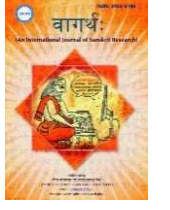




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## NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA AND BHĀSA

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*Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS) of Bharatamuni is one of the most voluminous and comprehensive texts on the art of theatre, drama and dramaturgy compiled around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. There is hardly any author in the galaxy of classical Sanskrit playwrights who has not been influenced in some way or other by overpowering impact of this *magnum opus*; mostly the playwrights in Sanskrit eagerly confirm to the dicta of the NS. *Bhāsa*, however, is an exception.

**Key Words:** *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS), *Bhāsa*.

*Bhāsa* stands as the foremost amongst the classical playwrights in our literature tradition. He was revered as a great dramatist even in the days of Kālidāsa. Not only because of his antiquity, but also because of his unparallel achievements in the conception of dramatic theme, his perception of human nature and command of theatric idiom as well as his vision and understanding of life, *Bhāsa* must be ranked as one of the greatest dramatists of world-literature. It is presumed that being anterior; *Bhāsa* does not exhibit the influence of the tradition of NS. The design of so-called *Bhāsa* plays violates Bharata's maxims, or at least his plays do not present a simple study in terms of his *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS). They present difficulties when we try to evaluate them on the basis of norms or principles of dramaturgy as spelt out by Bharata, viz :

- A. Presentation of death scenes: Vālin (in *Abhiṣeka*), Duryodhana (in *Ūrubhaṅga*) and Daśaratha (in *Pratimā*) succumb to death on the stage itself. NS prohibits depiction of a death scene in a *Nāṭaka* and the death of a noble hero should never be shown according to it.

युद्धं राज्यभ्रंशो मरणं नगरोपरोधनं चैव ।  
प्रत्यक्षाणि तु नाङ्के प्रवेशकैः संविधेयानि॥  
अङ्के प्रवेशके च प्रकरणमाश्रित्य नाटके वापि।

न वधः कर्तव्यः स्याद्योऽभ्युदयी नायकः ख्यातः॥

(NS XVIII. 38.39)

नाम्बरग्रहणं रङ्गे न स्नानं न विलेपनम् ।  
नाञ्जनं नाङ्गरागश्च केशसंयमनं तथा॥  
नाप्रावृता नैकवस्त्रा न रागमधरस्य तु ।  
उत्तमा मध्यमा वापि कुर्वीत प्रमदा क्वचित्॥  
अधमानां भवेदेष सर्व एव विधिः सदा ।  
कारणान्तरमासाद्य तस्मादपि न कारयेत्॥

(NS XXII.240-42)

न कार्यं शयनं रङ्ग नाट्यधर्मं विजानता ।  
केनचिद् वचनार्थेनऽङ्कच्छेदो विधीयते ।  
यद्वा शयीतार्थवशादेकाकी सहितोऽपि वा ।  
चुम्बनालिङ्गनं चैव यद् वा गुह्यं च यद् भवेत्॥  
दन्तच्छेद्य नखच्छेद्यं नीवीडुंसनमेव च ।  
स्तनान्तरविर्दं च रङ्गमध्ये न कारयेत्॥  
भोजनं सलिलक्रीडा तथा लज्जाकरं च यत् ।  
पितापुत्रसुषाश्चश्रुदृश्यं यस्मात् तु नाटकम् ।  
तस्मादेतानि सर्वाणि वर्जनीयानि तत्त्वतः॥

(NS XXII.295-99)

Murder is also prohibited. Vālin is actually murdered and Rāma is shown as shooting the arrow on him.

B. Again, NS does not allow violent scenes of fight, wrestling or murder in aNāṭaka. Bālacarita, aNāṭaka type of play attributed to Bhāsa, abounds in such scenes. In Madhyamavyāyoga a vigorous fight between Bhīma and Ghaṭotkaca.

C. Bhāsa has represented sleep on the stage in Daridrācārudattam and in Svapnavasavādattam. The later, a nāṭaka type of drama is taken as a genuine play of Bhāsa beyond any shred of doubt, even though it might have been tempered or edited at some places by the Cākyars. The dream of the hero (Udayana) forming a very touching scene is irrevocably linked with the very title of the play, on which Bhāsa's reputation stands.

NS lays down that the actors should not enact sleep on the stage. Is Bhāsa challenging the NS-tradition or he is violating the same owing to his unawareness about it? T. Ganapati Shastri holds Bhāsa's un-acquaintance with Bharata's NS as the reason for these transgressions. He says – 'I find that Bhasa disregards altogether the rules of dramaturgy laid down in that work.....Bhāsa perhaps belonged to one of the older schools of dramaturgy and therefore he was not aware of the rules laid down in the Natyashastra' (*Bhasa's Plays* – T. Ganapati Shastri, p. 80).

D. Again, the rulings of NS with regards to the arrangements of seats (Āsanas) for different types of characters has been disregarded in Dūtavākyaṃ, where Duryodhana offers seats to his elders entering the royal court.

देवानां नृपतीनां च दद्यात्सिंहासनं द्विजः।  
पुरोधसाममात्यानां भवेद्वेत्रासनं तथा ॥  
मुण्डासनं च दातव्यं सेनानीयुवराजयोः।  
काष्ठासनं द्विजातीनां कुमारानां कुथासनम्।  
एवं राजसभां प्राप्य कार्यस्त्वासनजो विधिः।

NS.XII.215-17

Kūrmasana and carmāsana do not find a mention in the prescriptions of NS (आचार्य ! एतत् कूर्मासनम्, आस्यताम्। पितामह ! एतत् सिंहासनम्, आस्यताम्। मातुल ! एतच्चर्मासनम्, आस्यताम्। (Dūtavākyaṃ).

E. NS gives a ruling for the mention of the name of the dramatist in the prologue of the play, none of the so-called Bhāsa – plays contain the name of the dramatist in their prologues.

F. The hero of Nāṭaka type of drama should fall under the category of Dhīrodātta. The hero of Svapnavasavādattam does not conform to the characteristics of a Dhīrodatta. He is more of a Dhīralalita type.

G. The use of the word cekrīdita in Avimarkare reminds us that Bharata disallows such uncommon usages:

अहं द्विनेत्रो न सहस्रनेत्रो  
मतिश्च मूढा सुचिराभिलाषात् ।  
कामार्णवस्याद्य तु दृष्टपारं  
चेक्रीड्यतां मे सुखमक्षियुगम् ॥

Avimārakam III.18

The remarks in (NS IXX. 153) with regards to the use of such rare forms seem to criticize the passage of Avimārika :

चेक्रीडिताद्यैः शब्दैस्तु काव्यबन्धा भवन्ति ये ।  
वेश्या इव न ते भान्ति कमण्डलुधरैर्द्विजैः ॥

It is only by just a chance that Bhāsa has used the work 'cekridita' and NS has criticized, rather in a way of mockery, the very use of the word 'cekridita' itself? Is it possible that the above line has been inserted in the text of NS just to comment on the language of Bhāsa, or alternately, Bhāsa, if he is aware of the dicta of NS, he is deliberately violating them?

In fact, it is not merely a question of violating a few rules prescribed in NS, Bhāsa is unique in his thematic design as well as the approach to dramatic canons. He displays certain peculiar features that are uncommon in the long tradition of Sanskrit drama. Svapnavasavādattam is decisively upheld as one of the greatest classical Sanskrit plays and is supposed to be a nāṭaka type of drama in our tradition; and has been cited as a nāṭaka by a number of rhetoricians. But it does not conform to the definitions of a nāṭaka in totality. Instead of one, there are two heroines, and curiously enough, the hero goes on loving the senior heroine (jyeṣṭhānāyikā) with a innermost feelings of his heart, maintaining just a sort of a formal relationship with his new bride – even though the later is more beautiful, younger and more attractive. This is a very strange situation – the younger one commands only respect owing to her qualities, while the senior heroine, who is supposed to be dead, reigns the world of his heart.

This expression from the hero of Bhāsa's play is extraordinary in the sense that it brings out a human relationship which is unique in Sanskrit drama. The other plays dealing with the theme of the triangle of love present a situation which is just the reverse. There the hero is running after the younger heroine and is desperately trying to maintain the semblance of his relations with the senior heroine which are almost heading towards a dead end. Even in the later plays dealing with Udayana-theme, the image of the hero together with his relationship with the two nāyikās has been reversed, with perhaps the single exception of 'Tāpasavatsarāja' by AnaṅgahaṛṣaMāyurāja which is a recast of Svapnavasavādattam itself.

Considering the forms of drama also, Bhāsa displays certain peculiar features. Amongst the ten major forms of drama, Bhāsa stands alone in exploring the rare types which were taken up only exceptionally by his successors. If the plays dealing with Mahabhārata-theme in the Bhāsanāṭakacakra are independent compositions of the great dramatist, then they can be presumed to be furnishing the earliest specimen of the types of drama which later on became extinct in our tradition.

Of the Mahabhārata plays by Bhāsa, Madhyamavyāyoga is of Vyāyoga type, Pañcarātra of Samavakara type and Karnabhāra and Ūrubhanga come under the category of Utsrṣṭikāṅka type. But none of them exactly stands in conformity to Bharata's definitions of these types. The Samavakara type of play is structured on triplets. It should have three acts, three Kapatās (deceptions), three Vidravas (flights) and three types of Śṛṅgāra Rasa. The three types of flight in Samavakara are caused by war, flood, typhoon, fire, elephant running amuck and siege of the city. The three kinds of deception create both pleasure as well as pain in this play. They are in the following situations – (i) an innocent person is deceived by other, (ii) the fate connives against him, (iii) the deception is done in retaliation. The three types of Śṛṅgāra Rasa are formed on the basis of the pursuits of goals of life – dharma, artha and kāma. The plot in Samavakarashould be related to gods and demons. It has twelve heroes. There are tense moments of altercation and agitation. Pañcarātra thus does not follow the complete description of Samavakāra. It has three acts It also evinces the use of various types of deceptions. But the neither the number of its heroes is exactly twelve, nor does it have gods and demons as characters. Neither we can call Pañcarātraan Īhamṛga as well. An Īhamṛga is a well-knit composition. The heroes should be celestial beings. The fight on account of celestial damsels is depicted in it with sufficient scope for misbelieve. The characters are mostly vehement and the plot centers around the anger of women marked with samkṣobha (agitation), vidrava (flight) and sampheta (encounter). There is kidnapping and ravaging of women in it. However, Sringara remains the dominant Rasa. In Pācarātra, there is hardly any scope for Śṛṅgārarasa as such.

The Utsrṣṭikāṅka type of play opens in a post-war situation. The heroes have turned back from fights and altercations. The sentiment of Pathos predominates. There are no divine characters. The mortals are shown to be meeting their mortal end. Themes of imprisonment and killing are also taken up. There are lamentations and bewailing by womenfolk and words of despair and disgust by men. This kind of play abounds in Bharati Vritti.

Identification of Dūtavākya and Dūtaghatokaca under the ten major forms of drama as defined in NS is also not easy. To certain extent, they attest to the characteristics of the Vyāyoga type. Pratiñāyugaṅdharayana too creates further complicated problems. Like Svapna. This is also definitely a genuine Bhāsa play. But to which category does it belong? Is it a Prakaraṇa, a Nāṭaka or an Īhamṛga? If the so-called sthapanā of this play is to be taken seriously, then it has been designated as a Prakaraṇa by the author himself. Perhaps it is the only play in Sanskrit dramatic tradition where the hero and the heroine do not appear on the stage at all from the beginning till end, and yet they dominate the scene throughout. NS prescribes that the hero of the play should remain present in each act on the stage, and it fails to take note of Bhāsa's unique experiment in making the presence of his protagonists felt and in maintaining a sustained interest in their activity without their physical presence on the stage. If Yaugandharāyaṇa, who consummates the resolution of the play, is taken as its hero, then it can be adjusted as a

Prakaraṇa, but a Prakaraṇa should at the least have five acts and it has only four. Īhamṛga is cited as a play of four acts, and like Rukminiharaṇa of Vastarāja, one of surviving examples of the Īhamṛga type of play, the hero here abducts the heroine or she absconds away with the hero. In that respect Pratiñā can be termed as a Īhamṛga as well. But then it hardly confirms the other characteristics of an Īhamṛga. But the fact is that the question of fixing any type for it under ten major forms of drama according to the canons of Bharata's dramaturgy remains unsettled.

T. Ganapati Shastri, known for discovery of Bhāsa and his pioneer work on the plays of the master dramatist, considers these difficulties in locating the genres of Bhāsa's plays ( ... 'the Pancharatra, owing to the fact that it consists of nearly a dozen actors and of three acts, each succeeding act being shorter in extant than the one going before, may be reckoned as samavakara, but the Rasa running through it is not Shringara and each of the actors therein delineated does not serve a different purpose, which facts are the essence of Samavakara; the Madhyamavyāyoga, Dutavakya, Dutaghatokacha and Karnabhara can be reckoned amongst Vyayogas on account of their embodying large number of male characters and of being made up of single act, but the fewness of the female characters which is also required in a Vyayoga is not found in Dutavakya and Karnabhara; the Urubhanga might be considered as an Utsrṣṭikāṅka on account of the Karunrasa and on account of the lamentation is not largely portrayed. The Pratiñanataka may be treated as an Īhamṛga on account of its consisting of four acts and on account of its depicting the battle as brought about by women, but it has been described in the colophon as Natika...' Bhasa's Plays. P. 96).

Bhāsa stands unsurpassed in his use of supernatural elements. In Bālacarita, apparitions of three young cāṇḍāla virgins are seen by Kaiśa and they invite him to marry their girls (or daughters)! Kaiśa emerges here as a tragic hero heading towards his destiny, and this peculiar use of supernatural element reminds us of similar uses in Greektragedies or Shakesperean plays like Macbeth or Hamlet. We do not find exactly any parallel to it in Sanskrit drama after Bhāsa, although his successors like Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti have utilized the motifs of supernatural element in a very imaginative way, but their approach is quite different. The use of supernatural element in Avimāraka – i.e. invisibility of a character – finds parallel of course in these two great successors of Bhāsa; but it is Bhāsa only who dares to represent arms or armaments in human form on the stage (as in Dūtavākya) or the animal demons (as in Bālacarita).

Staging the entry of the large number of characters who are invisible for the audience is also a very uncommon experiment that Bhāsa has made in Dūtavākya. Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Śakuni and several kings enter the court of Duryodhana, who alone sees them and greets each one of them, and they are supposed to have occupied the seats offered by Duryodhana; they sit dumb and stone-like from the beginning till the end only to watch the portrait of Draupadī being humiliated by Duḥśāsana and to stand helplessly at the entrance of Kṛṣṇa for being rebuked by the

angry Duryodhana. This is a very significant technical device used by Bhāsa here, and due to this invisibility of all the characters in Duryodhana's court, the protagonist and the antagonist stand face to face on the stage before the audience. Bhāsa has also created his own model of ākasabhāṣita here. Normally, a character who is supposed to be behind the curtain but is visible for the character on the stage is addressed in the way of an ākāsabhāṣita by the latter. Here, on the contrary, several characters are supposed to have made their entry on the stage; Duryodhana sees them and addresses them, only the audience does not see them. In fact, Duryodhana's ākaṣabhāṣita here is something very different from the technical motif of ākaṣabhāṣitaas defined in NS and other works and as practiced by the latter authors.

This would inevitably lead to the conclusion that Bhāsa is completely unfamiliar with the kernel of Bharata's NS. But there are facts which preclude this conclusion as too hasty. Bhāsa's acquaintance with a work called Nāṭyaśāstra cannot be ruled out altogether. Out of the store of surprises that Bhāsa has for us, we find a queer sentence in the dialogue of his Vidūṣaka in Avimārika :

कस्मादहमवैदिकः? शृणु तावत्। अस्ति रामायणं नाम नाट्यशास्त्रम्।  
तस्मिन् पञ्च श्लोका असम्पूर्णे संवत्सरे मया पठिताः।

Vidūṣaka is boasting of his scholarship here before a maid. Terming Rāmāyaṇa as a Nāṭyaśāstra, he proves his foolishness just to provoke laughter. The absurdity of his remark apart, it is clear that through it the dramatist has given a hint of his knowledge of both Rāmāyaṇa and Nāṭyaśāstra. It is probable that Bhāsa is not suggesting his acquaintance with a particular work called Nāṭyaśāstra, he is rather referring to the śāstra of nāṭya in a general way. It is also possible that by calling Rāmāyaṇaas a Nāṭyaśāstra, although from the mouth a character like Vidūṣaka, Bhāsa has hinted upon his acquaintance with the tradition of the performance of the Ramāyaṇa in a dramatic form.

Even if Bhāsa was familiar with a work called Nāṭyaśāstra it could not necessarily be the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata extant now. Possibly, Bhāsa is familiar with or is in touch with a different tradition of Nāṭyaśāstra, which might have been an older tradition. It seems that by the way of suggesting alternate models or prescribing options, NS of Bharata is recording this tradition. Can we understand Bhāsa in the light of these alternate models or options to general norms?

Bharata has given a strict ruling against representing sleep or dream in a Nāṭaka, yet he has also appended an amendment therein: (NS XXII. 296)

यद्वा शयीतार्थवशादेकाकी सहितोऽपि वा ।

(Or else, the actor may represent sleep alone or with a companion on the stage, if this serves some specific purpose).

This is exactly what Bhāsa has done in Act V of his Svapna. – in the dream-scene. The scene is charged with subtle emotions and bringing out the innermost feelings of heart. Out of a unique creative imagination, the master dramatist has been able to fulfill

a specific purpose in the portrayal of the dream-scene. Udayana and Vāsavadattā, yearning to see each other, are brought together incidentally and are made to share the same bed most innocently. Udayana is sleeping and he has a vision of Vāsavadattā in a dream, while Vāsavadattā is actually with him.

It is possibly, therefore, that Bharata has supplemented his rule with the above amendment to justify what Bhāsa had done, to indicate his appreciation of a unique dramatic sequence that the genius of Bhāsa has created in Svapna.; or, the authors of NS have simply recorded and accommodated an alternate tradition which Bhāsa has followed?

The tradition of depicting murder, gruesome fights, bloodshed and death has been practiced in Kathakali theatre of Kerala, and Bhāsa has been associated with the Kerala theatre for centuries, Is it possible that Bhāsa represents a different tradition of Nāṭyaśāstra which ran parallel to Bharata's NS and he made a distinct mark on Kerala theatre?

The author of NS seem to review even their very clear injunctions against representing fight, death and surrounding a city or murder of a rising hero in prescribing the following set of options: (XVIII.40)

अपसरणमेव कार्यं ग्रहणं वा सन्धिरेव वा योज्यः।  
काव्यश्लेषैर्बहुभिर्यथारसं नाट्यतत्त्वज्ञैः॥

It should also be remembered that the ruling against the representation of fights is applicable to the acts of Nāṭaka, Parakarāṇa or Nāṭika only.

The forms of drama like Samavakāra, Īhamṭga and Vyāyoga are said to be abounding in the scenes of vigorous fights, captures or even murders. Even the representation of arms in human form is permissible in NS in its scheme of āharya abhinaya by the way of an alternate model, NS XXI. 165 and XXI.91-92:

आयुधानि च कार्याणि पुरुषाणां प्रमाणतः।  
तान्यहं वर्तयिष्यामि यथापुस्तप्रमाणतः॥  
देवदानवगन्धर्वयक्षराक्षसपन्नगाः  
प्राणिसंज्ञाः स्मृता ह्येते जीवबन्धाश्च येऽपरे ।  
[स्त्रीभावाः पर्वताः नद्यः समुद्रा वाहनानि च ।।  
नानाशस्त्राप्यपि तथा विज्ञेयाः प्राणिसंज्ञया] ।  
शैलप्रासादयन्त्राणि चर्मवर्मध्वजास्तथा ।।  
नानाप्रहरणाद्याश्च तेऽप्राणिन इति स्मृताः ।  
अथवा कारणोपेता भवन्त्येते शरीरिणः ।।  
ये ते तु युद्धसम्पेटैरुपरोधैस्तथैव च ।  
नानाप्रहरणोपेताः प्रयोज्या नाटके बुधैः॥

NS also discusses the representation of live animals on stage under the treatment of 'Sañjīva' or sañjīva in āharya abhinaya. But this treatment is brief, NS XXI. 162:

यः प्राणिनां प्रवेशो वै सजीव इति संज्ञितः।  
चतुष्पदोऽथ द्विपदस्तथा चैवापदः स्मृतः ।।

No doubt Bhāsa had a fully developed system of theatre before him. He might be knowing a repertoire maintained by the king in his times. In his Pratimā, the troupe maintained by King Daśaratha is ordered to present a 'Nāṭaka' immediately, suitable to the occasion of the coronation ceremony of Rama. This troupe has a lady in charge of costumes and properties. The general term used for such a lady in the play is 'nepathyapālīnī'; and the general term for the troupe itself has been given as the 'nāṭakiyas'. Bhāsa seems to be familiar with the conditions and functioning of such troupe.

If Bhāsa was aware of the actual conditions of the theatre of his days, he was also conversant with the theories of drama and theatre – he has imbibed some tradition of theory of drama and theatre – i.e. a Nāṭyaśāstra. If this tradition is older and different from the tradition of NS as known to us, NS of Bharata has recorded or recognized this tradition by the way of suggesting alternate models or options to norms.

And yet there is some sort of co-relation between Bhāsa and the text of NS as it is available to us. We can hear the echoes of the Bharatavākyas (epilogues) of Bhāsa-plays in the last verse of NS XXXVII.31:

किं चान्यत्सम्प्रपूर्णा भवतु वसुमती नष्टदुर्भिक्षरोगा।  
शान्तिर्गोब्राह्मणानां भवतु नरपतिः पातु पृथ्वीं समग्राम् ॥

The Bharata-vākyas in most of the Bhāsa-plays repeat these words:

बलदेवः- गां पातु नो नरपतिः शमितारिपक्षः ॥ 66 ॥Urūbhaṅgam

सर्वत्र सम्पदः सन्तु नश्यन्तु विपदः सदा।

राजा राजगुणोपेतो भूमिमेकः प्रशास्तु नः ॥ (Karnabhāram)

इमां सागरपर्यन्तां हिमवद्विन्ध्यकुण्डलाम्।

महीमेकातपत्राङ्कां राजसिंहः प्रशास्तु नः ॥ 56 ॥ (dūtavākyam)

इमामपि महीं कृत्स्नां राजसिंहः प्रशास्तु नः ॥ 26 ॥Pañcarātram

यथा रामश्च जानक्या बन्धुभिश्च समागतः।

तथा लक्ष्म्या समायुक्तो राजा भूमिं प्रशास्तु नः ॥ 15 ॥ (Pratimā)

इमां सागरपर्यन्तां हिमवद्विन्ध्यकुण्डलाम्।

महीमेकातपत्राङ्कां राजसिंहः प्रशास्तु नः ॥ 20 ॥ (Bālacaritam)

In fact, a line in the specimen of nāṅdīas given in the NS also reproduces the last line of Bharatavākyas of some of the plays by Bhāsa almost verbatim:

नमोऽस्तु सर्वदेवेभ्यो द्विजातिभ्यः शुभं तथा ।

जितं सोमेन वै राज्ञा शिवं गोब्राह्मणाय च॥५.१०५॥

ब्रह्मोत्तरं तथैवास्तु हता ब्रह्मद्विपस्तथा।

प्रशास्त्विमां महाराजः पृथिवीं च ससागराम् ॥५.१०६॥

राष्ट्रं प्रवर्धतां चैव रङ्गस्याशा समुद्ध्यतु।

प्रेक्षाकर्तुर्महान् धर्मो भवतु ब्रह्मभाषितः॥५.१०७॥

काव्यकर्तुर्यशश्चास्तु धर्मश्चापि प्रवर्धताम् ।

इज्यया चानया नित्यं प्रीयन्तां देवता इति॥५.१०८॥

Further, the following words of Vṛddhagopālaka in Pañcarātram also remind us of the last verse of the NS

‘शान्तिर्भवतु शान्तिर्भवतु अस्माकं गोधनस्य च’

So, this is a strange relationship of Bhāsa with the text of NS as available to us today – that the Bharatavākyas of many of his plays have a line which is almost cited verbatim in the specimen of nāṅdī as given in the NS.

Despite this co-relation between Bhāsa and the NS, Bhāsa does not strictly adhere to the norms prescribed in the NS. Definitely, he was writing in a period when the process of the compilation of NS had not started, but Bhāsa had a very rich tradition of theatre before him. NS does not speak for this tradition in its kernel, but it records it in suggesting alternate models or options.

Which Nāṭyaśāstra Bhāsa followed then, if it was not the NS of Bharatamuni. T. Ganapati Shastri suggests that it could be the Nāṭasūtra of Śilālin. (“This might be the Natasutra referred to by Panini as composed by Shilalimuni or by Krishashvamuni; or this might be a certain old Nāṭyashastra written by Bharatamuni himself as seen from the fact that the name of Bharata is mentioned by Bhasa in the term Bharatavākya’, (Bhasa’s Plays, p. 96)

In all probability Śilālin had given certain aphorisms for the actors as the very name of his work suggest. We do not know whether his manual contained anything on the art of drama or on dramaturgy. Bharatamuni has referred to several authors, some of whom might have written their own Nāṭyaśāstras.

In Abhinavabhāratī, Abhinava refers to Subandhu as an ancient dramatist. This Subandhu had also authored a work on dramaturgy. He was a minister to king Bindusāra in third century BC. According to Śāradātanaya, Subandhu had given a different classification of nāṭaka; viz. - - Pūrṇa, Prāsānta, Bhāsvara, lalita and Samagra :

सुबन्धुर्नाटकस्यापि लक्षणं प्राह पञ्चधा।

पूर्णं चैव प्रशान्तं च भास्वरं ललितं तथा॥

Bhāvaprakāśa, VIII adhikāra, p. 238, line 15-16

Subandhu also had a different idea of sandhis (junctures) in drama.

Śāradātanaya in his Bhāvaprakāśanot only defines and illustrates these five types of Nāṭaka defined by Subandhu, He also identifies Svapnavāsadattam of Bhāsa as a prāsānta type of nāṭaka. Each of the five types of nāṭakas as enumerated by Subandhu has a different set of five sandhis. The five sandhis which a prāsānta type of nāṭaka is supposed to have are - nyāsa, nyāsasamudbheda, bījokti, bījadarśana and anuddiṣṭasāmhāra.

प्रशान्तरसभूयिष्ठं प्रशान्तं नाम नाटकम्।

न्यासो न्याससमुद्भेदो बीजोक्तिर्बीजदर्शनम्।

ततोऽनुद्दिष्टसंहारः प्रशान्ते पञ्चसन्धयः॥

Bhāvaprakāśa, VIII adhikāra, p. 238, lines 20-22

He also informs that Druhiṇi had accepted the prominence of Sāttvatīvr̥tti in a praśānra type of nāṭaka.

सात्त्वतीवृत्तिरत्र स्यादिति द्रौहिणिरब्रवीत्।

Bhāvaprakāśa, VIII adhikāra, p. 239, line 1

Śāradātanaya has also attempted an analysis of Svapnavāsavadattam on the basis of the whole conceptual framework of a praśāntanāṭakagiven by Subandhu.

स्वप्नवासवदत्ताख्यमुदाहरणमत्र तु।  
आच्छिद्य भूपाद् व्यसनाद् देवी मागधिकाकरे॥  
न्यस्ता यतस्ततो न्यासाद् मुखसन्धिरयं भवेत्॥  
न्यासस्य च प्रतिमुखं समुद्भेद उदाहृतम्॥  
पद्मावत्या मुखं वीक्ष्य विशेषकविभूषितम्।  
जीवत्यावन्तिकेत्येतद् ज्ञातं भूमिभुजा यथा।  
उत्कण्ठितेन सोद्वेगं बीजोक्तिर्नामकीर्तनम्।  
एहि वासवदत्तेति क्लासीत्यादि दृश्यते।  
सहोवस्थितयोरेक प्राप्त्यान्यस्य गवेषणम्।  
दर्शनस्पर्शनालापैरेतत् स्याद् बीजदर्शनम्॥  
चिरप्रसुप्तः कामो मे वीणया प्रतिबोधितः।  
तां तु देवीं न पश्यामि यस्या घोषवती प्रिया।  
किं ते भूयः प्रियं कुर्यामिति वाग् यत्र नोच्यते।  
तमनुद्दिष्टसंहारमित्याहुर्भरतादयः॥

Bhāvaprakāśa, VIII adhikāra, p. 238-39, lines 20- 22, 1-15

Thus, Śāradātanaya in 13th century AD knew of the tradition of evaluating Bhāsa's plays on the basis of tenets given by Subandhu. Subandhu belongs to the school of Druhiṇi who flourished before Bharata. He also represents the system of dramaturgy which Bhāsa seems to have followed.

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