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Portrayal of Vidhushaka in Dramatic Theories

Dr. Indira K

Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit, CDOE, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

Corresponding Author; **Dr. Indira K**

Abstract

Sanskrit drama occupies a distinguished position in world literature for its unique synthesis of artistic expression, philosophical depth, and poetic beauty. Among its many memorable characters, the *Vidhushaka* stands out as an essential figure who brings humor, relief, and social commentary to the stage. This paper explores the meaning, origin, and evolution of the *Vidhushaka* as described in three major Sanskrit theoretical texts—the *Natyasastra*, *Dasarupaka*, and *Sahityadarpana*. The study examines his physical features, linguistic style, dramatic functions, and role as the hero's confidant. It also highlights his contribution to evoking *Hasya Rasa* (comic sentiment) and balancing the emotional intensity of Sanskrit drama. Further, the paper traces the transformation and gradual decline of the *Vidhushaka* in later traditions while acknowledging his lasting influence on classical and folk theater forms across India. Ultimately, the *Vidhushaka* emerges as a timeless character who blends wit with wisdom, enriching the aesthetic and emotional experience of Sanskrit drama.

Keyword: *Vidhushaka*, Sanskrit drama, *Natyasastra*, *Dasarupaka*, *Sahityadarpana*, *Hasya Rasa*, Indian dramaturgy, classical theatre, comic character, aesthetic theory

Introduction

Sanskrit play holds a special place in the annals of world literature. It harmoniously combines theatrical art, philosophical profundity, and poetic beauty. Among its many characters, the *Vidhushaka* is one of the most recognizable and enduring. Bringing humor, relief, and social insight to the stage, he is more than just a jester—he is an essential part of the dramatic framework. According to several Sanskrit texts, including the *Natyasastra*, *Dasarupaka*, and *Sahityadarpana*, the *Vidhushaka* is essential to enhancing the emotional and artistic appeal of classical drama.

This paper examines the definition and role of the *Vidushaka* as presented in three major Sanskrit theoretical works: the *Natyasastra*, the *Dasarupaka*, and the *Sahityadarpana*.

Meaning and Origin of Vidhushaka

The Sanskrit word *dhush*, which means "to ridicule" or "to jest," is the source of the phrase *Vidhushaka*. Therefore, *Vidhushaka* literally translates to "one who makes others laughs or ridicules playfully." The *Vidhushaka* is the close friend and confidant of the hero (*Nayaka*) in Sanskrit dramas, especially during romantic and humorous moments. His main purpose is to arouse the feeling of laughter, or *Hasya Rasa*.

Natyasastra

The oldest and most authoritative work on Indian dramaturgy and performing arts is Bharata Muni's *Natyasastra*. It is thought to have been composed between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. and has over 6,000 verses spread across 36 chapters

that address every facet of drama, including acting, stagecraft, costumes, music, dance, emotions, and characters. It explains how Brahma developed drama as a divine art form for the moral and spiritual advancement of humanity. In addition to classifying characters such as the Nayaka (hero), Nayika (heroine), and Vidhushaka (jester), who are crucial in eliciting Hasya Rasa (the sense of laughter), the Natyasastra presents the philosophy of Rasa (aesthetic emotion). The basis for all later Sanskrit theatrical and aesthetic philosophies was established by this work.

In Sanskrit drama, the King's supporting cast members serve to emphasize his magnificence. Director (Sutradhara), Assistant of the Director (Pariparsvika), Actor (Nata), Parasite (vita), Sakara, Jester (Vidushaka), servant (ceta), courtesan (ganika) and Heroine all these persons together form the dramatic ensemble responsible for presenting a Sanskrit play.

वामनोदन्तुरःकुब्जोद्विजन्माविकृताननः।

खलतिःपिङ्गलाक्षश्चसविधेयोविदूषकः॥ (Natyasastra ch.35)

He who is short, has protruding teeth, is hunchbacked, a Brahmin by birth, has a distorted face, stammers in speech, and is of a tawny complexion —such a person is to be recognized as the Vidhushaka (the jester).

The physical characteristics of the Vidhushaka (the jester) in Sanskrit drama are described in this line. The hilarity of his role is enhanced by his humorous and flawed appearance. Despite having a humorous appearance, the Vidhushaka is also the hero's astute and devoted friend, adding insight and humor to the drama.

A theatrical performance is a collective art that necessitates the collaboration of numerous competent persons, according to Bharata Muni's Natyasastra. The members of a typical theatrical party include the actor (Bharata), the jester (Vidhushaka), musicians (Tauripa), actor-dancers (Nata), the director (Sutradhara), and the playwright (Natyakara). They are accompanied by the Kusilavas, who are general dancers and entertainers, as well as the crown-maker (Mukutakaraka), ornament-maker (Abharanakut), painter (Citrakara), dyer (Rajaka), and other craftsmen (Karu and Ailpin). This thorough categorization demonstrates that Sanskrit drama was both a literary form and a highly structured theatrical art that combined musicians, actors, and craftspeople, reflecting the cooperative and all-encompassing character of ancient Indian theater.

प्रत्युत्पन्नप्रतिभो नर्मकृतानर्मगर्भनिर्भेदैः।

छेदविभूषितवदनोविदूषकोचामविज्ञेयः॥²⁵॥ (Natyasastra ch.35)

A jester (Vidushaka) is someone who looks to people's enjoyment, can mimic everyone's manners, uses different [means] and mixes with women, is quick-witted in disclosures made through Pleasantry or in Covert enjoyment, and is clever enough to offer criticism through his remarks.

According to this stanza, the Vidhushaka is a witty and expressive comedian who is full of playful wit, expressive gestures, and funny discourse but may not be particularly intelligent. He is one of Sanskrit drama's most cherished and well-known characters because he infuses it with humor, ease, and human warmth.

Dasarupaka

Dhananjaya wrote Dasarupaka, a significant work on Sanskrit dramaturgy, in the tenth century CE. It describes the

ten forms of drama (Dasa Rupakani), including Nataka, Prakarana, Bhana, Prahasana, Dima, Vyayoga, Samavakara, Vithi, Ihamriga, and Anka. The work is based on Bharata's Natyasastra, but it provides the laws in a way that is easier to understand and more suitable for the theater. Dhanika, the brother of Dhananjaya, clarified the passage in a commentary titled Avaloka. One of the most important works in traditional Sanskrit poetics and theater, Dasarupaka is prized for its succinct exposition of dramatic structure, storyline, characters, moods, and styles. Companion of the hero is,

एकविद्योविद्वान्योहास्यकृच्चविदूषकः। (Dasarupaka, Prakasa 2, 8)
हास्यकारीविदूषकः।

One is a scholar, another is a parasite (vita), and the Vidhushaka is the one who makes people laugh. This verse conveys that among the humorous characters in Sanskrit drama, the Vidhushaka who embodies pure comedy, entertaining the audience with his wit, expressions, and playful nature.

Sahityadarpana

Visvanatha Kaviraja wrote the renowned Sanskrit poetics book Sahityadarpana in the fourteenth century CE. It summarizes previous conceptions of poetry, drama, and aesthetics and acts as a "Mirror of Literature." Rasa (aesthetic emotion), alankara (figures of speech), dhvani (suggestion), and the structure of kavya (poetic composition) are only a few of the themes covered in the text's 10 chapters. Visvanatha presents the concepts of great prior scholars, such as Mammata and Anandavardhana, in a straightforward and organized manner. Sahityadarpana is highly regarded for its thorough examination of Sanskrit literary theory and its sophisticated explanation of the aesthetic pleasure evoked by poetry and play.

The hero's assistants in matters of love are the humble friend (Vita), the dependant (Ceta), and the buffoon (Vidushaka) — all of them faithful, skilled in jests, removers of the pride of angry dames, and pure in conduct.

कुसुमवसन्ताद्यभिधःकर्मवपुर्वेषभाषाद्यैः।

हास्यकरःकलहरतिर्विदूषकःस्यात्स्वकर्मकः॥⁴²॥ (Sahityadarpana ch.3)

The Vidhushaka, who makes others laugh, enjoys lighthearted arguments and jokes, and exhibits behaviors, looks, attire, and speech appropriate for events such as the spring festival, ought to perform his own natural role.

The actual purpose of the Vidhushaka in Sanskrit drama is nicely concluded in this verse. It demonstrates that the Vidhushaka is a distinct theatrical character whose entire being—appearance, costume, gestures, and speech—is intended to evoke hasya rasa (comic sentiment), rather than a haphazard funny figure.

His lighthearted arguments and jokes brighten the mood of the play as he actively engages in happy and festive events (such as Vasanta, the spring season). By doing thus, he fulfills his innate responsibility (svakarma), which is to make the audience laugh while counterbalancing the hero's amorous or serious feelings (nayaka).

Language and Style

The Vidhushaka speaks broken Sanskrit, or Panditaprakrita, and Prakrit dialects rather than pure Sanskrit. He uses wordplay, puns, and double meanings in his discourse. He

conveys important truths while making the audience laugh with this humorous speech.

Famous Vidhushakas In Sanskrit Plays

Abhijnanasakuntalam of Kalidasa - Madhavya, companion of King Dushyanta.

Mricchakatika of Sudraka - Maitreya, friend of Carudatta

Malavikagnimitram of Kalidasa - Gautama, comic Brahmin friend

Priyadarsika of Harsha - Vasulaka, comic element

Ratnavali of Harsha - Vasulaka, again as comic adviser

Swapnavasavadattam of Bhasa - Vidushaka, unnamed friend of King Udayana

Dramatic Importance

The emotional intensity of Sanskrit drama would become burdensome without the Vidhushaka. He strikes a balance between rasa (emotion) and hasya (comic), giving the viewer a complete experience. Through conversation, he also aids in revealing the hero's innermost thoughts. It is clear how valuable the Vidushaka is as a source of amusement. Additionally, love and bravery became the main themes of Sanskrit drama as it evolved.

Decline of The Vidhushaka Tradition

His character got more exaggerated in later Sanskrit and regional dramas, evolving from a sarcastic companion to a clownish figure. However, his influence may still be seen in contemporary Indian theater, traditional forms like Vannan and Koothu, and Kathakali (as the Vidushaka).

Conclusion

In the context of Sanskrit drama, the Vidhushaka holds a very significant place. He is more than just a humorous character; he is a crucial dramatic force that counterbalances the story's emotional depth with human warmth, comedy, and insight. The Vidhushaka's character is meticulously sculpted in look, speech, conduct, and function to evoke Hasya Rasa, thereby enhancing the theatrical experience. It is based on the prescriptions of foundational literature like the Natyasastra, Dasarupaka, and Sahityadarpana. He adds relatability and vitality to the stage as the hero's clever confidant and astute social critic.

The Vidhushaka's legacy continues to influence classical and folk performance arts throughout India, despite his position steadily diminishing and becoming exaggerated in later traditions. His enduring influence on the history of literature and theater serves as evidence of the enduring worth of comedy, camaraderie, and satire in narrative. In the end, the Vidhushaka is one of Sanskrit drama's most enduring and unforgettable characters because he personifies the harmonic fusion of wit and wisdom that lies at its core.

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