

# Aharya Abhinaya – A Study

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The Art of Theatre is referred to as “Natya” and Bharata Muni defines it as the ‘glorified’ imitation of the world around us (lokanukertanam) wherein the various situations with different emotions, conveying pleasure, and pain, are depicted through the four Abhinayas or modes of communication namely: angika (physical), vacika (verbal), aharya (ornamental) satvika (intellectual and emotional). The purpose of this Natya is to create in the audience aesthetic relish and pleasure known as Rasa.

Among all the modes of representation Bharata gives Aharya Abhinaya, the most powerful status of communication to establish the intended rasa. He says that when an artiste is dressed up as a particular character, the concept and context is already communicated, even before a word is spoken or an action performed. Aharya Abhinaya is referred to as the wall or canvas on which other abhinayas are easily painted. Aharya Abhinaya represents collectively the external elements of communication such as the costume, ornaments, make-up, and stage props, which is referred to as “Nepathya” in Chapter XXI of the Natya Sastra. Bharata has devoted only one chapter to Aharya Abhinaya per se; however, the significance he attaches to it is evident from the constant mention of it in almost every chapter. There are certain basic principles in the Natya Sastra, which have remained valid for all times to come. There is a sense of universality and perennial purposefulness in his approach to Aharya, which does not restrict itself to a given period of time.

Surprisingly, many scholars who have done extensive work on translation and interpretation on other topics have not paid adequate attention to Aharya Abhinaya, including Abhinavagupta. Aharya Abhinaya according to Bharata makes the performance of other abhinayas fall in place effortlessly. A deeper study of the chapter on Aharya Abhinaya (Ch. XXI) reveals an amazing wealth of information available about Bharatavarsha. The aim in dealing with an exclusive study of the Aharya Abhinaya is threefold.

1. To bring out the importance given by Bharata to Aharya Abhinaya in Natya and its relevance for all times with cross-reference from other chapters.
2. To showcase the vast treasure of social history available in the chapter in the context of the different communities and class, religious orders and tribes, identifiable through their aharya.
3. To establish the emotional impact of Aharya. The rasa-realisation of a production is primarily kindled by the aharya in the form of dress, colour of make-up, props and accessories, which become the vibhava or determinant to establish the sthaya bhava to create Rasa. There is an instant communication of the character through the aharya and a rapport beyond language and action is established with the spectator.

The different perspectives of Aharya Abhinaya are dealt along with the four - fold classification of Pusta (model work of stage props and sets), Alankara (decoration with ornaments and dress), Anga-racana (cosmetic painting of the body) and Sajjiva (life-like representation of birds, animals, and inanimate objects, giving the touch of realistic presentation). These again are with reference to Pravrtti (regional preferences), Dharmi (style of presentation), Rasa (aesthetic relish), desha (region), jati (class or category) and avastha (mental condition) of the character. Aharya Abhinaya through ages has been studied in the thesis with literary, sculptural and pictorial Evidence.

Continuity of the Natya Sastraic traditions in the Aharya Abhinaya of today's theatre is clearly brought by 2 case studies, one of Shri Manohar of Tamil Nadu, known as a wizard in stagecraft and two Jayashree's own production in Marathi "Bhakta Sakha Vitthala."

Factors Enhancing Aharya's appeal viz., lighting, Backdrop curtains, Synthetic Materials for model work and Symbolic Devices in Aharya have been elucidated with reference to Dr Padma Subrahmanyam's "Meenakshi Kalyanam" produced for the Doordarshan Kendra, New Delhi, for the Doordarshan Archives. This showcases how the various concepts of aharya have been adapted beautifully to the requirement of the modern technique of multiple camera photography and the space area of a studio to be viewed on a two dimensional screen. The effect of lighting and backdrop screens which are modern additions to aharya are judiciously juxtaposed with the traditional aharya to bring out the terrestrial and celestial locales and transport us to the period of the Pandya Raja in Madurai.

The vast variety of aharya, delineated in an exclusive chapter on Aharya Abhinaya [Chapter XXI] of Natya Sastra shows what an advanced form of theatrical art existed in Bharatavarsha from very early times. This single chapter itself gives us an insight into the anthropological elements of that period. People of various class, caste, creed and professions made up an extremely civilized society rich in arts, religions, politics, philosophy and the very way of life itself. In this thesis an attempt has been made to show how our ancient wisdom has continued to guide the artistes through the centuries.

Bharata rightly proclaims:

Vayonurupau prathamastu vesho veshanurupena gatipracarau |

Gatipracanugatam ca pathyam pathyanurupo abhinayasca karyau ||

NS, XII, 251

"Firstly make-up and costume should be done according to the age context and nature of the character, followed by proper movements and gestures, correct voice and speech and finally by the responsive emotional reactions."