by suggesting depth (of the ocean,

out of which the sun is supposed to rise and into which to sink).

[*Indicating anything pleasant or unpleasant.*] Anything pleasant or happy is indicated by touching the limbs, by a rising of the hairs on the body; anything harsh and unpleasant also by similar gestures but by contracting the body as well. When one is to express or indicate important and noble objects (or persons), one must have grace and strength in one's gestures. [...]

[*Gestures for seasons.*] With all the limbs relaxed, suggesting that all quarters are clear and conveying that various flowers can be seen, autumn is conveyed; and winter by contracting the body, by seeking the sun or fire or warmth (in the case of superior and middling characters) and by chattering teeth and sneezing and shaking the head (in the case of inferior characters, and in some cases, even by superior characters); severe winter by gestures of touch, suggesting a chilly wind or drinking wine; spring by gestures of rejoicing, enjoying in festival occasions and blossoming of various flowers; summer by suggesting the heat of the ground, movements of fanning and wiping of sweat; and rainy season by the appropriate flowers, grass and the presence of peacocks.

Seasons, as a rule, are to be indicated by the appropriate (i.e. seasonal) marks, activity, costumes, etc. And the other thing is, seasons and other such experiences are a pleasure to one in happy circumstances but a pain when miserable. So in acting one should remember one's circumstances, then the cause of a particular experience and then know the automatic responses to it. (e.g. Spring to a lover in the company of his beloved is one thing, but to one separated from her is exactly the opposite.) [...]

27. [*Success of the productions.*] Now I shall speak to you about the success in connection with production; for, the production of drama is, above all, intended to be successful. Success which results from acting, emotion and gestures and which depends on different Rasas and Bhāvas is of two kinds: human and divine (i.e. depending on factors outside human control).

[*Human success.*] This depends on various factors, physical and verbal. Success is indicated vocally by a gentle smile, smile, loud laughter, remarks or exclamations like "good," "wonderful," "alas," loud applause, etc.

The physical indications are: "hair standing on end," "jumping in the seat," "throwing garlands and rings on the stage," etc.

When actors create humor by a *double entendre*, spectators should receive it with a gentle smile. [...]

When the humor, or the words suggesting it are not clear, then the audience should just part its lips in a half-smile.

Humor produced by the pranks of the jester or by some other artifice should be received with loud laughter.

Any act of virtue done in an excellent way should be received by exclamations of "good." Similarly, when surprised or greatly pleased, one natural-

ly exclaims "how wonderful." But for pathetic things or acts, the audience should exclaim "Alas!" When there is something astonishing, it should be received by vociferous applause. At words of condemnation, or when the actor acts a "thrill," i.e., his hair standing on end, or when there are retorts and replies making one curious, the audience should applaud. At brilliant passages in the play or when there are scenes of cutting or breaking or fighting or some such commotion, the audience should applaud by rising from their seats and with tears of appreciation. [...]

[*Competitions.*] This is applicable particularly to competitions. During a competition, faults due to factors outside should not be considered. But other successes and faults may be noted down. The one whose faults are few and successes more should be awarded the victory flag by the king. In cases of an equal number of successes i.e. points of success, the one whom the king chooses as the victor should get the flag. The experts should be seated at a distance of twelve hastas. [...]

35. [*Distribution of roles.*]

[*Manner of entry and impersonation.*] When one enters the stage, it should always be with the make-up of the character he is playing and not in his natural character.

Just as a man gives up his nature and his body and assumes those of another, so an actor, if he is clever, says, "I am not I, but I am *He*," and then takes up the style of the other's (i.e. character's) speech, gait and gestures.

[*Three ways of impersonation.*] The relation between the actor and the character he plays can be described in three ways; fitting, unfitting and suitable.

When a woman plays a female role and a man plays a male role, and there is no age-disparity between the actor and the role he plays, the casting may be called fitting; but when a child plays an old man's role and vice versa it is called unfitting casting. When a man assumes a female role and vice versa it is called suitable, provided other factors like age, limbs are also suitable.

[*Suitability of women for roles.*] Singing and dancing must be given to women because their voice is naturally sweet and their gestures and movements naturally graceful. Grace of body and movements and sweetness of voice in a man should be considered as an exception. The roles not only of women but of gods and men who are delicate must be played by women. A Director should not give any instructions to an actress when she is playing a female role; but if she plays a male role he should instruct her. [...]

[*Impersonation of a king.*] It may be asked how can an actor, with a few accessories, express the qualities of a king? Why not? He has been painted, he has been decked with ornaments; with all this, if he walks with dignity, he could feel he owns the whole earth. (Why a king behaves like that we do not know.) But if a king behaves like an actor, an actor can behave like a

King. [...]

[*Qualities of a director.*] Now I shall describe the qualities a Director should possess. He should know everything about *Nāṭyaśāstra*; he should be an expert in four kinds of musical instruments; he should know not only about polity, the various Śāstras, but also know about the non-vedic practices; he should have full knowledge of courtesans and their ways, about the *Kāmaśāstra*, about Rasas and Bhāvas, about the various arts and crafts, about poetics, about astronomy and the science of wealth; he should know about the people, he should be able to read, understand and explain and even give instructions about the Śāstras; he should be a man of good memory, keen intelligence, patient, liberal, firm, not susceptible to anger and illness, truthful, impartial, honest and not amenable to flattery.