

PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FROM EPISODES IN BHĀSA'S PRATIMA NĀTAKAM: EXPLORING THE POWER OF SANKALPA

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Abstract

The concept of Sankalpa (resolve or intention) is a central element in Bhāsa's Pratima Nātakam, shaping the narrative structure and the psychological depth of its characters. Sankalpa is a driving force that governs their actions and influences their decisions, leading to the unfolding of the plot throughout the drama. The firmness of Sankalpa not only guides the progression of events but also reveals the internal struggles and external conflicts of the characters, making it a crucial component of the dramatic experience, thereby demonstrating the psychology of characters.

Several established behavioral theories such as Lewin's Equation, the Theory of Planned Behavior, the Transtheoretical Model, and the Fogg Behavior Model offer structured, formula-based frameworks to general human conduct. Classical Sanskrit plays have not been examined through such structured approach, particularly for episodes and interlinkage between them. Addressing this gap, this study examines the role of Sankalpa through key prasanga (episode) from Pratima Nātakam that is Rajyabhisheka (the coronation) which manifests into Vanagamanam (the exile). Through this episode, this research explores the psychological insights of characters based on their roles and their respective Sankalpa towards their duties or wills thereby resulting in outcome in the form of next episode and the mark on the individual character.

This study uncovers significant psychological insights through the coronation episode analysis. The Sankalpas reflect the internal struggles of the characters, their ethical dilemmas, and the tension between personal desires and moral obligations. This interplay between Sankalpa and consequence highlights universal aspects of human behavior and decision-making applicable to everyday life. As the manifestation of the coronation forms the entry point of the exile, the framework establishes a basis for analyzing the remaining episodes of Pratima Nātakam in future work and may further be extended to other classical Sanskrit plays to examine their psychological depth in a structured and objective manner.

Keywords: Sankalpa, Bhāsa, Intention, Resolve, Psychological Insights, Pratima Nātakam, Episode Analysis, Prasanga

INTRODUCTION

Plays or drama have been an important source of entertainment (Chang, 2026; Vorderer & Knobloch, 2000), awareness (Lu, 2025) and inner quest across cultures (Goyal, 2023). The simplicity with which a play entices emotions in individuals and groups is quite commendable (Hook et al., 2023). In the olden days, when modern communication media did not exist, dramas had a huge role to play in transforming society through their characters, where an individual seeks inspiration by being part of the audience (Kamath & Lothspeich, 2022). Drama touches various aspects of human psychology with ease and comfort (Constien et al., 2025).

Sanskrit drama comes with a history of following principles from the Nāṭyashastra (Srivastava, 2026), wherein comprehensive rules of drama, ensuring that the drama upholds the morals of society (Yajnik, 2025). Within these traditions, tragedies were often avoided. Bhāsa, who flourished around 3rd-2nd century BCE (Chaturvedi, 2011), deviated

from the classical *Natyashastra* by introducing innovation in story telling through tragic themes, physical violence, emotional depth and complexity (Meena, 2022).

Bhāsa's plays on *Ramayana* have some modifications of characters and stories as compared to the *Valmiki Ramayana* (Paranjape, 1930). In *Pratima Nātakam*, Bhāsa draws positive characteristics (Paranjape, 1930) of all the characters, thereby giving an opportunity to study (Trigun & Jain, 2026) the psychological insights from the story, which helps in understanding contemporary human challenges.

Modern behavioral psychology has produced several structured, formula-based frameworks (Ajzen, 1991; Fogg, 2009) that model how intention and resolve translate into action. These frameworks, however, have been applied largely to general human conduct, and rarely to literary drama. Classical Sanskrit plays in particular have not been modeled through such a structured, formula-based lens (Rocchi & Pescatore, 2022), especially at the level of the individual episode (*prasanga*) and the narrative interlinkage by which one episode gives rise to the next. The present study addresses this gap by proposing a formula-based framework that analyzes the *Sankalpa* (resolve) of each character within an episode and traces how the resulting manifestation shapes the episode that follows.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature surveys key psychological frameworks that form the analytical lens of this study, tracing the evolution of behavioral theory from Kurt Lewin's foundational field-theoretic equation to contemporary models of behavior activation and change. Each framework provides a multi-dimensional vocabulary and a formula-based method for understanding how intention, environment, volition, and inner resolve interact to produce human behaviour (Bandhu et al., 2024).

2.1 Drama and Psychological Analysis

The intersection of drama and psychological analysis constitutes a well-established tradition in both Eastern and Western scholarly thought, based on the understanding that dramatic works are not merely aesthetic artifacts but profound maps of human motivation, emotion, and behavior (Yu, 2022). Psychological drama as a genre emphasizes the internal psychological processes, emotional conflicts, and mental states of characters (Roberts, 2024), prioritizing introspective character studies and subtle relational dynamics over external action. This emerged as a tradition in the late 19th century amid the rise of realism (Willis, 2023), though its conceptual roots reach considerably further back into the history of literary and theatrical thought. In the Western tradition, Aristotle's concept of catharsis (Schaper, 1968; Vives, 2011) provided the earliest formal framework for understanding the psychological relationship between dramatic performance and the audience. Later psychoanalytic approaches (Vives, 2011) extended this tradition through dynamic interplay between conscious and unconscious drives within theatrical texts (Turri, 2015), with character interpretation through a psychoanalytic lens (Ringstrom, 2018), revealing the emotional and psychological undercurrents that propel dramatic action. These include the interplay of text and subtext, rhythm, timing, and recognition moments that parallel the mechanisms of psychoanalytic therapy (Mancia, 2003).

The Indian dramatic tradition offers a parallel yet distinct psychological framework through the *Rasa* theory of Bharata Muni, articulated in the *Natyashastra*. Bharata Muni argued that emotion governs all human behavior, psychology, and movement, and outlined eight primary emotional states (*sthayibhava*) and their corresponding aesthetic responses (*rasa*) experienced by the audience (Das, 2024; Goyal, 2023). In *Natyashastra*, unlike the Aristotelian model of catharsis through identification, the spectator responds to suffering on stage not by feeling the same pain but through compassion and empathy (Goyal, 2023). *Rasa* theory is based on a specific view of psychology that holds that personality is constituted by a few primary emotions lying deep in the subconscious and unconscious strata of human beings, which run through all natures in a permanent manner and may thus be called dominant or stable emotions (*sthayibhava*) (Naik, 2023).

$$R = f(V_i, A_n, V_y)$$

where:

V_i = *Vibhava* (stimulus that triggers the emotion),

A_n = *Anubhava* (consequent effects of the emotion),

V_y = *Vyabhicharibhava* (transitory complementary states that intensify),

R = *Rasa* (the aesthetic emotional experience produced)

$$R = Sth(V_i + A_n + V_y)$$

where:

Sth = *Sthayibhava* (the dominant stable emotion underlying all the above), which is the permanent psychological substrate upon which *Rasa* is built.

Contemporary empirical research has further established that audiences engage with drama through three interconnected psychological processes (Jinliang & Jia, 2024; Sokolova, 2021) i.e., identification with a character, moral approval of their behavior, and causal attribution of their motivations.

2.2 Formula Based Models of Behaviour

Kurt Lewin's Equation is a foundational framework for understanding how individual psychology interacts with external circumstances (Lewin et al., 1936). The equation, $B = f(P, E)$ indicates Behavior (B) is a function of both the person (P) and environment (E). Person (P) component encompasses the individual's internal psychological attributes, including traits, needs, motivations, cognitive structures, and the lingering influences of past experiences. Environment (E) represents the psychological field as the individual perceives and experiences it. Lewin proposed that every individual exists within a "life space" which is a psychological field composed of forces, goals, barriers, and perceptions. Understanding behavior requires examining both person and environment together, at the same moment in time (Horstmann, 2017).

2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), stands as one of the most widely applied and empirically tested frameworks for predicting and explaining human behavior across diverse domains (Ajzen, 1991; Madden et al., 1992). This was developed as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Sheppard et al., 1988).

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA): $BI = w_1(AB) + w_2(SN)$

where:

BI = Behavioral Intention,

AB = Attitude toward the Behavior,

SN = Subjective Norms, w_1/w_2 = empirically derived weights

TPB was elaborated to improve predictive power by adding a third core component named "perceived behavioral control", to the existing constructs of attitude and subjective norms, with the central tenet that behavioral intention is the most proximal determinant of human social behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude toward the behavior refers to the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a given action. Subjective norms capture the perceived social pressure from significant others to perform or refrain from the behavior and perceived behavioral control reflects the individual's assessment of the ease or difficulty of executing the behavior, encompassing both internal capacity and external constraints.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) - Ajzen's extension: $BI = w_1(AB) + w_2(SN) + w_3(PBC)$

where:

PBC = Perceived Behavioral Control, w_3 = weight of PBC

Full behavioral prediction adds: $B \approx BI + PBC$

This means, the actual Behavior (B) is approximated by Intention and the direct effect of PBC when perceived control aligns with actual control. These three belief-based constructs are assumed to be readily accessible in memory and together predict behavioral intention, which in turn is the immediate precursor to actual behavior (Madden et al., 1992). The TPB's key theoretical contribution lies in the concept of perceived behavioral control, defined as an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a particular behavior, which influences both the strength of intention (Ajzen, 1985, 2002) and, in cases where perceived and actual control converge, behavior directly. Scholars have argued that the model's reliance on rational decision-making underestimates the influence of emotions, habits, and unconscious cognitive processes, and a persistent challenge remains the intention-behavior gap (Mathieson, 1991). Scholars observe that strong intent does not always translate into action, as circumstantial limitations such as the absence of a concrete goal, means, or temporary motivational deficiency can constrain goal-directed intentions (Hagger & Hamilton, 2025). Extensions of the model, including the Extended Theory of Planned Behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998), have sought to address these limitations by incorporating additional predictors such as past behavior and habit strength, reflecting ongoing efforts to account for the full complexity of human behavioral decision-making.

Extended TPB (ETPB): $BI = w_1(AB) + w_2(SN) + w_3(PBC) + w_4(MN) + w_5(PB)$

where:

MN = Moral Norms,

PB = Past Behavior

TRA established intention-based logic. TPB extended it by adding PBC, recognizing that not all behavior is fully volitional (Madden et al., 1992; Sheppard et al., 1988). The weights (w_1, w_2, w_3) are not fixed universally as they are context- and population-specific, estimated through regression analysis in each study. This is what makes TPB a probabilistic predictive model rather than a deterministic equation like Lewin's.

2.2.2 Transtheoretical Model (TTM)

The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) is an integrative model designed to conceptualize the process of intentional behavior change by incorporating and synthesizing key constructs from multiple theories of counseling and behavioral change into a single comprehensive framework (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). It has been applied across a wide variety of behaviors, populations, and settings (Hassani et al., 2023; Mohebbi et al., 2021; Noroozi et al., 2023). The model is organized

around four key constructs: the five stages of change, ten processes of change, decisional balance, and self-efficacy, with the stages of change serving as its central organizing principle progressing from precontemplation, through contemplation, preparation, and action, to maintenance (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997). This model is concerned with explaining how people change rather than why they change, and it assumes that behavioral change is a process that unfolds over time through a sequence of stages that are both stable and open to change, often occurring in a non-linear fashion. Beyond the stages themselves, the TTM incorporates ten processes of change, including consciousness raising, dramatic relief, environmental re-evaluation, social liberation, and self-re-evaluation, which are proposed to facilitate movement through the earlier stages, while behavioral strategies become more prominent in the later stages of action and maintenance. The model further recognizes that typically less than 20% of population at risk is prepared to take action at any given time.

$B(t) = f(\text{Stage}(t), \text{POC}, \text{DB}, \text{SE})$

where:

$B(t)$ = Behavior at time t ,

$\text{Stage}(t)$ = Current stage of change,

POC = Processes of Change,

DB = Decisional Balance,

SE = Self-Efficacy

2.2.3 Fogg Behavior Model (FBM)

Fogg Behavior Model (FBM) was developed primarily within the context of persuasive technology and habit design (Fogg, 2009). Its identification of the precise convergence points at which behavior is activated distinguishes it from stage-based or intention-based models and makes it useful for designing targeted interventions that account for the specific moment a behavior is triggered. It is distinctive because it is one of the few models that identifies a precise moment of behavioral activation rather than a process or stage sequence (Duarte-Anselmi et al., 2025).

$B = \text{MAP}$

where:

B = Behavior,

M = Motivation,

A = Ability,

P = Prompt

All three (M , A and P) must converge simultaneously for behavior to occur. Unlike Lewin, TTM or TPB, FBM insists that even high motivation and full ability produce no behavior without a prompt firing at the right moment.

2.3 Comparative Analysis of Literature Reviewed

Reviewed together, these frameworks share three features. First, each is formula-based, expressing behaviour as a function of a few interacting determinants. Second, each reaffirms Lewin's core insight that behaviour is determined by a combination of person and environment, attitude and norm, stage and self-efficacy, or motivation, ability, and prompt. Third, each was developed and validated on general human conduct. A summarized representation is given in the table below:

Model	Theorist(s)	Year	Formula with Insight
Bharata's Rasa Sutra	Bharata Muni	~200 BCE	$R = \text{Sth}(V_i + A_n + V_y)$ Aesthetic-emotional experience arises from the convergence of stable emotion, stimulus, response, and transitory states
Lewin's Equation	Kurt Lewin	1936	$B = f(P, E)$ Behavior is a function of both the person and their environment, simultaneously
Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	Fishbein & Ajzen	1975	$BI = w_1(AB) + w_2(SN)$ Intention is shaped by personal attitude and subjective social norms
Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Icek Ajzen	1985	$BI = w_1(AB) + w_2(SN) + w_3(PBC)$; $B \approx BI + PBC$ Adds perceived behavioral control - not all behavior is fully volitional
Transtheoretical Model (TTM)	Prochaska & DiClemente	1983	$B(t) = f(\text{Stage}(t), \text{POC}, \text{DB}, \text{SE})$ Change is a non-linear stage process governed by decisional balance and self-efficacy
Fogg Behavior Model (FBM)	B.J. Fogg	2009	$B = \text{MAP}$

			Behavior occurs only when Motivation, Ability, and Prompt converge simultaneously
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2.4 Gap in Existing Literature

The application of such structured, formula-based reasoning to literary drama, specifically to classical Sanskrit plays is yet to be addressed. Although Bharata's Rasa theory offers an indigenous formula-like account of aesthetic emotion, it models the audience's emotional response rather than the character's internal resolve and its narrative consequences. While the concept of Sankalpa has been examined in contemporary applied and clinical settings (Di Fronso, 2025) and in philosophical analyses of desire and resolve (Dash, 2023), it has not been employed as a structured, formula-based lens for analyzing character volition and narrative progression in Sanskrit drama. No existing framework analyzes the volitional drive of individual characters at the level of the episode, nor the interlinkage by which the outcome of one episode becomes the starting condition of the next. It is precisely this gap that the methodology developed in the following section seeks to fill, by adapting the formula-based spirit of these models to the concept of Sankalpa.

OBJECTIVES

With regards to Bhāsa's Pratima Nātakam, this research has the following objectives:

- To identify the characters and their roles within an episode, and Sankalpa arising from those roles
- To examine the effects of each character's strongest Sankalpa on the outcome of the episode
- To examine how the manifestation of one episode leads into another episode
- To study the impact of Sankalpa on its manifestation and on the individual character
- To demonstrate structured formula-based framework for analysis for an episode of play

METHODOLOGY

This study proposes a structured, formula-based framework for analyzing the operation of Sankalpa in a Sanskrit play. The behavioral models stated in the literature review, share the property of expressing human conduct as a function of a few interacting determinants. The framework developed here adapts that formula-based spirit to the analysis of character resolve within and across the episodes of a play. The framework was arrived at inductively, through close reading of the chosen episode, and is then formalized into the general procedure set out below so that it may be applied systematically to any episode of the drama.

The present study employs a progressively narrowing analytical framework, represented as

$$PI = f(SP(BP(PN(EX(SK))))))$$

where:

- PI** = Psychological Insights in Drama,
SP = Sanskrit Plays (the broader classical tradition),
BP = Bhāsa's Plays (the specific dramatist),
PN = *Pratima Nātakam* (the specific work),
EX = Prasanga (the specific episode),
SK = *Sankalpa* (the specific psychological construct in an episode)

This framework moves from the broad tradition of psychological insights in drama through the corpus of Sanskrit plays, to the specific dramatic works of Bhāsa, to *Pratima Nātakam*, and finally arriving at *Sankalpa* as the central psychological construct under examination for a specific episode. Learning from the literature review, this research employs a structured, text-grounded character analysis through the formula-based method given below. The analysis focuses on investigating each character's different roles in the episode. It examines the *Sankalpa* that drives the character's actions and unfolding of the subsequent events. This method aims to uncover the psychological and relational complexities embedded in the drama.

4.1 Formula for Analysis of Drama

Consider the following variables for analysis of Pratima Nātakam.

Roles in Episodes:

1. **P**: Person
2. **X_i**: Episode *i*, where $i \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$
3. **R (P, X_i)**: Roles *R* played by *P* in *X_i*
4. Role Dominance and Evidence:
5. **D (R, X_i)**: Dominance of role *R* in episode *X_i* which is qualitative in nature
6. **E (R, X_i)**: Evidence associated with *R* in *X_i*
7. Sankalpa Formation:

8. $S(R, X_i)$: Sankalpa generated by R in X_i , influenced by $D(R, X_i)$ and $E(R, X_i)$
9. $S^*(R, X_i)$: Strongest Sankalpa from $S(R, X_i)$
10. Inference and Outcome:
11. $O(X_i)$: Outcome (Influence) inferred from the strongest Sankalpa $S^*(R, X_i)$ for P
12. Mutual Influence (Manifestation):
13. $M(X_i)$: Manifestation in episode X_i , formed by the union of all outcomes $O(X_i)$
14. Inter-episode Dynamics:
15. $M(X_i) \rightarrow X_{i+1}$: Manifestation M of episode X_i serves as the starting point for episode X_{i+1}
16. Formula for analysis
17. $R(P, X_i) \rightarrow (D(R, X_i), E(R, X_i)) \rightarrow S(R, X_i)$
18. $S^*(R, X_i) = \text{argmax} [D(R, X_i) \cdot E(R, X_i)]$, over all R in X_i
19. $O(X_i) = g(S^*(R, X_i))$
20. $M(X_i) = \cup O(S^*(R_k, X_i))$, for $k = 1$ to K
21. $M(X_i) \rightarrow X_{i+1}$
22. $O(S^*) \in [\text{Fulfilment}, \text{Suffering}]$, classifying each character's outcome; $M(X_i) \rightarrow X_{i+1}$
23. where K = total number of roles in episode X_i and g is the interpretive inference function applied during the research.
24. Here, dominance ($D(R, X_i)$), is assessed interpretively. A role is taken as dominant in an episode when the textual evidence most strongly foregrounds it as the governing source of the character's conduct in that episode. The framework therefore treats D as a qualitative judgment grounded in śloka evidence rather than a numerically measured quantity.

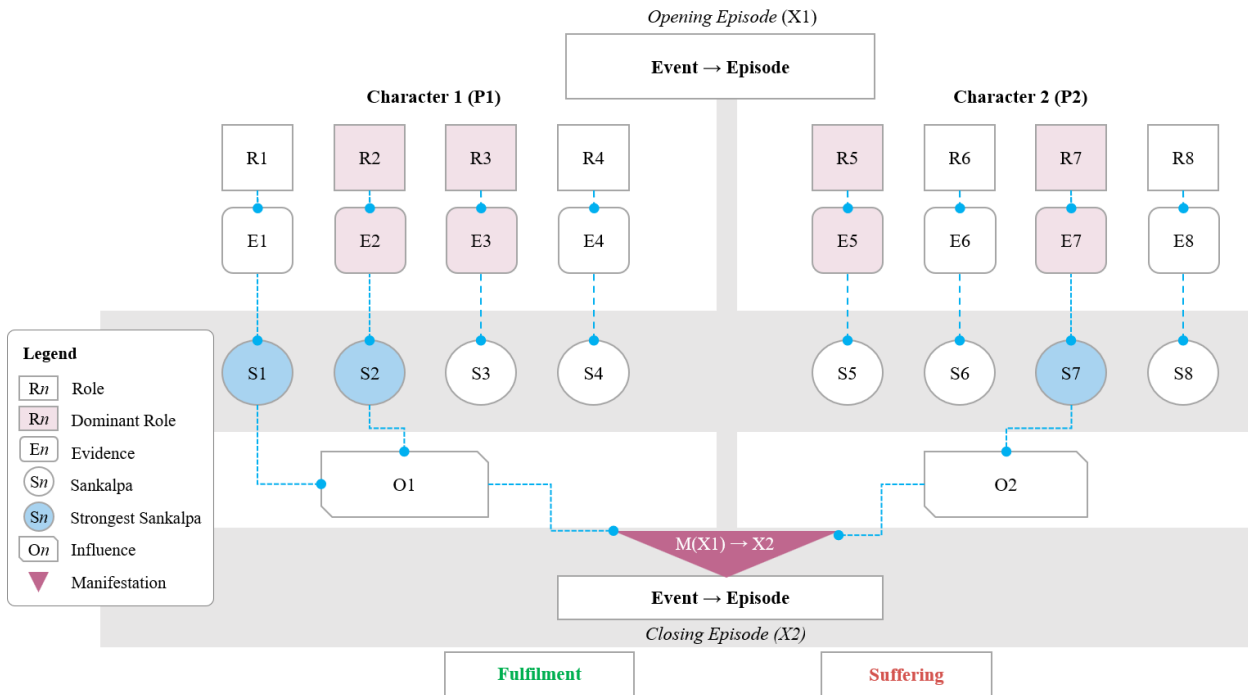


Figure 1: Framework for analysis of the episodes

4.2 Steps for analysis of text in Pratima Nātakam

1. Identify the Person (P) and their Roles (R) in each Episode (X_i).
2. Determine the Dominance ($D(R, X_i)$) and Evidence ($E(R, X_i)$) for each role in the episode.
3. Identify the Sankalpas ($S(R, X_i)$) and compute the strongest one ($S^*(R, X_i)$).
4. Infer the Outcome ($O(X_i)$) influenced by the strongest Sankalpa for that person.
5. Aggregate the outcomes as Mutual Influences to derive the Manifestation ($M(X_i)$).
6. Use the Manifestation to analyze transitions between episodes and classify the closing Manifestation as either Fulfilment or Suffering.

ANALYSIS

This section applies the framework developed above to *Pratima Nātakam*. Following the funnel structure of the methodology mentioned above i.e., $PI = f(SP(BP(PN(EX(SK))))))$, it moves from psychological insights in plays generally, to Bhāsa's plays, to *Pratima Nātakam*, to the concept of Sankalpa in Sanskrit thought, and finally to analysis of the

coronation episode.

5.1 Psychological Insights from Plays (SP)

Drama has long served as a mirror to the human mind. Historically, language conveys psychological cues about people, situations, and things, and these cues are exemplified, elaborated, and often heightened in dramatic performance, where motivation, conflict, and consequence are externalized for an audience to witness. Unlike everyday speech, a play compresses and intensifies inner life: a character's hesitation, resolve, or moral struggle is given visible form through dialogue, gesture, and dramatic situation. This is what allows drama to function not merely as entertainment but as a structured representation of how persons deliberate, decide, and act under pressure (Das, 2024; Goyal, 2023; Naik, 2023; Sokolova, 2021).

Across traditions, this insight is long-standing. The Western dramatic tradition, from Greek tragedy onward, treated the stage as a site for examining choice and its consequences, while the Indian tradition, codified in the *Natyashastra*, held that emotion (*bhāva*) and its aesthetic realization (*rasa*) are the very substance of dramatic art. Sanskrit, in particular, has a rich history of dramatic literature dating to at least the early centuries BCE, in which psychological and ethical states are rendered with considerable subtlety (Goyal, 2023). It is within this broad tradition of psychologically expressive drama that the present study locates itself, before narrowing to the plays of Bhāsa and, ultimately, to a single episode of *Pratima Nātakam*.

5.2 Bhāsa's Plays (BP)

Bhāsa is among the earliest of playwrights in India. He is known for his 13 plays which are written in an innovative manner deviating from the classical culture of plays based on *Natyashastra*. He created plots in his dramas which deviate from the original story, at times, glorifying villains and doing their *guṇa-darśana* (a portrayal of their redeeming qualities) and showing tragedies like war and death on stage. These plays were discovered in handwritten form by T. Ganapati Sastri in 1909 at different places and subsequently attributed to Bhāsa because of their literary style (Chaturvedi, 2011; Sastri, 1925). Bhāsa's plays are listed below:

5.2.1 Based on Ramayana

- *Pratimā-nāṭaka* (प्रतिमा-नाटकम्) – The Statue Play (based on a story involving Rāma's statue).
- *Abhiṣeka-nāṭaka* (अभिषेक-नाटकम्) – The Coronation Play (depicting Rāma's coronation).
- 5.2.2 Based on Mahābhārata
- *Dūtavākya* (दूतवाक्यम्) – The Messenger's Words.
- *Karṇabhāra* (कर्णभारम्) – The Burden of Karna.
- *Dūtaghaṭotkaca* (दूतघटोत्कचः) – Ghatotkaca as a Messenger.
- *Ūrubhaṅga* (ऊरुभङ्गम्) – The Breaking of the Thigh.
- *Madhyama-vyāyoga* (मध्यमव्यायोगः) – The Middle One's Conflict.
- *Pañcarātra* (पञ्चरात्रम्) – The Five Nights.

5.2.3 Based on story of Brhatkathā

- *Pratijñā-Yaugandharāyaṇa* (प्रतिज्ञायौगन्धरायणम्) – The Vow of Yaugandharayana.
- *Svapnavāsavadatta* (स्वप्नवासवदत्तम्) – The Vision of Vasavadatta.
- *Avimāraka* (अविमारकः) – Avimāraka (name of the protagonist).
- *Cārudatta* (चारुदत्तः) – Charudatta (name of the protagonist).

5.2.4 Other plays

- *Bālarita* (बालचरितम्) – The Story of Bala (depicting Kṛṣṇa's childhood and Kāṁsa's slaying).

5.3 Pratima Nātakam (PN)

Pratima Nātakam has many episodes which unfold the psychological insights from a character and events depicted through changes in the scenes and storyline (Paranjape, 1930). The first act of this drama opens with Rāma's coronation, which ends with Rāma's exile after Kaikeyi gets the coronation interrupted to get her two boons fulfilled. In the second act, Dasharatha passes away. *Pratima Nātakam* takes its name from the events that unfold in the third act where the scene of action is the *Pratimagruham* where there are statues of departed emperors of Ayodhya, among his forefathers, Bharata finds the statue of Dasharatha and hence knows the reasons behind Rāma's exile.

Just as Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis (Freud, 1900) distinguishes between the manifest content and the latent content, this drama operates on a comparable dual structure. The sequence of events, scenes, and actions visible on stage constitutes its manifest content, while the deeper currents of *Sankalpa* i.e., the inner resolves, dominant roles, and volitional forces driving each character form its latent content. For Freud, the overt content of a narrative serves as a window into the unconscious desires and motivations that determine both behavior and consequence. Similarly, the present analytical framework treats each episode (X_i) of the drama as a manifest layer beneath which the strongest *Sankalpa* (S^*) of each character must be uncovered through the systematic reading of role dominance and textual evidence. In this sense, the analysis of *Pratima Nātakam* becomes an act of interpretive excavation analogous to psychoanalytic method which is moving from what is shown to what is meant, from the visible episode to the underlying resolve that propels the character and the narrative forward.

5.4 Sankalpa in Sanskrit Texts and Spirituality (SK)

The word *Sankalpa* (संकल्प) is formed from the verbal root कल्प् (*kalp* dhātu) and the prefix सं (*sam* upasarga). The prefix सं (*sam*) carries the senses of auspiciousness, completeness, union, and intensity. As the *Medinī* lexicon notes:

सं - शोभनार्थः । समार्थः । सङ्गतार्थः । प्रकृष्टार्थः । इति मेदिनी ॥

And as Durgādāsa explains in his commentary on the *Mugdhabodha*:

उपसर्गविशेषः । अस्यार्थाः यथा । सम् प्रकर्षाक्षेपनैरन्तर्यौचित्याभिमुख्येषु ॥

that is, *sam* conveys eminence (*prakarṣa*), conjunction (*āśleṣa*), continuity (*nairantarya*), propriety (*aucitya*), and orientation toward something (*ābhimukhya*).

The root कल्प् (*kalp*) conveys the sense of forming, ordaining, or determining

कल्प्यते विधीयते असौ । कल्प् + कर्मणि घञ् ।

Thus, the two elements combine to mean a determination or resolve that is well-formed, complete, and oriented toward a chosen object - an intention conceived in the heart and mind and brought to a state of firm resolution.

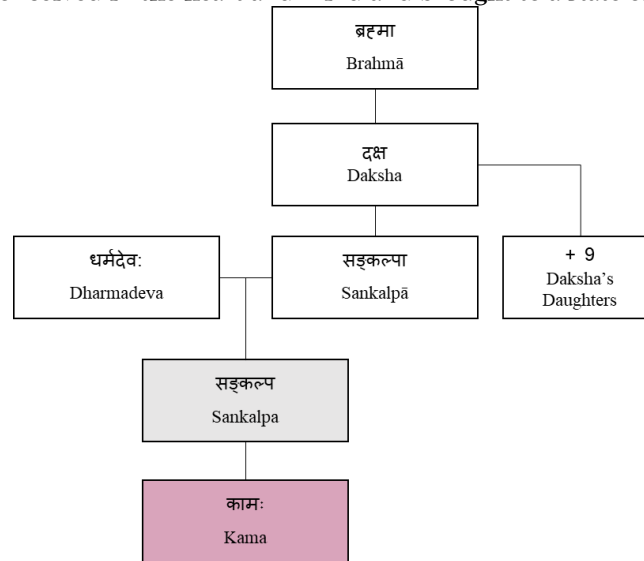


Figure 3: Origin of Sankalpa from Brahma's family tree

The Purāṇas personify Sankalpa within the cosmic family tree descending from Brahmā, locating it precisely within the lineage of Dharma. According to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (VI.6), Dakṣa fathered sixty daughters with Asiknī, of whom ten were given in marriage to Dharmadeva. One of these ten daughters was Saṅkalpā, and from the union of Dharmadeva and Saṅkalpā was born a son named Saṅkalpa who in turn became the father of Kāma (desire). This genealogy is corroborated across multiple Purāṇic sources, including the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (III.3.33), the *Matsya Purāṇa* (5.19, 203.10), the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (66.34), and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (I.15.108). The genealogy thus encodes a psychological sequence indicating that order gives rise to resolve, and resolve gives rise to desire. This makes intention the generative link between moral order and the impulse to act.

Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says, "Sankalpa is gentle intention without feverishness, but with confidence." (Gurudev, 2020) This distinction between restless desire and steady resolve is central to understanding how *Sankalpa* operates as

a psychological force. Every desire tells us something about what is not yet there - "I want to do something, but I do not yet have the power to do it." If a desire stays with us, it becomes, in the form of resolve, the impulse that drives action. Yet when desires multiply, they create their own difficulty: when all of them seek fulfilment at once, we find ourselves in trouble, much as a child wants every appealing thing it experiences. We become attracted to so many things at once, and in bringing our mind from the scattered pull of these many desires into the present moment, the vagueness of desire dissolves and the process of taking *Sankalpa* begins. This progression from the diffuse feverishness of *kāmanā* (desire) to the focused clarity of *Sankalpa* (resolve), is reflected in the very meaning of *satyasaṅkalpa* in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (8.7.1):

- सत्यकामः (*satyakāmaḥ*) = One whose desire becomes fact (true)
- सत्यसंकल्पः (*satyasaṅkalpaḥ*) = One whose resolve is of immutable purpose (*satya* = true), conviction, commitment to Truth

Chandogya Upanishad has a reference to Sankalpa in the following verse. It states that the Sankalpa which has a foundation of truth is the cause of commitment to truth.

य आत्मापहतपाप्मा विजरो विमृत्युर्विशोको विजिघत्सोऽपिपासः

Ya ātmā apahatapāpmā - the Self is free from sin; *vijarah* - free from the effects of age; *vimṛtyuḥ* - free from death; *viśokaḥ* - free from sorrow; *vijighatsaḥ* - free from hunger; *apipāsaḥ* - free from thirst;

सत्यकामः सत्यसंकल्पः सोऽन्वेष्टव्यः

satyakāmaḥ - is the cause of desire for Truth; *satyasaṅkalpaḥ* - is the cause of commitment to Truth; *saḥ* - that; *anveṣṭavyaḥ* - has to be sought.

स विजिज्ञासितव्यः स सर्वांश्च लोकानाप्नोति

saḥ vijijñāsitaḥ - that has to be thoroughly investigated; *saḥ* - a person; *sarvān ca lokān āpnoti* - attains all worlds.

सर्वांश्च कामान्यस्तमात्मानमनुविद्य विजानातीति ह प्रजापतिरुवाच ॥ ८.७.१ ॥

sarvān ca kāmān - and all desires; *yaḥ* - who; *tam ātmānam* - that Self; *anuvīdya* - having learned; *vijānāti* - and knows it; *prajāpatiḥ iti ha uvāca* - Prajapati once said.

Dimension	Source/Basis	Insight & Implication for Analysis
Etymological	सं (sam) + कल्प् (kalp) - Medinī & Mugdhabodha	A fully formed, complete resolve directed toward a chosen object. Establishes Sankalpa as an identifiable strength of resolve within a character.
Genealogical	<i>Purāṇas</i> Dharma → <i>Saṅkalpā</i> → <i>Sankalpa</i> → <i>Kāma</i>	Born of Dharma (moral order) and parent of <i>Kāma</i> (desire), mediating between order and impulse. Positions resolve as the link transforming dharma into action.
Volitional	<i>Sri Sri Ravi Shankar</i> ; <i>kāmanā</i> vs. <i>sankalpa</i>	Desire freed from feverishness. Scattered desire focused into steady, confident intention. Distinguishes a character's diffuse wishes from decisive, actionable resolve.
Upaniṣadic	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i> 8.7.1 - <i>satyasaṅkalpa</i>	The resolve grounded in truth (<i>satya</i>) is the cause of commitment to truth and the path to "all worlds." Affirms that a resolve founded on truth produces righteous, fulfilling outcomes.
Moral Polarity	<i>Pāpa</i> as "evil intention" - <i>satyasaṅkalpa</i> vs. <i>pāpasāṅkalpa</i>	Sankalpa is morally directional. Its quality depends on whether its foundation is <i>satya</i> or <i>pāpa</i> . Determines whether a character's resolve leads toward fulfilment or suffering.

Taken together, these five dimensions establish that *Sankalpa* is a complete, directed (desire focused into resolve) (Dash, 2023), and morally-oriented resolve whose strength and foundation together determine its outcome, making it a precise and powerful lens through which the psychological architecture of each character and episode in *Pratima Nātakam* can be examined in this study's framework, toward *Fulfilment* or *Suffering*.

5.5 Analysis of the Coronation episode (EX + SK applied)

The analysis of an episode begins with the recognition that no character in the drama acts from a single, fixed identity. Each character occupies multiple roles simultaneously, and it is the interplay among these roles that gives rise to their resolve. In the opening episode of *Pratima Nātakam*, three characters are examined in this way. Each character (the Person, P) is shown with the several roles they play in the episode. Among these, one role emerges as dominant for each character that most strongly governs their conduct in the episode. Each role is supplemented with textual evidence drawn directly from the play itself. Seven such pieces of evidence (E1–E7) are cited in this episode, each presented as the original *śloka* alongside its translation, so that the analysis remains anchored in the primary text rather than in interpretation

alone. This evidence is what allows the dominance of a role to be established and, in turn, what gives rise to the character's resolve. From the evidence, the Sankalpas (S) of each character are identified. A character may hold more than one Sankalpa at once; the diagram therefore distinguishes the strongest Sankalpa (marked in blue) from the others. Each strongest Sankalpa produces an Influence (Outcome, O). Finally, the combination of all these outcomes constitutes the Manifestation (M) of the episode that is the aggregate consequence that does not merely conclude the present episode but becomes the seed of the next. Here, the union of the three outcomes manifests as Rāma's Exile (X2).

Step 1: Identify Person (P) and Roles R (P, X₁)

Three persons are analyzed through their roles:

- **Person A (Rāma)** - R1 Husband (पति), R2 Dutiful Son (कर्तव्यदक्षपुत्रः, dominant), R3 Prince (युवराजः), R4 Elder Brother (अग्रजः)
- **Person B (Kaikeyi / the Queen)** - R5 Queen (राजपत्नी), R6 Mother (माता)
- **Person C (Dasharatha)** - R7 Cursed King (शप्त-नृपः), R8 Displeased Husband (रुष्ट-पतिः), R9 Deluded Father (मोहवशपिता)

Step 2: Dominance D (R, X₁) and Evidence E (R, X₁)

The shaded (pink) role boxes mark the Dominant Role for each person, and each is supported by textual evidence (E1–E7). For instance, R2 (Dutiful Son) is dominant for Rāma, evidenced by E1–E3 (his reasoning that a son must obey his father, and that the word "loved one" should bring no shame).

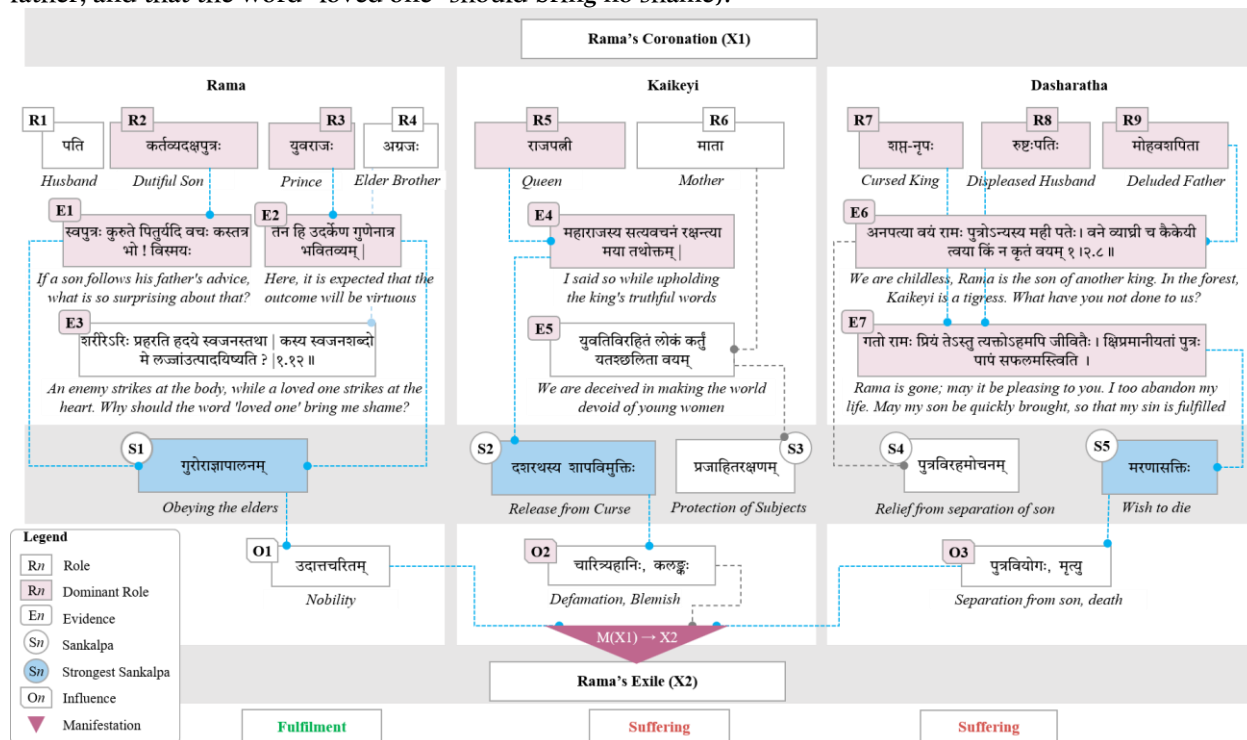


Figure 2: Episode under analysis - X1 Rāma's Coronation which manifests into X2 Rāma's Exile

Step 3: Sankalpa S (R, X₁) and Strongest Sankalpa S*

Each person's evidence generates Sankalpas (S1–S5). The blue-filled circles mark the Strongest Sankalpa (S*):

- Rāma → S1 Obeying the elders (गुरोराज्ञापालनम्)
- Kaikeyi → S2 Release from Curse (दशरथस्य शापविमुक्तिः), with S3 Protection of Subjects secondary
- Dasharatha → S5 Wish to die (मरणासक्तिः), with S4 Relief from separation of son secondary

Step 4: Outcome O(S*)

Each strongest Sankalpa produces an Influence or an Outcome:

- S1 → O1 Nobility (उदात्तचरितम्)
- S2 → O2 Defamation, Blemish (चारित्र्यहानिः, कलङ्कः)
- S5 → O3 Separation from son, death (पुत्रवियोगः, मृत्युः)

Step 5: Manifestation M(X₁)

The union of all outcomes $UO = M$, depicted by the Manifestation triangle, produces the next episode: **Rāma's Exile (X2)**.

Step 6: Classification

Each cluster's outcome is tagged:

- Rāma → **Fulfilment**
- Kaikeyī → **Suffering**
- Dasharatha → **Suffering**

This analysis demonstrates that the framework can trace an episode end to end i.e., from the multiple roles each character holds, through their strongest Sankalpa, to the outcome that marks them, and finally to the aggregated manifestation that generates the next episode. The same procedure can now be applied to the remaining episodes of the play, beginning with the exile (X2) whose entry conditions are established through coronation (X1).

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the analysis, relates it to the reviewed models, and notes the study's limitations.

6.1 Insights from the Analysis

The analysis of the coronation episode shows that Sankalpa, when formalized as a function of a character's dominant role and its textual evidence, can account for the psychological progression of an episode from beginning to end. Each of the three characters examined arrives at a strongest Sankalpa that determines their conduct. Rāma's resolve to obey his elders, Kaikeyī's resolve to secure release from the curse, and Dasharatha's resolve born of his wish to die. The aggregation of the resulting outcomes does not merely conclude the coronation but constitutes the very conditions that make exile the only possible continuation. In this sense the framework captures not just isolated character psychology but the causal-narrative link by which one episode gives rise to the next.

6.2 Relation to Formula Based Models of Behaviour

Lewin's principle, $B = f(P, E)$, is borne out in the way each character's Sankalpa emerges. Rāma's resolve is not a free-floating disposition but the product of his roles meeting the interrupted coronation (the environment). The same situational field produces an opposite resolve in Kaikeyī, confirming Lewin's insistence that neither factor alone is sufficient.

The Theory of Planned Behavior's (TPB) distinction between intention and its determinants finds an analogue in the layered structure of Sankalpa. Rāma's strongest Sankalpa functions as his behavioral intention, shaped by his attitude toward filial duty and the subjective norms of dharmic kingship. His unhesitating action reflects high perceived behavioral control, whereas Dasharatha's resolve, paralyzed into a wish for death, illustrates the intention-behavior gap in which resolve does not translate into efficacious action.

The Transtheoretical Model's (TTM) view of change as a staged, non-linear process is mirrored in the movement from the diffuse desires (kāmanā) discussed in the analysis toward focused resolve. This is a transition that resembles the passage from contemplation to decisive action, with the strongest Sankalpa marking the point of commitment.

The Fogg Behavior Model's convergence principle, $B = MAP$, offers the closest structural parallel. The strongest Sankalpa operates precisely as Fogg's activating moment. Motivation and ability may be present across several of a character's roles, but action crystallizes only when resolve fixes upon a single object i.e., the prompt-like trigger that converts disposition into deed.

Taken together, these frameworks confirm that Sankalpa is not a culturally isolated notion but a construct that engages the same explanatory variables viz, person and situation, intention and control, readiness and activation, that modern behavioral science models for general conduct. What the present framework adds is the application of this formula-based reasoning to the volition of individual characters within a Sanskrit play, and to the interlinkage between its episodes.

6.3 The Moral Orientation of Sankalpa

A finding that distinguishes this analysis from the behavioral models is the moral directionality of Sankalpa. The behavioral frameworks are largely value-neutral. They predict whether behavior occurs, not whether it is righteous. The Sanskrit conception, by contrast, holds that the same volitional faculty yields satyasaṅkalpa or pāpasāṅkalpa according to its foundation in truth or its absence. This is visible in the contrasting outcomes of the coronation episode. Rāma's truth-grounded resolve issues in fulfilment, while resolves entangled with adharma issue in suffering. The framework thus records not only the strength of a character's resolve but its ethical orientation, a dimension the Western models do not capture.

6.4 Limitations

The analysis demonstrates the framework on a single episode. While chosen for its richness, it cannot establish the framework's behavior across the full range of the play's episodes. The determination of role dominance and the selection of the strongest Sankalpa rest on interpretive reading of the śloka evidence rather than on quantitative measurement, so

different readers may weigh the evidence differently. Finally, the framework is developed and applied within one play. Its generalization to other Sanskrit dramas is yet to be tested.

CONCLUSION

Although modern behavioral psychology offers several structured, formula-based accounts of how intention becomes action, classical Sanskrit plays have not been read through such a lens, particularly at the level of the individual episode and the narrative interlinkage between episodes. To address this, the study proposed a formula-based framework that derives each character's resolve from their dominant role and its textual evidence, identifies the strongest Sankalpa, traces its outcome, and aggregates these outcomes into a manifestation that becomes the entry condition of the following episode.

Applied in depth to the coronation episode, the framework demonstrated that Sankalpa governs both the conduct of individual characters and the transition between episodes. Rāma's truth-grounded resolve issued in fulfilment, while the resolves of Kaikeyi and Dasharatha issued in suffering, and the union of these outcomes made the exile the only possible continuation of the narrative. The analysis thus showed that a single episode can be traced end to end i.e., from role, through resolve, to outcome and manifestation, and that the resulting framework engages the same explanatory variables as established behavioral models while adding a moral dimension those models leave aside.

This study offers a structured, formula-based method for the psychological analysis of Sanskrit drama at the level of the episode. It demonstrates that the episodes of a play can be linked analytically, with the manifestation of one episode forming the foundation of the next, and it shows that Sankalpa, far from being a culturally isolated notion, is a rigorous psychological construct whose strength and moral orientation together shape outcomes.

Beyond the text, the analysis points to the transformative power of Sankalpa as a principle of conduct. Characters who harness their Sankalpa strongly, firmly, and effectively shape their own destiny. This pattern is echoed in modern accounts of determination, cognitive resilience, emotional regulation, and self-efficacy. Read in this light, the episodes of *Pratima Nātakam* offer lessons for the present: that clarity of resolve, grounded in truth, is what converts intention into action and circumstance into outcome.

As the manifestation of the coronation establishes the conditions of the exile, the analysis of the remaining episodes of *Pratima Nātakam* follows naturally as the continuation of this work through the same framework. The approach may further be extended to other plays of Bhāsa and to the wider corpus of classical Sanskrit drama, offering a structured and objective means of examining their psychological depth.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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