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INDIAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

B.E.G.C.- 101

B.A. English (Hons.) - 1st Semester

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**Sample Preview
of the
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

INDIAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

B.E.G.C.-101

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: There are **three** Sections in this paper, A, B and C. Attempt questions from all the **three** sections. In Section A attempt any **four**; Section B any **two** and in Section C attempt any **three**.

SECTION-A

Note : Write short notes on any four of the following/Explain with reference to the context.

Q. 1. “Many are the daughters of sages, married by the Gandharva rite, we hear; and once married, felicitated with joyful acceptance by their fathers.”

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Abhijana Shakuntala* by Kalidasa.

Explanation: It is in the world of the hermitage, a place for austerities and meditation, Shakuntala and Duhsanta find love and it is the Royal Court, a place ideal for the intrigues of love, their separation occurs. Shakuntala born and bred in the innocent and pure world of nature puts her faith in words rather than objects and agrees to a *Gandharva* marriage. Such marriage does not need the consent of the parents/elders and is primarily foregrounded on the desires of the lovers. However, this love cannot disrupt the established caste hierarchy and therefore, Duhsanta pursues Shakuntala once he ascertains her *Kshatriya Varna*. Duhsanta represents the world outside the secluded and protected Hermitage, which is filled with deceit and cunning.

Q. 2. Bhavabhuti the Sanskrit dramatist.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 3, ‘*Bhavabhuti*’.

Q. 3. Structure of the Mahabharata.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 49, Q. No. 1.

Q. 4. “No you yourself must mention it in the right way to Dhrtarashtra, the first of the Kurus, O Saubala. I shall not be able to bring up the matter.”

Ans. Context: Above lines are taken from the *Mahabharata* written by Vyasa.

Explanation: Duryodhana is conservative to not disaffect his abettors and apprehensive of the ties he must maintain with musketeers. Further, when Sakuni

urges Duryodhana to speak to the king about permitting a challenge of the bones, Duryodhana goes on a back bottom and is reluctant to speak to his father. He conversely persuades Sakuni to take the task of presenting the matter to the king in “the right way”. See how he articulates his vacillation, “No, you yourself must mention it in the right way to Dhrtarashtra, the first of the Kurus, O Saubala. I shall not be suitable to bring up the matter” The *Mahabharata* is an ancient Indian epic where the main story revolves around two branches of a family—the Pandavas and Kauravas—who, in the Kurukshetra War, battle for the throne of Hastinapura. Simple into this narrative are several lower stories about people dead or living, and philosophical dialogues.

Q. 5. Orientalism.

Ans. Orientalism, Western scholarly discipline of the 18th and 19th centuries that encompassed the study of the languages, literatures, religions, philosophies, histories, art, and laws of Asian societies, especially ancient ones. Such scholarship also inspired broader intellectual and artistic circles in Europe and North America, and so Orientalism may also denote the general enthusiasm for things Asian or “Oriental.” Orientalism was also a school of thought among a group of British colonial administrators and scholars who argued that India should be ruled according to its own traditions and laws, thus opposing the “Anglicanism” of those who argued that India should be ruled according to British traditions and laws. In the mid-20th century, Orientalists began to favour the term Asian studies to describe their work, in an effort to distance it from the colonial and neocolonial associations of Orientalism. More recently, mainly through the work of the Palestinian American scholar Edward Said, the term has been used disparagingly to refer to the allegedly simplistic, stereotyped, and demeaning

conceptions of Arab and Asian cultures generally held by Western scholars.

As a scholarly practice, Orientalism emerged in late 18th-century European centres of learning and their colonial outposts, when the study of the languages, literatures, religions, laws, and art of East Asian societies became a major focus of scholarly attention and intellectual energy. In that era, the number of Europeans doing research on East Asia dramatically increased, and new forms of institutional support in universities and scholarly associations encouraged such studies and their dissemination. A frequent theme of that scholarship was that Asia had once been host to great civilizations that had since fallen into their current state of decay. Many Orientalists, as they came to be called, were connected to a colonial bureaucracy, but others were not, and their positions on colonialism varied. Orientalism as a scholarly field was dominated by research in the French, English, and German languages and associated centres of learning, and its subjects ranged geographically from the North African Mediterranean to East and Southeast Asia. One of the most significant discoveries of Orientalists was that Sanskrit and many European languages were related to each other, which implied that Europe and India shared historical origins. That discovery has been credited with giving rise to the comparative method in the humanities and social sciences.

Q. 6. "Let us praise the Moon. Like the cool, white parasol

Of the Cola king, his garland heavy with pollen, he blesses this good earth."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Cilappatikaran* by Illanko Atikas.

Explanation: In Pukar, Matavi, a beautiful courtesan and a very talented dancer, also lives. Once the Chola king presents her with a garland and a thousand and eight pieces of gold in recognition of her talent. Matavi decides to auction the garland to anybody who will purchase it at the price decided by her and in the process she would also marry the man who buys the garland.

She asks her servant Vacantamalai to announce this to the people of Pukar. After hearing the announcement, Kovalan purchases the garland and abandons his wife

Kannaki and starts living with Matavi. As a result, Kannaki is extremely heartbroken. Enamoured of Matavi, Kovalan squanders a lot of his wealth away.

SECTION-B

Note : Answer the following questions:

Q. 7. Would you consider the *Mahabharata* to be similar to or different from a western epic? Elaborate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 46, Q. No. 6.

Q. 8. Examine the notion of kingship in *Abhijana Shakuntalam/The Loom of Time*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 34, 'Kingship'.

Q. 9. Examine some of the dimensions of social life as highlighted in *Mrichchhakatika*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 99, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 3 (Check Your Progress).

Q. 10. What is Sangam Literature ? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 125, Q. No. 1.

SECTION-C

Note : Answer the following questions.

Q. 11. Discuss the significance of the Pandavas' gestures as they leave for their exile.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 69, Q. No. 1.

Q. 12. Is the theme of love central in Sudraka's *Mrichchhakatika*? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 118, Q. No. 2 and Chapter-11, Page No. 105, 'Introduction'.

Q. 13. Write a brief essay on the cult of the Pattini.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 147, Q. No. 6 and Q. No. 1.

Q. 14. Examine the role of Madhavya as Vidusaka.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 38, Q. No. 8 and Page No. 40, Q. No. 8.

Q. 15. Examine some of the themes of classical Tamil/Sangam poetry.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 126, Q. No. 3, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 2.

Q. 16. Discuss the character of Sakara as an example of characterization.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 118, Q. No. 3 and Page No. 117, 'Backdrop of Art as Problematic Conflicts and Ridden Structure'.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

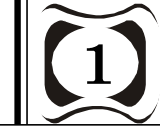
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INDIAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE



Indian Aesthetics: An Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Drama is a literary composition. It usually tells us a story through dialogues, gestures, movements and facial expressions of the characters, dances, costumes, background landscape, music and stage setting. Drama is a performing art that involves playwright, actors, director, audience, costume designer and make-up artists. Like other literary genres, drama has its own origin, history and evolution.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

INDIAN CLASSICAL DRAMA

The origin of Indian drama can be traced to the Vedic era (1500-1000 BCE). The dramatic elements have been found in the Vedas, in dialogue hymns and Vedic rituals. Even the epics, like the *Mahabharata* support the existence of performers or nata as early as 400 CE. The *Natyashastra* by Bharatamuni, which emerged in 3rd CE, is the most extant treatise on Indian drama. Some critics like Weber assert a Greek influence on Indian drama. They point out that the division of the Play into Acts and Scenes, use of the Chorus, developments of stock characters demonstrate the Greek influence.

However, there are some major differences between the two traditions. The Indian dramatic tradition does not have tragedy. Greek drama adheres to the three unities of time, place and action which are not strictly observed in Indian drama where the action shifts from earthly spaces to heavenly ones, taking place across many years as well. Dance and song are an important part of Indian drama and not found in the Greek counterpart. The Indian tradition has the extra element of supernatural figures like Gods and Goddesses that populate the world of drama. Other scholars highlight the influence of Buddhist and Jain

traditions in the formalising of the Indian dramatic tradition.

Classical Indian drama as we know it today may have the influence of the Greek as well as the Buddhist and Jain traditions. The Tamil Epic *Cilappatikaram* can be an example.

SANSKRIT DRAMA

Sanskrit drama is one of the most prominent dramatic traditions of India. Sanskrit drama has the following elements:

- (i) **Purpose:** As the *Natyashastra* mentions the purpose of a dramatic work was to provide not just entertainment and pleasure but instruction, wealth, justice and spiritual liberation, Sanskrit drama does not have a tragic ending. Hindu cosmology also believes death is not the end but a means to either achieve spiritual liberation from the cycle of life or be reborn till it is achieved.
- (ii) **Rasa:** The Rasa or the aesthetic sentiment is an important element of Sanskrit drama. The Rasa is the audience's refined emotional response evoked by the drama. Rasa includes the different types of emotional responses such as: *vibhava*, *anubhava*, *vyabhicharibhava* and *sthayibhava*. Rasa can also be explained as a blissful aesthetic experience achieved via drama. Rasa is considered as Sanskrit drama's highest purpose.
- (iii) **Different types:** *Natyashastra* describes different types of plays – the major type (*Rupaka*) or the minor type (*Uparupaka*). *Rupaka* has ten varieties out of which the Nataka are plays based on myths and heroic tales, and the *Prakarana* are plays based on fictitious stories and where less important characters are dominant.

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- (iv) **Plot:** Sanskrit drama's plot has five transitions that lead to a final culmination of the events depicted: (a) "origin" (*mukha*) – it states the seeds or the starting of the plot; (b) the "incident" (*pratimukha*) – it develops the plotline further by showing both good and bad events; (c) "germ" (*garbha*) – in this good actions/events seem to lead towards the "aim" (*phala*); (d) "crisis" (*vimarsa*) – here bad actions/events seem to outweigh the good and strays away from the "aim"; (e) "completion" (*nirvahana*) – it brings together all the different narratives in the play to a definitive conclusion.
- (v) **Bilingual:** Sanskrit drama is bilingual in nature. The protagonists who belonged to the upper castes like Brahmins and Kshatriyas spoke in Sanskrit whereas characters from other sections of society such as soldiers, servants, women and children spoke in different Prakrit languages. The stock characters encountered here like the *Sutradhar* (director), the *Nayak* (hero), the *Nayaki* (heroine), and the *Vidusaka* (jester) speak either in Sanskrit or Prakrit depending on their caste, class, gender and age. Such a linguistic construction of the play restricted the variety of people who could watch and enjoy it. Thus, the audience was mostly limited to a refined circle of upper castes such as the royalty, aristocrats, Brahmins and Kshatriyas, leading to royal patronages. Even the *Natyashastra* states that the ideal spectators should be educated and noble men, all four castes could watch a play as long as they were seated separately. It is no surprise then that Sanskrit drama failed to be a people's drama like those in ancient Greece and medieval England.
- (vi) **Different from European Drama:** Sanskrit drama differs from its European counterpart in the composition of actors. Unlike the ban on female actors in European classical drama, the *Sanskritic* tradition did not have such prohibitions that needed male actors to perform the role of female leads, and drama could be performed by men alone, women alone or a mix of both, depending on the plot.
- (vii) **Major Drawbacks:** The major drawbacks of Sanskrit drama were its linguistic barrier and

the strict adherence to the rules of dramaturgy that did not leave much space for individual imagination and experiments with the genre. Its failure to transition into popular art because of the decline of Sanskrit as a living language led to the gradual disinterest in *Sanskritic* works.

However, Sanskrit plays are still being written and performed in India by playwrights like: Manmohan Acharya and Prafulla Kumar Mishra.

CLASSICAL SANSKRIT PLAYWRIGHTS

Sudraka, Bhasa, Bhavbhuti, Harsha and Kalidasa are the great Sanskrit dramatists. Their works have survived through thousands of years. The main reason is their literary prowess in depicting characters, settings, plots in their own individualistic way. These Sanskrit playwrights benefitted from royal patronage or were part of royal households or even of kings.

BHASA

Bhasa (3rd-4th CE) believed to have lived in the city of Ujjain. Bhasa's works saw the light of the day in 1909 when the play *Swapnavasavadatta* (*Vision of Vasavadatta*) was discovered by Pandit Anandalvar of the Archaeological Survey of Mysore. In 1913, a total of thirteen plays were discovered in a library in Thiruvananthapuram by T. Ganapati Shastri.

Bhasa was inspired by the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Purana* and semi-historical legends and figures. Bhasa's plays do not follow the *Natyashastra* strictly, even breaking dramatic conventions. Some critics believe that Bhasa's plays were written before Bharatamuni's treatise, but some others believe this as an indication of Bhasa's poetic experiments and disregard for dramatic conventions.

Swapnavasavadatta depicts the story of King Udayana, who had to choose between marrying for love his beloved Vasavadatta or the daughter of a neighbouring king, Princess Padmavati, for political gain. The play has romance as well as political intrigue. Thus, it is new type of drama. Besides traditional dramas, Bhasa also wrote short plays, one act plays and monologues.

Bhasa broke many dramatic conventions. One was depicting a tragic ending in his plays. Both *Uru-bhanga* (*Breaking of the Thighs*) and *Karna-bhara* (*Karna's Task*) have tragic endings. Duryodhana and Karna are seen as villains in the *Mahabharata* but Bhasa treats them with sympathy and shows a different side of their character. Bhasa does also not deviate from showing violent acts on stage, which is a deviation from the *Natyashastra* convention.

SUDRAKA

Sudraka was a poet-king believed to have lived in Ujjain in the 2nd CE. He is known for his *Prakarana* play, *Mrichchhakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart*), an extended version of Bhasa's incomplete play *Charudattam* (*Charudatta*). The ten act play depicts the love story of a Brahmin merchant, Charudatta and a courtesan *Vasantasenā*, whose union is thwarted by a jealous suitor. There are a few serious elements in the play, but it ends happily. The play has both romance and humour. The play also offers an interesting and realistic picture of urban society and the complex social structure of that time. *Vinavasavadatta*, a *Bhāna* (short one-act monologue) and *Padmaprabhritaka* are his other works. The 1984 Hindi movie *Utsav*, directed by Girish Karnad, is based largely on *Mrichhakatika*.

BHAVBHUTI

Bhavabhuti was the court poet of King Yashovarman of Kannauj in 8th CE. He wrote plays based on the *Ramayana*. The *Mahaviracharita* (*Exploits of a Great Hero*) depicts the early life of Rama, and *Uttaramcharita* (*The Latter History of Rama*) shows the final years of Rama's life as written in the *Uttara Kanda* of the *Ramayana*. Both the plays written in the *Nataka* style have seven acts.

His another work, *Malatimadhava* (*Malati and Madhava*), is a *Prakarana* play. It depicts the love story of Malati, the daughter of a minister and Madhava, her beloved. Malati is set to be married off to Nandana as per the king's wishes. The powerful suitor as well as a mix-up with another couple interrupts the union of Malati and Madhava, which is finally resolved with the aid of magic. The use of the supernatural makes it a type of drama that skillfully combines romance with horror.

Bhavabhuti's long poetic descriptions are seen as mere embellishment that does not add anything to the drama, but tends to obfuscate his clear and simple diction. He did not use the *vidusaka* and thus eliminated the comic element in his plays. Bhavabhuti compensates for it by highlighting the supernatural and the grotesque and evokes the *Rasa Bibhasta* (disgust) and *Raudra* (anger) in his works. His plays have the unique combination of heroism, romance and horror.

KALIDASA

Kalidasa is one of best-known Sanskrit dramatists in the world. His works have been adapted and translated into numerous languages and forms. His poetic skills are unparalleled even today. His works

are based on the Vedas, the Purana and the epics, but reimagined and breathed new life into the plots that he took from these works.

His works include *Mālāvikāgnimitram* (*Pertaining to Mālāvikā and Agnimitra*) and *Vikramorvasiyam* (*Pertaining to Vikrama and Urvashi*). He also wrote epic poems like Raghuvams'a (*Dynasty of Kalidasa: Abhijnana Shakuntala Raghu*) and *Kumārasambhava* (Birth of 'Kumara' or Subrahmanya) along with *Khandakavyas* (minor poems). However, his most popular and famous work remains the *Abhijñāna Shākuntalam* (*The Recognition of Shakuntala*).

TERMINAL QUESTIONS

Q. 1. What do you think is the origin of Indian Classical Drama?

Ans. The origin of Indian classical drama can be traced in the Vedas. Even the epics, like the *Mahabharata* support the existence of performers or nata as early as 400 CE. The *Natyashastra* by *Bharatamuni*, which emerged in 3rd CE, is the most extant treatise on Indian drama. Some critics like Weber say Indian Classical Drama was influenced by the Greek dramas. They assert that the division of the Play into Acts and Scenes, use of the Chorus, developments of stock characters demonstrate the Greek influence. Some scholars highlight the influence of Buddhist and Jain traditions in the formalising of the Indian dramatic tradition. The Tamil Epic *Cilappatikaram* can be an example in which both the Greek as well as the Buddhist and Jain traditions have been found.

Q. 2. What do you understand by the term Sanskrit Drama?

Ans. Sanskrit drama is one of the most prominent dramatic traditions of India. Sanskrit drama provides not just entertainment and pleasure but instruction, wealth, justice and spiritual liberation; Sanskrit drama does not have a tragic ending. The *Rasa* or the aesthetic sentiment is an important element of Sanskrit drama. The *Rasa* is the audience's refined emotional response evoked by the drama. *Natyashastra* describes different types of Sanskrit plays – the major type (*Rupaka*) or the minor type (*Uparupaka*). *Rupaka* has ten varieties out of which the *Nataka* are plays based on myths and heroic tales, and the *Prakarana* are plays based on fictitious stories and where less important characters are dominant. Sanskrit drama's plot has five transitions that lead to a final culmination of the events depicted: (a) "origin" (*mukha*) (b) the "incident" (*pratimukha*)

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(c) “germ” (*garbha*) (d) “crisis” (*vimarsā*) and (e) “completion”.

Sanskrit drama is bilingual in nature. The protagonists who belonged to the upper castes like Brahmins and Kshatriyas spoke in Sanskrit whereas characters from other sections of society such as soldiers, servants, women and children spoke in different Prakrit languages. Sanskrit drama differs from its European counterpart in the composition of actors. Unlike the ban on female actors in European classical drama, the Sanskrit tradition did not have such prohibitions that needed male actors to perform the role of female leads, and drama could be performed by men alone, women alone or a mix of both, depending on the plot.

Q. 3. Name some of the prominent Classical Sanskrit playwrights and attempt a critical analysis of their works.

Ans. Bhasa, Sudraka, Bhavabhuti, Harsha and Kalidasa are the prominent Sanskrit playwrights.

- (i) Bhasa lived in Ujjain during 3rd-4th CE. His play *Swapnavasavadatta* depicts the story of King Udayana, who must choose between marrying his beloved *Vasavadatta* or the daughter of a neighbouring king, Princess Padmavati, for political gain. The play has romance and political intrigue. Thus, it is new type of drama. Besides traditional dramas, Bhasa also wrote short plays, one act plays and monologues. Bhasa’s plays were inspired by the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the Purana and semi-historical legends and figures. Bhasa’s plays do not follow the *Natyashastra* strictly, even breaking dramatic conventions. Some critics believe that Bhasa’s plays were written before Bharatamuni’s treatise, but some others believe this as an indication of Bhasa’s poetic experiments and disregard for dramatic conventions. Bhasa broke many dramatic conventions. One was depicting a tragic ending in his plays. His plays *Uru-bhanga* (*Breaking of the Thighs*) and *Karna-bhara* (Karna’s Task) have tragic endings. Duryodhana and Karna are seen as villains in the *Mahabharata* but Bhasa treats them with sympathy and shows a different side of their character. Bhasa does also not deviate from showing violent acts on stage, which is

a deviation from the *Natyashastra* convention.

- (ii) Sudraka, a poet-king believed to have lived in Ujjain in the 2nd CE, is known for his *Prakarana* play, *Mrichchhakatika* (*The Little Clay Cart*), an extended version of Bhasa’s incomplete play *Charudattam* (*Charudatta*). The ten act play depicts the love story of a Brahmin merchant, Charudatta and a courtesan Vasantasena, whose union is thwarted by a jealous suitor. There are a few serious elements in the play, but it ends happily. The play has both romance and humour. The play also offers an interesting and realistic picture of urban society and the complex social structure of that time. *Vinavasavadatta*, a Bhasa (short one-act monologue) and *Padmaprabhritaka* are his other works.
- (iii) Bhavabhuti was the court poet of King Yashovarman of Kannauj in 8th CE. He wrote plays based on the *Ramayana*. The *Mahaviracharita* (*Exploits of a Great Hero*) depicts the early life of Rama, and *Uttaramcharita* (*The Latter History of Rama*) shows the final years of Rama’s life as written in the *Uttara Kanda* of the *Ramayana*. Both the plays written in the Nataka style have seven acts. His another work, *Malatimadhava* (Malati and Madhava), is a *Prakarana* play. It depicts the love story of Malati, the daughter of a minister and Madhava, her beloved. Malati is set to be married off to Nandana as per the king’s wishes. The powerful suitor as well as a mix-up with another couple interrupts the union of Malati and Madhava, which is resolved with the aid of magic. The use of the supernatural makes it a type of drama that skillfully combines romance with horror. Bhavabhuti’s long poetic descriptions are seen as an embellishment that does not add anything to the drama. He did not use the *vidusaka* and thus eliminated the comic element in his plays. Bhavabhuti compensates for it by highlighting the supernatural and the grotesque and evokes the *Rasa Bibhasta* (disgust) and *Raudra* (anger) in his works. His plays have the