

## What Sanskrit drama might teach us about Music and Audience Reception of later Greek drama

As Alexander the Great spread Hellenism through the Mediterranean to India, theatre venues expanded east far beyond Athens and theatre audiences grew more socially and ethnically diverse. Thus, we must ask how theatrical performances during this time succeeded in communicating the proper emotions to a mixed audience. In recent years, scholars of later Greek theatre have examined the problems of a more diverse audience in terms of gender, ethnicity and class, and exhort us to consider the input of non-Athenian, non-Greek communities (e.g. Hall 2006, Gildenhard & Revermann 2010, Moore 2012). The influence of Richard Shechner's broad and inclusive performance theory (1988) has further stimulated scholars of Greek theatre to employ cross-cultural and cross-genre comparisons.

In this paper I illustrate how music may have been used in later Greek drama to produce the appropriate pleasure (Aristotle's *hēdonē*) for mixed audiences, through cross-cultural comparison with music as employed in Sanskrit drama. Music, song, and dance were an essential, pervasive part of both ancient Greek and Indian drama and worked together to stimulate and give pleasure to large, mixed audiences (Gupt 1994:274). Both Greek and Indian writers on drama and music share the idea that a successful performance leads all spectators toward virtue, good character, and appropriate pleasure.

I focus on two forms of Indian drama—Kutiyattam and Kathakali dance-drama of Kerala—still performed today in India before mixed audiences. The key to success of these productions is the way they combine different emotions through music, dance, and drama to create *rasa* 'aesthetic pleasure'.

I begin with the definition of *rasa*, a key theoretical concept explained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the Indian treatise on dramaturgy c. 4th c. CE, ascribed to Bharata. The goal of any dramatic performance (*nāṭya*) depends on *rasa*, which Bharata describes as the holistic combination of music, dance, and drama as received by the audience (Rangacharya 356–367; *NS* V 31–45). A performance that combines different emotions properly results in *rasa*, which thus "civilizes all *varna-s* (castes)" (*NS* I 1–20). I compare the concept of *rasa* with Greek *mousikē* as describing a collective aesthetic experience of music, art, poetry, and dance, tied to religious thought, and equal to "Culture" in its broadest sense, in that the entire community is involved in production and reception. I suggest that Bharata's explanation of *rasa* may inform our understanding of Aristotle's statement that *mousikē* leads humanity toward *aretē*, *ēthos*, and proper *hēdonē* (*Pol.* 1339a11–1340b19).

Kutiyattam and Kathakali dance–drama share key musical elements with Greek drama. Both dramatic traditions employ songs and instrumental music to heighten the effect of the drama; music and meter were used in both to convey mood, character, gender, class and ethnic difference; Intervals, notes and modes were suited to word and action; Melodies and rhythm were composed in mimetic ways to suit individual characters, and the audiences would expect thrilling solos and complex music (Murray & Wilson 2004; Rowell 1992). In the *Poetics* Aristotle focuses on visual (*opsis*), plot, and character of tragedy and has no interest in *performance*; still, he states that song–making (*melopoeia*) is the greatest of the components that creates pleasure (*hēdonē*) (1450b16). In the *Politics* he adds that rhythms and songs (*melē*) create emotions through different *harmoniai* (modal systems). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* deals at length with these same musical concerns as integral components of dramaturgy. Musical modes (*harmoniai, raga*), rhythm (meter, *tala*), and instruments (aulos, shenai), were used in both Greek and Indian dramatic traditions to convey not only emotions, but also gender, class and ethnic differences (Baumer and Brandon 1981).

Thus, despite the chronological, textual, and cultural differences that make it problematic to draw conclusions about Greek practices from a study of Sanskrit drama, cross–cultural comparative study of living traditions of Kathakali and Kutiyattam, alongside the textual evidence, may provide some clarity as to how the musical aspects of drama functioned in practice and inform and expand our understanding of audience reception of later Greek plays.

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