Emotions in the Fine and Performing Arts

22

Fabrizia Baldissera

Emotions in Indian Drama and Dances

The Rediscovery and Reconstruction of the Indian Performing Arts

At the beginning of the 20th century the Indian traditional performing arts were threatened with extinction. Various foreign political and economic dominations had cut into the power of the former patrons of temples and royal retinues, who by then lacked the means to entertain large troupes of dancers and musicians, whose instruction in the traditional dramas could last from ten to thirty years. From the 19th century onwards, moreover, new circumstances had favoured the rise of an Indian urban bourgeois class, who looked at modernity from a Victorian perspective and dismissed traditional performances as old-fashioned or vulgar.

By this time it was as if three traditions, that were historically intertwined, had gradually become independent from each other. These were the composition of dramatic texts, that of dramatic treatises, and actual performance. From at least the first centuries CE there had been a vast literary dramatic production. This was soon accompanied by a highly developed tradition of dramatic lore and criticism. And finally, from ancient times and throughout India, there had been an extremely diversified tradition of performances, both secular and religious, based on dramatic practice.

By the beginning of the 20th century the texts of several dozens-old plays were still extant, as well as some classical dramatic treatises, and in many regions of India there was still a number of knowledgeable teachers and performers of the ancient plays and dances. No one of importance, however, seemed to be particularly interested in them or in their ancient art. This was further worsened by the ill repute in which female dancers, including temple dancers, had incurred, starting from at least the 17th century, when due to lack of sustained patronage they had to resort also to prostitution as a means of livelihood.[1]

[1] Actresses apparently were considered easy women or prostitutes also in more ancient times, as stated already by the great grammarian *Pā ini* (fifth or fourth century before CE). In a satire of the eighth century CE, the *Ku anīmata* of *Dāmodaragupta*, a play is enacted in a temple by a troupe of courtesans, *dāsī*.

Fortunately in the second decade of the 20th century a group of cultivated people from Madras, belonging to the new Indian bourgeoisie, most of whom were of Brahminical extraction, endeavored to restore self-respect and give a new lease of life to the languishing performing arts, in their bid to promote Indian cultural values. Their action was part of the larger nationalistic struggle that ultimately led to Indian independence, and was also favoured by the Theosophical Society of Madras. They were later hailed as the pioneers of the "Indian cultural renaissance," as their work of discovery and classification proved vital for the recovery of the traditional performing arts of Tamil Nadu, and their example then led to the study and preservation of several dramatic forms throughout India. At the same time their changed sensibility "reconstructed" the art of performance in accord with the aesthetic ideals of the time, giving new shape to several aspects of dramatic practice. Some contemporary scholars and performers (Fratagnoli 2010; Meduri 1996, 2005, 2009; and cf. Orr 2000). Of Indian dances, in the wake of postcolonial and cultural studies, such as Spivak (1988), oppose strongly the pioneers' reconstruction of the ancient dramatic forms. They maintain that the disrepute attached to professional female dancers had to do mainly with the subaltern rank of most practitioners, often overlooking the historical documents that prove the courtesan status of most ancient dancers (Kulke 1978; cp. Marglin 1983; *Kuṭṭanīmata* below).

Written Plays, Drama Manuals, Performance and Dramatic Criticism

To try and imagine what an ancient dramatic performance might have looked like, we have on the one hand three types of old written documents, and, on the other hand, the performances of traditional drama and dances enacted in our times. The documents are the written texts of the actual dramas, the prescriptions of the classical dramatic treatises and a few written critiques, usually embedded in a play, left by people who had witnessed, or who appear as to have witnessed actual performances in the past centuries.

As we can not be sure that the performances of our contemporaries, no matter how "traditional" they claim to be, abide by the rules of ancient stage practice, we can try and test some of their elements, by comparing them to what we know about the old practice. One of the formal characteristics of the oldest dramas, for example, was that they were written in both verse and prose. The old dramatic textbooks and the texts on poetics, as well as some stage directions found in the plays, declare that in drama verses were to be sung, and interpreted through expressive mimicry, *abhinaya*. Verses, composed in a variety of metres, were meant to develop a particular mood in a poetic way, while the prose passages, usually found as dialogues or asides, fulfilled the purpose to further the action.

If we assume that the performance practice of our time is similar to the old one, we can imagine that the verses were sung, and perhaps repeated a few times as a refrain, so that the mimicry could explore all their interpretive possibilities, whereas the prose passages were rendered in plain verbal recitation. We can further "test" our assumption by comparing it with the extant stage directions and old critical notations on actual performances. Often we would find that some of this criticism described the way in which, for instance, an actress sung her lines with perfect pitch and intonation; in this particular case, immediately later, the critic praised her manner of developing the mood through her expressive acting. These remarks are found in the ancient court drama *Mālavikāgnimitra* of the great writer Kālidāsa, who lived in the fourth or fifth century CE. Here it would appear that there was an important distinction between theory — represented by the *śāstras*, the technical treatises, in this case the dramatic ones — and the performing practice, called *prayoga*, as expounded by one of the two court dancing masters (cf. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act I v. 12). In the words of another character, a learned ascetic woman called to judge the dance of the heroine, dramatic art, called *nāṭyaśāstram*,[2] is said to be "predominantly practical" (*prayogapradhānam*). The performance, however, had to be carried out "in accord with [the rules of] dramatic shows" (*yathādarśanam*) (cf. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act II v. 8) which prescribed also that the performer be constantly aware of the possibilities of building up and enhancing the general mood through sophisticated mimicry.

In the opinions of most critics and scholars of poetics, in fact, the most important element of a good performance was the harmonious development of a sustained mood through the correct representation of the emotions that contributed to its creation. From being spontaneous reactions to certain situations, emotions in drama became ritualized, and shown in a conventional way, through a very specific and lengthy training.

Articulate dramatic forms in ancient India adopted very particular, stylized ways of acting and of dealing with emotions on stage. The most refined dance forms observed a great number of dramatic conventions, which were first orally taught from teacher to pupil, and later preserved in manuals of dramatics. Much was left, however, to the actors' improvization, and to the imagination of the audience. The stage was usually bare, and props had to be created by illusory mimicry. Music, on the other hand, was most important; it accompanied the whole performance, creating the appropriate mood and emphasizing the salient moments. In all types of dramatic performances emotions had to be portrayed always in keeping with the prescribed, ritualized way of displaying these feelings. Some extreme manifestations of emotion, deemed unsuitable for an audience that could number children, women and old people, were banned from the stage, as already stated in the oldest preserved manual of

[2] This is also the title of the main treatise on drama, see below.

dramatics, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (the treatise, *śāstra*, on dramatic representation, *nāṭya*, from now on referred to as NŚ)[3] attributed to the mythical sage Bharata. Dramatic conventions in fact enjoined that disturbing actions such as fighting, eating, kissing (as deemed conducive to sex), sleeping, taking a bath and death were not to be shown on stage (cf. NŚ XXIV 285ff., XX 21); they could be verbally described by actors, but were not represented as such by mimicry.

A peculiar feature of *nāṭya* is to be both a *śravyakāvya*, an artistic literary composition (*kāvya*) meant to be heard, and a *dṛśyakāvya*, an artistic literary composition meant to be seen. Emotions were conveyed to the audience through the three media of music — both vocal and instrumental — verbal recitation and body language, in a complex pantomime that affected the spectators on multiple sensorial levels.

Emotions Connected to the Fictional Aspect of Drama

The fictional aspect of drama, this artificial imitation of the world, was often alluded to within the most complex plays, often by the device of the fiction within the fiction, which at times saw the weaving of the story within and without the scene of a "play within the play," *antarnāṭaka*. The old dramas present for instance descriptions of people transported into a fictional world by the particular mood arising from their emotion at witnessing a work of art.

To this particular awareness of fiction contributed also the initial benedictory verses of dramas. Usually very elaborate, these hinted at the plot of the play, together with the prologue that had the stage director speak to the main actress and to the actors, to summon them for the performance. In so doing, he reminded the public that they were to look at a work of art, a product of imagination, and were to keep a detached stand in the face of the emotions that would be displayed. In most prologues, beside the novelty of the play and the skill of the playwright, the good qualities of the troupe were praised. Sometimes, like in the three dramas by Harṣa,[4] the stage director could state: "… and we are good at acting."[5] This self-awareness of both playwright and actors is probably the reason why some ancient plays present contemporary dramatic criticism, or even introduce actual theatre critics on stage.[6] On the other hand the fact that *nāṭya*, dramatic representation, was both an imitation of real life and created an illusory world evoked perplexity in some religious circles. A very peculiar play, the humorous *Āgamaḍambara* (Much ado about religion) of Bhaṭṭa Jayanta (cf. *Āgamaḍambara*, Act I, prose before v. 2, v. 2

[3] Dating from the fourth or fifth century CE but containing much older material.

[4] Playwright and king of Kanauj, 606–647 CE.

[5] The formula is the same, *nā ye ca dak ā vayam*, in his three plays: *Nāgānanda*, Act I v. 3; *Ratnāvalī*, Act I v. 5, *Priyadarśikā*, Act I v. 3.

[6] As in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, Act VII, first prose after v. 1, where seats are provided in the king's theatre for the critics, called *ra gaprāśnikā* .

and following prose), presents a stage director who reviles the actor's lot in these words:

> Shame, for shame, being an actor is indeed an extremely wretched means of supporting one's family, in which one is continuously practicing a display of utterly false behaviour. […]
> Hara, Viṣṇu, Brahmā, a sage, a king, a brutish fool, a rake, a coward,
> a hero, a happy man, a sad one: taking all roles the actor plays,
> feeling no shame before the people —
> in reality he is [just] resorting to craft to fill his belly.
> Better, then, that I should wind up this vile craft, which bears small fruit but which causes great trouble and yet more shame, attach myself to some household of a guru in some ashram, and strive to reach the highest goal of man, [which is] the cessation of all sufferings.

His assistant then tries to comfort him by stating that, as everyone in the world is subject to Illusion, his own condition is not at odds with the ways of the world. But finally the stage director says:

> [...] My friend, I simply cannot carry on with this intolerable profession of acting full of trickery and illusion (*Āgamaḍambara*, act I, prose after v. 2).

Dezsö (2005) in his Introduction to the play aptly remarks that this exchange, though strange in itself, is a perfect introduction to the peculiar subject matter of the play, a tongue-in-cheek philosophical dispute about different ascetic paths.

Performance: Emotions experienced by the Audience

Attendance at dramatic performances in India could be prompted by a number of reasons. These, beside entertainment, could number the taking part in a religious experience in the case of performances celebrating a religious occasion, or reaffirming one's belonging to a certain social and cultural milieu, or also showing and sharing one's political agenda. A personal motif, however, could also have been the desire to experience emotions of a different order from those of everyday life. In a traditional[7] type of performance, based on legendary stories, these would be expected emotions which would punctually reoccur at specific junctures of the show. In some cases, in fact, people came deliberately to view only certain distinct moments of the performance, in order to experience the particular scenes of heightened emotion and virtuosity

[7] It is better, for the purpose of this study, to define what is "traditional" in the dramatic field according to the Indian manner of interpretation: traditional is something that descends from *paramparā*, taken ideally as "an uninterrupted line of teaching and learning from master to pupil." In addition to this, here traditional are also considered the subject matters of dramas and dances taken from myth or from the epics.

that would make them transfixed in wonder.[8] This obviously presupposes that the audience knew well in advance not only the subject matter of the performance, which was usually drawn from religious or epic stories, but also its development in each of its distinct sections, and that it was conversant with the highly stylized dramatic conventions of the genre.

Interestingly, this technical type of knowledge was shared equally by people of very different backgrounds, and was not just a prerogative of the cultured members of the upper classes. Drama is at once fiction and imitation of life, so that even the stylized gestures most peculiar to the Indian stage, executed according to elaborate dramatic conventions — called *nāṭyadharma*, the "norm, dharma, adopted in acting" — were drawn by imitation from the ways of the world, called *lokadharma*, the "norm adopted in the world [as it is]." That dance and drama were meant to be enjoyed by people in all walks of life is stated already in the NŚ, the oldest Indian manual for actors, musicians, and stage directors, written in Sanskrit. Its description of the principles and details of acting, dancing and playing music is so comprehensive that it is certainly following after a long line of earlier texts or sets of oral teachings now lost. Attributed to the mythical sage Bharata, it was intended as a practical manual for staging performances, as it contains knowledge gathered from acting experience through trial and error. It comprises much heterogeneous material, which ranges from mythological stories to technical details on music and choreography, to a very articulate poetic analysis of dramatic compositions that then became the foundation for all further discussion on aesthetics.

The NŚ maintains that as dramatic representation, *nāṭya*, is the imitation of the world, it provides a teaching for everyone. It goes on to say that this teaching is open even to those groups or sections of society who were forbidden access to the Vedas, the four collections of the revealed sacred lore, whom only initiates could approach after a long period of study. The NŚ thus compares *nāṭya* to a fifth Veda, open to all, and says that a difficult teaching is easily apprehended by simple people through the amusement of *nāṭya*, dramatic representation, in the same way as a bitter medicine is accepted willingly by patients when it is coated in honey. Its accessibility to everyone has been sometimes questioned, especially where ancient plays in Sanskrit[9]

[8] This happens also, for instance, with Japanese traditional theatre, notably in Nô and Kabuki performances.

[9] Sanskrit ceased to be a natural, spoken language probably during the first millennium CE, and even before that time it was only the language of part of India. It continued however to be the language used in Brahminical ritual, it was polished and embellished for literary purposes, and it was the legal and diplomatic language used throughout India by the learned. Audiences not conversant with Sanskrit, or illiterate, probably understood only some recurring words and the pantomime, as they were familiar with the subject matter and the general course of the story represented. We could also imagine that for several centuries the differences between Sanskrit and the spoken languages of the Indian regions where it originated may not have been so pronounced.

are concerned. This did not seem to present a real problem, however, in that the audience was to experience and enjoy the particular mood that characterized performances based on texts or oral narratives that everybody knew well, and that were enacted through expressive mimicry. Often at least part of the recitation was carried out in the local language, so that all cultural references could be immediately grasped, as the drama was the living expression of a locally based culture. Later, when exported in other contexts, where it could still prove artistically valid, its meaning would change from traditional lore to aesthetics. In the case of a locally represented traditional performance, on the contrary, there would be complete correlation between the emotions ritually represented on stage, and the reactions to these emotions ritually experienced by the audience. What people expected to obtain from the performance in fact was also ritualized, especially when the show took place recurrently, for a particular festivity or celebration.[10]

Here "ritual" is taken to mean both that the dramatic performances are part of ritual celebrations, usually of a religious nature, and that there is a correct, "ritual" manner of representing such emotions, handed down by a tradition of formal training, and by a long experience of performance.[11] This second acceptance of "ritual" would also apply to cases when the play was not based on myth, did not take place in temples or for particular religious occasions, but was staged at royal courts or in palaces, in front of an audience of connoisseurs, or, at a later time, in public theatres.

The more articulate types of performances were usually based on highly polished literary texts, often written in Sanskrit, where the ambiguity of fiction, that could provoke a possible involvement of the spectators in the emotions displayed on the stage, was sometimes seen as a problem, hindering their relish of the aesthetic experience. One of the ways to distance the spectator from the fictional world portrayed onstage, beside the prologue, was the use of highly developed dramatic conventions, which comprised also elaborate make-up and costumes. In the words of C. Dezsö, these stage conventions "hide the identity of the actor (which was, however, revealed in the preliminaries of the play), and distance the performance from all actualities. To sum up, they contribute to the aesthetic experience through the accomplishment of the state of generality, *sādhāraṇabhāva*" (Deszö 2005, p. xliii).

---

[10] At the end of some such performance, even today, it can happen that one of the main characters goes into a trance and is believed to be possessed by a deity. The character might then predict the future, or the deity might use the possessed as a medium, who would then interact between the audience and the deity.

[11] In most types of dances, a professional performer would complete his or her training in eight or ten years; in the case of Kathakali, and of some other highly elaborate dramatic forms from Kerala, complete mastery of all roles is said to require about thirty years of practice.

Emotions enacted in performance; the folk/classical divide, and the classification of the different styles of performance

The discourse on the ritual way in which Indian traditional dramas and dances are enacted is certainly polyphonic. There are several distinct types of regional performances, which vary sometimes even within the same area, depending on which cultural or ethnic group performs them, as well as on the particular occasion that has called for their performance. At the same time, there are many different manners of representing the same stories, with considerable differences. Each local version has its own ritualized manner of elocution, and a ritualized body language, as well as its own specific way of playing music and of singing,[12] and a particular set of costumes and accessories.

The rigid division encountered today in studies on Indian dances between the "classical styles" and the "folk styles" appears to be a rather artificial one, at least for what concerns the modern claim that there is a common "classical" origin that was able to influence the so-called "folk styles." It seems wiser to think that influence was always reciprocal, acting in both directions. It could both be that the ancient dramatic treatise influenced through its prescriptions a mode of representation, or that the treatise had taken on a particular form manifested locally, and had given it pride of place. The movement of ideas around representation must have been both from the country towards the town as well as from the town towards the country, as some historical examples would seem to show.[13]

The classification of the performing arts in the two opposed categories "classical"/"folk" was used by the pioneers of the renaissance of the Indian performing arts in a deliberate manner. It was meant to achieve political ends, namely the recognition of the importance of Indian cultural values, at a very specific time, that of the struggle towards independence. It was also a time

[12] Within these traditions, as well as the sanctity of correct repetition, there have constantly been new developments and innovations over time, as in all living arts. Since Independence, however, when the Indian performing arts got a new lease of life, there seems to be a problem with change, as if these living forms had to become completely fixed in order to retain their cultural credibility. It is difficult to understand, today, who has the authority to decide which change is an acceptable one, in keeping with the principles of a particular style. Cf. Moser (in this volume) for such developments and for the criticism of change in contemporary Kū iyā am.

[13] The dance form called Manipuri, for instance, long considered a "folk" style from Manipur, presents a very striking jump, absent in other dance styles, which is supposed to imitate the sudden jump of a scorpion. The NŚ itself however gives a description of this particular jump, called *v ścika*, "of the scorpion," which is portrayed also in the bas-reliefs on dancing positions sculpted on the *gopura*s of the Chidambaram temple in Tamil Nadu. Manipuri dances then would appear to be the only ones that preserved this ancient movement, attested in a source which is believed to be the fountainhead of what is deemed "classical."

when most of these arts were on the verge of extinction due to lack of local patronage, so that the work of discovery and classification carried out by these "pioneers" proved vital for their recovery. At present however it would appear that, with Indian dances having obtained full recognition in the world, such an unnuanced classification is no longer needed or desirable. It could be better then to drop the heavily charged and less precise terms "classical" and "folk," and start a way to identify different manners of performance by making a distinction between professional performers and occasional performers. The geographical provenance of performance and performers, of course, could still be taken into account.

The more useful classification in different styles of performance, on the other hand, was prompted by the observation that performances considered traditional adopt particular languages[14] and a specific body language that is extremely expressive, and assumes different forms in the different regions of India, with local variations even within the same region. In the dramas using pantomime the whole body is involved, from the posture of the entire frame and of the limbs to the positions and movements of the neck, of the chin, of the cheeks, of the eyes and eyebrows. When the plays are enacted with masks, for instance, the limbs become all-relevant, and in some styles the hand gestures have developed a highly stylized language, which is different in each style.

Body language: hand gestures

The peculiar series of hand gestures handed down by dance masters and practitioners in different parts of India, to be used in many kinds of traditional dramas and dances, has sometimes been compared to the specialized vocabulary of ritual gestures belonging to the sphere of sacrifice, obeisance, and worship. The repertoire of religious acts favours certain bodily postures, and in particular some specific movements of the hands. It is interesting to note that the terms qualifying these stylized, symbolic hand gestures both in the dramaturgical textbooks and in actual dramatic training are either *hasta* (hand), or *mudrā* (seal). The latter term, outside stage practice, qualifies the specific hand gestures used during particular prayers and ritual actions such as *nyāsa* or *kriyā*. The gestures themselves are at times very similar in both contexts, and are actually identical when the dancers wish to represent divine beings or their attributes. A reason for using the term *mudrā*, "seal," also in dramatic language may refer to the ancient religious plays, or to the dances of worship performed in temples or for religious ceremonies. The dancers then may have

[14] All over India the characters of Sanskrit drama, for instance, used several different forms of Prakrit, supposed to be the local vernacular spoken by different subcastes, as well as Sanskrit; Kathakali uses both Sanskrit and Malayalam, as well as the old, cultivated form of the regional language, Manipravala.

felt the need to symbolically placing (*nyāsa*) a seal on their bodies against external influences, interpreted as possibly noxious or disruptive, during a dance that might have had for its theme a religious story.

Emotions connected with the preliminaries to the performance

The puzzling double terminology for "hand gesture" found both in the NŚ and in actual performances may also arise from the fact that the more articulate dramatic forms usually began with a sort of preliminary ritual blessing, which transformed part of a field into a delimited space, a stage fit for representation. This operation, even in its abridged form, recalls the drawing of the diagram, *yantra*, that makes for the delimitation of the space fit for sacrifice. At the same time it also recalls the myth, first handed down in the NŚ, of the divine origins of drama. According to this source the first dramatic performance took place in mythical time, and staged the conflicting emotions of gods and titans (or demons) during the "churning of the Ocean."[15] The actors were some of the gods, the actresses were the heavenly nymphs.[16] The titans, who sat in the audience next to the gods, dismayed at the portrayal of their defeat threw a magic spell on the performers, whereby the celestial actors and actresses were suddenly stopped in their tracks, and remained fixed in their poses like living statues. Indra, the chieftain of the gods, came to their rescue and thrust on the scene his standard, the *jarjara*, breaking the spell. In memory of that occurrence, and to prevent attacks to the performance from malignant forces, the practice of protecting the stage through the erection of an imitation *jarjara* continued, so that even today in the preliminary preparations to some contemporary performances a small *jarjara* is erected on stage, and the stage director worships it in an elaborate ritual.

In other cases, depending on the region and the style, the director and his assistants perform a short preliminary ceremony with offerings of prayers, water, and flowers, that consecrates the dramatic space before the beginning of the actual performance.

The NŚ is rich in religious myths meant to explain the origins of the different parts of dramatic action. Thus pious people attending a performance could also experience a whole set of emotions related to their knowledge of those foundation myths. These emotions would be connected to the religious feeling of devotion induced by the dramatic repetition and enactment of the mythical

[15] The first full account of the churning is from the largest great epic, the *Mahābhārata* "The great [battle] of the Bhāratas": once gods and titans worked together to churn the Ocean in order to obtain the nectar of immortality, but then fought about its possession, until in the end the gods obtained it.

[16] The *apsarases*, "[made] from the essence of [the celestial] water," heavenly nymphs of celestial beauty, were extremely seductive, and the gods often used them as charming weapons to spoil the concentration of human ascetics.

event; its performance would act then as a reinforcement of their piety as well as of their cultural identity.

Aesthetic and devotional emotions

In the productions of dramatic art one can also distinguish between two different kinds of ritualized emotions: the purely aesthetic, and the devotional, *bhakti*[17]-induced one. The two would often prove to be closely related, as the subject matter of many performances comes from mythological narratives or from the epics, which are imbued with religious themes and occurrences. An interesting example is that of masked dramas. The masks used in some of these mythological representations during non-performance periods are kept in their own specific room in a temple, or in a particular "mask house" in the village. Those of gods and semi-divine heroes, in particular, are believed to confer special powers to the wearers at performance times. In some villages at the end of the play the performers[18] leave the stage still wearing the masks of the gods and proceed through the streets, while from every household stream out villagers eager to pay homage to these "incarnated gods," whom they worship with deep emotion.

The *bhakti* plays

The pious type of emotional response is particularly noticeable all over India when troupes of temporary actors perform yearly religious plays.[19] These are dedicated to different religious figures, like the Yakṣagāna of Andhra, the various masked dances referred to above, the Raslīlā of Braj or the Rāmlīlā of Varanasi.

In the two latter plays the main performers are young male Brahmin children, called *swarup*, "own form" (of the divinities they impersonate) or *mūrtis*, "(holy) images." In the Raslīlā of Braj they embody the hallowed figures of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.[20]

---

[17] *Bhakti* is the particular form of piety, attested in India from the early middle ages, that expresses itself in the feeling of heightened, devotional loving emotion towards a deity. The devotees believe that they share into the love of the deity, and their emotional involvement can take very erotic, sexual connotations. The first author of kā*vya* literature and poetics who included *bhakti* among the *rasa*s — aesthetic experiences resulting from the dramatic portrayal of emotions — and thought it supreme among them, is Rūpa Gosvāmin (16th century CE).

[18] These performers are usually non-professional actors, employed in different capacities at non-performance times, but who take on, however, the same role year after year.

[19] Starting with the middle ages, there was a similar practice of religious plays in Europe.

[20] K a, believed to be an incarnation of god Viṣṇu, is a prominent divine figure of *vai ava bhakti* (tradition of emotional loving devotion towards a deity), and the milkmaid Rādhā, his principal human beloved, is often also perceived as his divine companion.

In the Rāmlīlā the heroes are the protagonists of a version of the *Rāmāyaṇa.*[21] The young actors change every year, and thus are not trained professionals, but have only about three months to learn and rehearse their roles. In both types of drama the main actors are deemed to be so imbued with holiness at the time of performance that they are forbidden to touch the ground,[22] so that to proceed from one dramatic location to the next they are carried in the arms of appointed persons.

These performances last for several days, and take place in the open in different places around the town, on temporary raised stages, where one or two different episodes are enacted every day. Open to all, they are so popular that people try to find free time from their occupations as often as possible in order to watch the action and pay respect to the *mūrti*s. Audiences thus are especially numerous at evening time, after working hours, and even in this type of show some episodes are considered more "important" than others, and attract the largest crowds. Raslīlā and Rāmlīlā are rather popular in outlook and appeal, as they present a rather naturalistic way of acting and are intended at once as offerings to the deity, and entertainment and teaching to the people.

The ritual way of representing emotions on stage

The most articulate Indian dances and dramas are performed by professional actors/dancers. While maintaining the same aim of entertaining and providing a teaching to the people, these performances employ a complex, highly conventional system of representing emotions, *bhāva*s. This happens in connection with an expected reaction of the audience to the represented emotion, in a further play of mirror images. In its section on *abhinaya*, expressive representation, the NŚ, later followed by other manuals of drama, gives specific indications of this selective stylization of emotions, *bhāva*s, portrayed on stage.

Emotions in Nāṭyaśāstra *and in* Sāṃkhya *philosophy*

The NŚ is supposed to be contemporary with a philosophical work, the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, dating from the fourth or fifth century CE, but conceived as the exegesis of an older treatise,[23] which explains the term *bhāva* as "disposition." Sāṃkhya philosophy identifies eight *bhāva*s, "fundamental dispositions" of the human mind, divided into two sets of

---

[21] The Rāmāya a, "The voyage of Rāma", is the second great epic of India. Rāma is the righteous king, believed to be another incarnation of god Viṣṇu.

[22] Indian myths refer to gods whose feet do not touch the ground: their forms can be exactly the same as those of humans, with the exception that their feet do not touch the ground, their eyelids never flutter, and their flower garlands never fade.

[23] The *a itantra*, probably of the fourth century.

opposites, namely moral virtue, knowledge, detachment, suzerainty, and their opposite, i.e., immorality, absence of knowledge, attachment, dependence. The term *bhāva* is acknowledged to come from the root *bhū*, "to be" or "to become." The NŚ gives it a slightly different meaning, intending it as "[stable] emotion" rather than "disposition." Moreover the NŚ's set of eight[24] *bhāva*s is different from the one found in Sāṃkhya philosophical treatises. The NŚ's description comes from the empirical notations of actors and stage directors, who through trial and error established a practice of dealing with emotions on stage in a particular way. In later dramaturgical texts these empirical findings were articulated in a coherent theory, which became ritualized as the correct way of artistically rendering emotional states. This theoretical stand was then appropriated by the scholars on poetics, *alaṃkāraśāstra*, who applied it also to non-dramatic literature. In subsequent times, this fully fledged aesthetic theory was applied to other artistic fields as well.

Aesthetic rapture, rasa, *as produced in a drama through the causes of emotion, the effects of emotion, and the display of the fleeting emotions*

The NŚ states that a dramatic author, and therefore the stage director, must set three groups of elements at play to further dramatic action and obtain a feeling of aesthetic rapture, *rasa*, in the audience. The three groups are: the causes of emotions, *vibhāva*; the effects of emotions, *anubhāva*; and the temporary, transient emotions, *vyabhicāribhāva* (or *vyābhicārī*).

It is by experiencing the artistic combination of these in a performance that aesthetic rapture, *rasa*, arises, so that the audience can taste joy, *harṣa*. The NŚ employs a culinary simile that plays also on the two principal meanings of the term *rasa*, "juice," and "taste." It says that in order to obtain *rasa*, aesthetic rapture, the author has to combine *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāva* in a knowing manner, as if he were a good cook, who from an ingenious mixture of different ingredients and spices produces a dish of a distinct taste, *rasa*, whose flavour is quite different from that of its separate ingredients.

The NŚ's particular analysis further identifies which basic emotion or cluster of emotions portrayed on stage may give rise to a particular aesthetic experience, *rasa*, in the consciousness of the audience.

The causes of emotion, *vibhāva*, are to be found in the actual circumstances of the action, drawn from real life; their effects, *anubhāva*, which are to be shown by mimicry, in the spontaneous physical reactions of the characters to a circumstance or to a sudden emotion.

[24] In some later textual tradition a ninth *bhāva* appears, and the later authors of *ala kāraśāstra* devised then a number of other *bhāva*s and corresponding *rasa*s, that did not however become as popular as the ones prescribed in the NŚ.

The NŚ presents in a list its ownt sequence of eight *bhāva*s, called *sthayībhāva*, the "basic," or rather "stable," emotions, each giving rise to its own particular aesthetic rapture, *rasa*:

Love, *rati*; its *rasa* is *śṛṅgāra*, the amorous, sensitive.
Humour, *hāsa*; its *rasa* is *hāsya*, the comic.
Grief, *śoka*; its *rasa* is *karuṇa*, the compassionate.
Anger, *krodha*; its *rasa* is *raudra*, the furious.
Surge of energy, *utsāha*; its *rasa* is *vīra*, the heroic.
Fear, *bhaya*; its *rasa* is *bhayānaka*, the apprehensive.
Disgust, *jugupsā*; its *rasa* is *bībhatsa*, the horrific, repulsive.
Astonishment, *vismaya*; its *rasa* is *adbhuta*, the marvellous.

A ninth *bhāva*, added at a later stage, is *śānti*, tranquillity; its *rasa* is *śānta*, the quietened, appeased.[25]

Some emotions give origin to correlative *rasa*s situated on a similar level, others move the reaction to a different one, like when a "surge of energy" gives rise to the heroic, or when grief excites the compassionate. From a comparative point of view it is interesting to point out that this text contains the *bhāva* "grief," *śoka*, which gives rise in the spectator to the particular aesthetic experience (or "taste," *rasa*) called "compassionate," *karuṇa*, but does not present a stable emotion called "joy." It is said to arise for a brief moment when *rasa* occurs. It is peculiar to the NŚ aesthetic sensibility that this particular emotion is not considered basic or stable, but it is found in the third, more numerous group, that of the fleeting, temporary emotions. The group of the impermanent emotional states of being which accompany, for a short time, a stable emotion is also meant to help detail the dramatic portrayal of characters. The NŚ numbers thirty-three *vyabhicāribhāva*, the subsidiary or transient, temporary emotions, that follow each other in rapid succession and together with its other concomitants further a *rasa*.

The transient emotions shown through abhinaya, *expressive representation*

An actual dramatic performance does not show any stable emotion, *bhāva*, but "only their visible and audible effects, in relation to a representation of their causes" (Warder 1972, p. 23). Indian literary aesthetics is an aesthetics of subtraction, that favours suggestion rather than statement, preferring poetical connotation to denotation. On stage, it is only the performer, helped by music, who with a few impressionistic touches creates both the scenery and the dramatic mood. Props are almost absent,[26] so that everything has to

[25] It is the *bhāva* appropriate to the ascetics and the contemplative life, and is found as the main emotion in several Buddhist plays.

[26] In Kathakali there is sometimes a seat, and in some dramas the actors carry weapons or wear crowns.

be created through both recitation and body language by the performer, and followed through an imaginative effort by the spectator.

Actors usually resort to *abhinaya*, "expressive representation," or pantomime, to render the different nuances of emotion required, where they employ both verbal recitation, song and body language. In the peculiar Indian aesthetics the latter, in fact, is considered more immediately evocative than voiced feelings. The NŚ maintains that actors should be perfectly trained in *sāttvikābhinaya* "the interiorized manner of acting,"[27] i.e., the expressive manner of suggesting the spontaneous physical reactions that conventionally accompany the different emotions at play. But this suggestive manner of performance became ritualized by constant repetition, so that the NŚ lists eight manifestations of these reactions: paralysis (and choking), perspiring, thrilling of the body hair, change of voice, trembling, change of colour, tears, and fainting. In later literary criticism these were also considered as the different amorous stages that could be experienced by lovers in a work of fiction.

On stage, these main spontaneous physical reactions would have to be shown directly through the use of the appropriate body language. At the same time, the spectators would see, and listen to, the thirty-three transient emotions, the *vyabhicāribhāva*, also shown by recitation and mimicry, which the NŚ enumerates as follows:

> Indifference, *nirveda*; depression, *glāni*; alarm (or doubt), *śaṅkā*; envy (or jealousy), *asūyā*; intoxication (proceeding from wine, love or pride), *mada*; exhaustion, *śrāma*; lassitude, *ālasya*; misery, *dainya*; anxiety, *cintā*; bewilderment, *moha*; remembrance (mixed with longing), *smṛti*; contentment, *dhṛti*; shame, *vrīḍā*; foolhardiness (or rashness), *capalatā*; joy, *harṣa*; agitation, *āvega*; stupidity, *jaḍatā*; pride, *garva*; despair, *viṣāda*; eagerness, *autsukya*; drowsiness, *nidrā*; forgetfulness (or, having an epileptic fit, being possessed), *apasmāra*; sleeping (which includes dreaming), *supta*; awaking, *vibodha*; indignation, *amarṣa*; dissimulation, *avahittha*; ferocity, *ugratā*; thoughtfulness, *mati*; sickness, *vyādhi*; madness, *unmāda*; dying, *maraṇa*; terror, *trāsa*; doubt, *vitarka*.[28]

The conventional way of dramatically representing emotions in order to create *rasa*, especially through *sāttvikābhinaya*, the interiorized, suggestive manner of acting, is the object of a long, ritualized training that, depending on the style of performance, can take from ten to thirty years to master. The peculiar manner of devising a role so that it could be interpreted through *sāttvikābhinaya*, by giving full scope to the three elements of dramatic action — the causes of emotions, their effects, and transient emotions — identified

[27] Literally *sāttvika* means "what is, what really is, the truth," so *sāttvikābhinaya* would mean something like "acting in a true manner."

[28] NŚ VI, 18-21. These terms are translated mostly according to Warder (1972, p. 24).

in the NŚ, was adopted by later authors as the testing stone of any literary and dramatic achievement.

Ancient criticism of the ritual way of representing emotions in performances: the play within the play, antarnāṭaka

All dramas and dance performances were once appreciated or criticized by measuring their adherence to descriptions of *bhāva*s and *rasa*s similar to those presented in the NŚ. Sometimes this happened when there was a "play within a play," that could also consist of a dance performance. This type of criticism is found already in dramas of authors who could have been almost contemporary with the NŚ, such as in a play of Kālidāsa (believed to have lived around the fifth or sixth century CE), the *Mālavikāgnimitra*, ("Mālavikā and Agnimitra") or in works of authors of a few centuries later. One finds a similar approach for instance in the *bhāṇa*[29] *Ubhayābhisārikā* ("Both [lovers] go looking for each other") of Vararuci, which might belong to the sixth century, as well as in a courtly drama of Harṣa, the *Priyadarśikā* of the seventh century, in a satire of the eighth century, the *Kuṭṭanīmata* ("The bawd's counsel") of Dāmodaragupta, or again in the *Uttararāmacarita* ("The latter story of Rāma") of Bhavabhūti, also belonging to the eighth century. Kālidāsa's, and to a higher extent Bhavabhūti's work, are surprising tours de force, that weave themselves within and without the "play within a play," creating thus two or three simultaneous levels of fictional emotions. In particular, throughout the *Uttararāmacarita*, the characters make frequent mention of the *bhāva* (emotion) at play and of the *rasa*s employed, which is an absolutely extraordinary occurrence in a drama, and one that offers much information on the dramatic criticism of the times. This drama introduces also, as secondary figures, some drama critics, called *raṅgaprāśnika*, who are invited to attend the performance of a "play within the play."

Inside criticism of the emotions displayed in the dance performance within the play Mālavikāgnimitra *of Kālidāsa*

The *nāṭaka*[30] of Kālidāsa introduces a discussion about *bhāva*s and *rasa*s in relation to a solo dance performance which is pivotal to the plot.[31] The dancer in fact is a young princess in incognito, who has just started learning

[29] The *bhā a* is a particular type of drama, a comic monologue in one act. Its peculiarity is that the protagonist, called *vi a*, "the parasite," or "man about town" pretends to hold conversations with a number of characters who do not appear on stage. He himself reproduces their speeches, and mimics their demeanours through *abhinaya*, expressive representation.

[30] The best known form of play, in five or ten acts, usually dealing with mythological characters or the kings of antiquity.

[31] Cf. the interesting study of Radicchi (1966).

a particular dance, the *chalita,*[32] from one of the two *nāṭācārya*s, dancing masters, of the court where she had been sent under cover to serve the queen, in order to satisfy a prediction. Her dance takes place in the *saṅgītaśālā*, the music room of the palace, and is staged to quench the quarrel between the two court dance teachers, called in this passage *abhinayācārya*, masters of the expressive, interiorized manner of acting, *abhinaya*, where emotions are interpreted and given full development through the body language of pantomime. In the first act (cf. *Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act I, v. 4) one dancing master extolls *nāṭya*, dramatic performance, as "the one sacrificial rite (*kratu*, which means also 'act') which is pleasing to the gods,[33] exhibits the various *rasa*s, and is the chief amusement of the people."[34] He further declares that his pupil has such extraordinary qualities that, while demonstrating what she has learnt, she improves on his teaching, as if mirroring his gestures with added scope, after he has just instructed her in the five-fold[35] *abhinaya*. Then the two dance masters squabble about their respective merits, and approach king Agnimitra for a settlement of their dispute, "looking like the embodiments of two *bhāva*s, (emotions)" (*Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act I, v. 10). One of them says that he has learnt *abhinayavidyā*, the science of *abhinaya*, and has given *prayoga*, "performances, representations." The other dance master makes a further distinction, in the art of dance, between *śāstra*, "theory" and *prayoga*, "[dancing] practice" (*Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act I, prose after v. 12). And a few lines further, a learned ascetic woman called to judge the dance says that dramatic art, *nāṭyaśāstram*, is "predominantly practical," *prayogapradhānam*. She wishes to see enacted the *chalita* dance, which she deems to be *duṣ prayoja*, "difficult to perform."

The king, who is already married to more than one queen, has fallen in love, through the mere sight of her portrait, with the incognito princess who has to show her proficiency in dancing. When he sees her for the first time, in the flimsy dancing costume that exhibits her graces, in a verse of praise he remarks on her extraordinary beauty, which is one of the qualities a good dancer must possess. The last emistych, in the translation of Devadhar (*Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act II, v. 3, p. 39), reads:

> her whole body thus seemed framed
> to suit the fancy of her teacher of dancing.

[32] For this dance form see Warder (1972, pp. 150f., 155, 175) (who reads it *chalika* and intends it as a solo dance) and Radicchi (1966), section "La danza di *Mālavikāgnimitra* II.4."

[33] The gods intended here are Rudra (an epithet of Śiva) and his consort Umā.

[34] This almost echoes the statement of NŚ IV, vv. 261ff. on dance, *n tta*, "Dance does not have a particular aim. It originated in order to create beauty. And because it is loved by everyone, it is considered auspicious."

[35] According to the NŚ, there are four types of *abhinaya*.

To add to the piquancy of the situation, the scene chosen for the performance is a verse containing a declaration of love, which the performer, Mālavikā, has to both sing and mime. The stage direction after the verse (*Mālavikāgnimira*, Act II, v. 4) says *yathā rasam abhinayati*, "then she brings out the *rasa* through *abhinaya*, (the expressive body language)." The king interprets her rendering as a concealed way to show him her real feelings, a sudden loving emotion prompted by his sight, the classical *coup de foudre*. The female ascetic, then, asked to state her judgement of the dance, extols the expressive acting of Mālavikā both in a short passage before v. 8, and in the verse itself, which is a good example of contemporary criticism:

> Everything was without reproach, and "in accord with [the rules of] dramatic shows" (*yathādarśanam*). And why?
> The meaning was excellently suggested by her limbs, which had words concealed in them,[36]
> the striking of the feet followed the rhythm,
> there was complete absorption in the *rasa*s;
> her *abhinaya* was delicate, proceeding from her branch-like[37] [hand];
> and while in the successive representations of its [different] shades
> one emotion, *bhāva*, dispelled another from the field,
> yet there was indeed a "[steady] expression of passionate love" (*rāgabandha*) (*Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act II, v. 8).

This verse, spoken to connoisseurs, would mean that the performer was showing through her body language all the different transient emotions (*vyabhicāribhāva*) that appear fleetingly in the company of the stable emotion, *bhāva*, which in this case was her passionate feeling of love at first sight. This apt representation, however, was fictional only to a point: it did make use of the appropriate conventional gestures signifying love on stage, but it also signified it for real, under the cover of acting. Later in the play, Mālavikā is shown a portrait of the king in his harem, and becomes jealous of his favourite queen. The king who, unseen, is looking at her, exclaims again about her manner of manifesting the emotion of jealousy:

> As she turned her face away [from the painting] so that the decoration drawn on her forehead was blurred by the knitting of her brow, and her lower lip quivered, she seemed to perform the graceful *abhinaya* taught her [by her teacher] as being appropriate in the angry fits due to the transgressions of a lover (*Mālavikāgnimitra*, Act IV, v. 9).

Mālavikāgnimitra is a singular play, not only because it contains a performance within its performance, similar to Hamlet's, for instance, but because it keeps

[36] Meaning "which were as eloquent as words."

[37] *Śākhā*, branch, could also been interpreted here as "a measure of the hands in dance."

referring to the heroine in terms of her dramatic excellence, as if fiction kept mixing with the play's "reality," which is of course itself a fiction. And the knowledgeable spectator expects to be taken in, and at the same time, in reality but also by convention, in the ritual way that is expected from drama connoisseurs, would relish the delicate flavour, *rasa*, of this expected delusion. Kālidāsa is a master of both the delicate literary style, the *sukumāra*, which hints at things and builds up feelings with subtle touches, as well as of the art of illusion. His best-known play *Śakuntalā*[38] is a case in point, for he shows the male protagonist, a courageous king, as so besotted by the emotion of love that he starts talking to a bee, and not even to an actual bee, but to a bee depicted in a painting. That scene is a sort of miniature "play within the play," for all action is arrested in its contemplation, and the spectator, just like the king, is led to believe for a moment that he is transported within the painting.

Inside criticism of bhāva *and* rasa *in Bhavabhūti's* Uttararāmacarita

The other great playwright of classical India, Bhavabhūti, in *Uttararāmacarita* appears determined to outdo both plays of Kālidāsa.[39] He disseminates a reflection on acting and fiction in every part of his play, putting in the mouth of different characters several considerations about the suitability of the *rasa* employed at the time of action, and thus absolutely defying dramatic conventions. Usually, in fact, *rasa* is construed from a combination of different elements so as to be perceived by degrees, demanding a conscious effort of interpretation from the spectator, and it is suggested through verses, music, and body language. It is never actually stated in words as such: only some stage directions give indications about the emotion underlying the action, the *bhāva*, not the *rasa*.

In *Uttararāmacarita* the three main protagonists, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, and Rāma,[40] are in turn captured by the paintings, and react differently to them, at different times in their promenade through the picture gallery. Rāma says a most revealing thing when he tells Sītā not to worry about their old separation (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, prose after v. 27),[41] because "it is only a painting," thereby showing already a second level of fiction. A similar circumstance

[38] *Abhijñ*ānaśakuntala, "Śakuntalā recognized [through the ring]."

[39] The *Uttararāmacarita* presents several elements that echo both *Śakuntalā* and *Mālavikāgnimitra*: as in the former, in *Uttararāmacarita* the protagonists are shown looking at paintings and projecting their feelings into their past adventures shown in the murals; as in the latter, the protagonists of *Uttararāmacarita* also witness a "play within the play," which again has them taking part, as it were, in the action portrayed onstage; there is moreover a similarity of plot with Śakuntalā, as Sītā, like Śakuntalā, is groundlessly rejected by her spouse, and restored to his embarrassed embrace only after several years of separation.

[40] Sītā is Rāma's wife, Lak ma a is Rāma's brother.

[41] The painting showed Śūrpa akhā, the demoness sister of Rāva a, Sītā's abductor, and it reminded her of her forced stay in La kā.

occurs later, during the "play within the play," when Lakṣmaṇa has to remind his startled brother that what he sees "is only a play."

The *bhāva*s and *rasa*s at play in the composition are varied, but with the preponderance of the *rasa karuṇa*, the "compassionate," which is the more often aknowledged one, together with *adbhuta*, the "marvellous." A presupposition for *karuṇarasa* is however the *rasa śṛṅgāra*, the love-related one, which surprisingly is never mentioned as such, except for some stage directions, in which however the more neutral term *sneha*, affection, is employed instead of the sexually charged *kāma* or *rati*, both suggestive of love as physical desire. Many different *bhāva*s and *rasa*s are mentioned not only in the stage directions, but both in verses and in prose passages. Act V is based mostly on *vīra*, the heroic *rasa*, but even there Lava,[42] the young hero, comments on the play he finds himself in, by complaining that "the development of *rasa* is muddled (*miśrīkṛta*)" (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, v. 26). Later, in Act VI (*Uttararāmacarita*, act VI, prose after v. 32), Rāma sadly observes that what happens in the round of existences is *virasa*, devoid of *rasa*. Another, unheard of type of *rasa* makes a fleeting appearance in the words of a female ascetic who speaks of the good nature of the holy ones (*sādhu*) as of a *rasa* that is *aviparyāsita*, "that never changes" (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act II, v. 2), probably meaning "that never changes for the worse." Later Lava talks about the *rasa* of the new composition of Vālmīki, the dramatized *Rāmāyaṇa*, saying that it is *sandarbhāntareṇa rasavān*, "expressing *rasa* because of its [new] arrangement" (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act IV, prose after v. 22).

In this play, moreover, emotion, *bhāva*, is presented at times in its violent manifestations, as there are several instances of extreme emotional reactions, such as crying out, tears, and fainting. The latter in particular occurs quite frequently: there are fourteen cases of characters fainting out of sorrow, with some of them losing consciousness more than once: Rāma and Sītā faint four times each, while Sītā's friend Vasantī faints twice.

The poetics of vipralambhaśṛṅgāra, *love in separation, in* Uttararāmacarita

The *rasa śṛṅgāra* is ritually represented in *kāvya* literature in the two set moods of love lived in the enjoyment of the lovers' union, *saṃbhogaśṛṅgāra*, or in that of the love pangs sorely felt during their separation, *vipralambhaśṛṅgāra*. In *Uttararāmacarita* Rāma and Sītā, spouses and lovers, are constantly represented in the mood of separation, called *vipralambha* or *virāha*, which gives rise to *rasa karuṇa*, "the compassionate." The theme of separation in its different varieties is echoed several times in the play, starting with the sadness of Sītā at the departure of her father (cf. *Uttararāmacarita*, Act I,

[42] Son of Rāma and Sītā.

prose after v. 8). Rāma immediately understands her emotion, and says that such sad things provoke repulsion, *bībhatsa*, another *rasa*. He will say it again, in increased form (*atibībhatsa*, extremely repulsive), when referring to his having had to send away Sītā in order to propitiate his subjects (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, prose after v. 45). In the picture gallery, the first person to feel emotionally transported by the scenes depicted in the paintings is Sītā, who says that she feels almost as if she were there (at the time of her wedding) (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, prose after v. 17), and Rāma agrees, and later he recalls their passionate nights (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, v. 27), in one of the few instances of *saṃbhogaśṛṅgāra* of the play. Again Sītā is reminded of their previous separation by the painting of Śūrpaṇakhā and Rāma reassures her saying: "it is only a painting"; immediately afterwards, however, Lakṣmaṇa notices that Rāma is crying at the recollection, and Sītā again cries out in pain, looking at a depiction of herself separated from her husband. Then Sītā points to another image depicting both brothers in sorrow, and at that Rāma asks them both to stop looking at the murals, because it is as if he were experiencing anew *viprayoga*, separation from Sītā (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, v. 34). In a later verse, Rāma again says that the only thing he does not love about his wife is *viraha*, separation from her (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, v. 39). Later Sītā has a troubled sleep, and Rāma understands that after seeing the murals she is still worried about *viraha*, separation. Again, Sītā has a nightmare about being separated from Rāma, as it is in fact actually happening (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, prose after v. 52). Later the river Tamasā, in the prelude to Act III (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act III, v. 4), will say of Sītā that she is *karuṇasya mūrtir*, "the icon of compassion," as she is in *viraha*, separation. The other river, Muralā, in the following verse will speak of Sītā's "long grief," *dīrghaśoka*. So that both *rasa* — *karuṇa* — and *bhāva* — *śoka* — are mentioned, though in inversed order to how they should be dramatically "shown," rather than spoken of, demonstrating once again the originality of Bhavabhūti's approach.

The poetics of saṃbhogaśṛṅgāra, *love enjoyed in the union of the lovers, in* Uttararāmacarita

The *Uttararāmacarita* presents comparatively few instances of *saṃbhogaśṛṅgāra*, set either in the past, before the separation of Rāma and Sītā, or in the actual time of the action, referred both to the main couple or to other lovers. These verses create a stark contrast with the general mood of wistful melancholy of the play, so that the protagonists' longing is made unbearable. Amorous emotions here are often depicted as arising from bodily contact; several verses dwell on the amorous reactions of Sītā, and of her hand, when it touches the unconscious body of Rāma. A similar erotic delight is felt

by Rāma, revived at the touch of Sītā (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, vv. 35–36).[43] Rāma gives voice to these intense feelings in I.36, one of the loveliest:

> Every single time you touch me
> A kind of transformation –
> It can't be described as joy or sorrow,
> ecstasy or sleep,
> a state of intoxication
> or all-suffusing poison –
> confuses my senses and at once
> excites and dulls my awareness (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, v. 36).[44]

A verse spoken by Rāma on constant love, that also contains the word *rasa*, is one of the most quoted in ancient Indian anthologies:

> Identity in joy and sorrow,
> consonance in every condition,
> where the heart can find respite,
> whose rasa old age cannot spoil
> what alone abides as time
> removes all veils and pure love ripens —
> that singular blessing is only bestowed
> on a good man, and only then with luck (*Uttararāmacarita*, Act I, v. 40).[45]

The playwright plays with expected emotions: Fiction recreated in Uttararāmacarita

As already noticed by Pollock (2007, pp. 38ff.) in his Introduction to the play, the *Uttararāmacarita's* beginning already shows that it is a play about the creation of reality by writing. Vālmīki, the ancient seer believed to be the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, here is also recognized as the author of its dramatic adaptation in the "play within the play" of the last act, and *Lakṣmaṇa* calls to him to set the play right[46] when on stage it appears that Sītā has given up her life in the forest. As in the novel *Atonement* of I. McEwan, for instance, here a writer apparently can change the moral as well as the end of a tragedy, and turn it into a more acceptable story. Here the protagonists would certainly experience suffering, even for a very long time, but happiness would be restored at the end. And there is an ironic coda to this: as G. Karnad aptly remarks in his foreword to Pollock's study, Valmiki's last appearance as the playwright and

[43] A *vidyādharī* says a similar thing about the emotion she feels at the contact with her husband's body in Act VI, prose before v. 5.

[44] Translation by Pollock (2007).

[45] Translation by Pollock (2007).

[46] Pollock translates *te kāvyārtha* as "the moral of your poem," taking *artha* as "moral," instead of the more usual "meaning."

deus ex machina has him put a question that is “what every playwright would want to ask of his audience” (KARNAD 2007, p. 25): “Dear Rāma, is there some further good turn I can do for you?”[47] In *Uttararāmacarita* the levels of fiction are indeed multiple and overlayered. Here emotions deviate from what is ritually known from myth: Sītā does not disappear, as the spectators would expect, according to their knowledge of the traditional Rāmāyaṇa’s end, but is reunited with Rāma, who is here recognized as the supremely just king.

Examples of knowledge of dramatic theory in the ancient bhāṇas Pādatāḍitaka *and* Ubhayābhisārikā

The *bhāṇa* (comic monologue in one act) *Pādatāḍitaka* of Śyāmilaka, probably belonging to the 6th century, presents the image of a handsome man as he strides along with delicate steps, mischievously knitting his brows, so that he appears to give a one-man show:

> Here comes Bhaṭṭi, gracing the inner apartments with his footfalls that imitate the cavorting of a bull that has descended the sandy riverbank […]
> Striding with swinging arms,
> his shoulders and chest splendid and robust,
> his eyebrows adept at flirting,
> repeatedly shooting side-glances,
> he performs a one-man play without lutes and drums,
> as he enters a royal palace with stately bearing (*Pādatāḍitaka*, pp. 52–53).

In the *bhāṇa Ubhayābhisārikā*, belonging to the same ancient collection of four *bhāṇa*s, the *viṭa*,[48] in describing the dance of the young courtesan Priyaṅgusenā, shows a thorough knowledge of the art of dancing. He employs technical terms very similar to those of the NŚ, and at the same time seems to consider dance as yet another form of sensual enticement.

[47] This type of statement, though not put into the mouth of the author, is present at the end of almost all ancient plays: “what other dear [desired] thing can I (or, someone else) do for you (*vatsa*, or the name of the person addressed)?” It is usually found, with minor variations, as *ki te bhūya priyam upaharāmi*, (or sometimes *upakaromi* or *karomi*). Examples are found, to quote but a few instances, in *Abhijñānaśakuntala*, spoken by sage Mārīca to the king; in *Vikramorvaśīya*, spoken by Nārada to the king; in *Nāgānanda*, spoken by Gaurī to Jīmūtavāhana; in *Anargharāghava*, spoken by Vasi ha to Rāma; in *Ratnāvalī*, spoken by Yaugandharāya a to the king; in *Mālavikāgnimitra*, spoken in Prakrit to the king by queen Vāsavadattā (*ā avedu ajjautto ki bhūo vi pia a uci hāmi*), and again in *Priyadarśikā*, spoken in Prakrit to the king by queen Dhāri ī (*ajjautta ado vi param ki de pia karīadu*). The originality of *Uttararāmacarita* is that the playwright himself, who is a seer endowed with miraculous powers, asks Rāma, a special spectator, this question.

[48] Cf. note 29.

The *viṭa* converses with Priyaṅgusenā, who tells him she has made a bet with another girl, Devadattā, that the lay called Purandaravijayam ("The Victory of Purandara," epithet of god Indra) would be staged (*abhinetavyam*) with a performance expressing the aesthetic sentiment (*yathārasābhinayam*). The *viṭa* then exclaims:

> [...] How ill advised Devadattā is, entering into acompetition with you, who, first of all, abound in such qualities as a good figure (*rūpa*), grace (*śrī*), fresh youth, radiance, and splendour, you who are accomplished in the four kinds of acting (*caturvidhābhinaya*),[49] the thirty-two kinds of hand gestures (*hastapracāra*),[50] eighteen ways of looking (*nirīkṣaṇa*), six [standing] postures (*sthāna*),[51] two kinds of gait (*gati*),[52] eight aesthetic sentiments (*rasa*), three tempos (*laya*)[53] of vocal and instrumental music (*gītavādi-*) — these and the other constituents of dancing (*nṛttāṅga*) become beautiful with you as their locus [...] (*Ubhayābhisārikā*, pp. 203–205).[54]

The verse immediately following this passage reads:

> You incessantly make the eyes and hearts of men
> dance (*pratinartayase*) before your playful gestures (*ceṣṭita*).
> Why dance (*nartana*) at all, sensual girl?
> Your graceful coquetry alone is sufficient.

Dramatic criticism in Kuṭṭanīmata

Interesting ideas on *bhāva* and *rasa* are also expressed in a rather extended portion of Dāmodaragupta's *prahāsana* (farce) of the 8th century *Kuṭṭanīmata* (The Bawd's Counsel).[55] The social environment evoked in this comic work is very different from the royal setting of both *Mālavikāgnimitra* and *Uttararāmacarita*, and the tone changes accordingly. The performance of a "play within the play," in fact of Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī*,[56] does not take place in a royal palace nor on the banks of the Gaṅgā, the holy river, and is not staged by princesses, divine beings, gods, and heavenly nymphs, for an august audience

---

[49] *Ā gika, gestures, vācika*, speech, *āhārya*, costume and make-up, *sāttvika*, manifestation of feelings.

[50] NŚ 4.29f. has thirty-two *a gahāra*s (movements of the limbs) and NŚ 9.11ff has sixty-four *n ttahasta*s (hand gestures [used in dance]).

[51] *Uai ava, samapāda, vaiśākha, ma ala, pratyālī ha, alī ha*, NŚ 10.51.

[52] NŚ 12.12f has three types of *gati*.

[53] *Druta*, *madhya*, *vilambita*, cf. NŚ 31.5.

[54] Passages translated by Dezsö/Vasudeva (2009).

[55] By courtesy of Dezsö and D. Goodall are here reproduced some verses from their yet unpublished The Bawd's Counsel, *Ku anīmata*, newly edited and translated.

[56] *Ratnāvalī* (The garland of gems) by *Har avardhana*, King of Kanauj (606–647 CE).

of kings, sages, or heroes. It takes place, instead, in a *śaiva* temple full of "rakes and molls" and is staged in front of a silly young prince, who later acknowledges his own ignorance of dramatic criticism in these words:

> People like me, who occupy
> Their minds with animals of draught,
> Conveyances, and carriages,
> With villages and infantry,
> Can't penetrate the subtleties
> Of histrionic art (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, v. 930).

Here both actors and audience, to the exception of the young prince, appear to be low characters. At the beginning of the episode, once he has done with worshipping Śiva, the prince sits down while:

> A group of dancers, flautists, singers
> And courtesans sat down before him,
> And he was offered paan and flowers,
> And scented unguents by tradesmen
> Led by the men of merchant castes (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, v. 757).

Then the dance master, *nṛttācārya*, asked by him whether performances in that establishment were good, can only reply:

> [...] Where theatre patrons live from trade,
> And actresses are prostitutes (dāsī)
> — Embodiments of perfidy —
> How can the plays be any good? (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, v. 794)[57]

It is interesting to observe that here the term *dāsī*, "slave," "prostitute," indicating actresses found in a temple could also refer to "*devadāsī*," a class of female temple attendants charged with several functions to do with the images of the deities worshipped in a temple. Some of them were also traditionally employed as temple dancers, who would naturally enact plays. This could be the oldest reference known so far, as the oldest inscriptions relating to *devadāsīs* date from the 11th century.

The dance master then gives a variety of reasons why these prostitutes may desert the stage. These verses are a short excerpt:

> One may be bullied by her he-man;
> One can not leave her handsome beau;
> Another lets the day go by
> With boyfriends in some cocktail lounge.

[57] Brackets with Sanskrit term introduced by Baldissera.

Another one can't leave her door
Because she's constantly expecting
Some man to come; and of another
Her pimp, who has received his fee,
Explains she's at "that time of the month."

One floozy, if she should discover
Some man she knows has reached her house,
No matter if she is on the stage,
She'll claim she has to go pass water,
Then drop her role and walk away.

Therefore the dance master declares:
And here these girls, without commitment,
Because they fear their trade will suffer,
Occasionally throw about
Their hands and feet a little bit
To act the play *Ratnāvalī* (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, vv. 795–797).

The play apparently was performed by this singularly uncommitted all-female troupe, with one remarkable exception. The dance master in fact was satisfied with but one of his actresses, a certain Mañjarī,[58] who seemed to be the daughter of a temple priest, and who, according to the dancing master, was beautiful and exerted herself, following his teachings. In describing her manner of acting both in general, and with examples taken from the actual performance of *Ratnāvalī*, the dance master gives an interesting example of dramatic criticism, where particular attention is paid to the ritual representation of emotions, *bhāva*s and the ability to fully develop and heighten the *rasa* of the composition.

With reference to this Mañjarī,
People describe her execution
Of varied postures (*vividhasthānakaracanā*), her way of walking (*parikrama*),
The grace (*lālitya*) in movement (*valana*) of her limbs,
Her speeches which by intonation (*kāku*)
Express a range of different meanings,
The way she amplifies the mood (*rasa-puṣṭi*),
The firmness (*sthairya*) of the mental world (vāsanā)
That she projects, her calling up (*unmīlana*)
The body's outward signs of feeling (sāttvika*bhāva*),
Mimetic gestures (*abhinaya*), fitting ornaments
And maquillage, true-ness (*cyuti*) in pitch (*lāya*)
In solo musical performance
And when accompanied by others (*miśrāmiśre*).

[58] The bawd actually introduces her story to show how a courtesan like Mañjarī could seduce any man.

The moment when she sees the king
Of Vatsa through an aperture
Among the Sinduvāra trees
With eyes in which infatuation (*manobhava-bhāva*)
Has burgeoned suddenly to blossom,
And when his name (*udayana*)
Is uttered, quelling her belief
That this was the god of love incarnate,
She robs from the minds of the audience, (*samājikajana*)
— whose mouths are filled with cries of "Bravo!" —
The power to differentiate (*bheda*)
Her art (*anukaraṇa*) and what it imitates (*anukārya*) (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, vv. 804–807).[59]

And again, on her wonderfully artistic reproduction of the spontaneous body language induced by the emotion of love (here called *kāma*), the master exclaims:

Sketching the Lord of Vatsa's profile,
The hand she moves is tremulous,
As gradually she manifests
Each stage of love (*kāmāvasthā*), with shiverings,
With perspiration, hairs on end.

When she has got to the point at which
She means to end her life by hanging,
She shows the tragic sentiment (*karuṇarasa*),
In which there's nothing left to hope for,
As different from the sentiment
Of yearning love in separation, (*vipralambha*)
Although the symptomatic gestures (*anubhāva*)
Of both those modes are similar. (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, vv. 808–809)[60]

Dramatic criticism in philosophical perspective: Adbhuta, *the marvellous, as the transcendent* rasa

In the interpretation of some later philosophers, the final aim of *nāṭya*, dramatic performance, is to inspire in the audience, whatever the emotion portrayed, an impersonal aesthetic enjoyment, a state of wonder. Through the *rasa* theory one could achieve a sort of impersonalization of emotions, that Indian philosophers addressed as one way to experience, albeit for a moment, oneness with the absolute, starting with the great 10th-century *śaiva* thinker Abhinavagupta.[61] Western scholars have argued that this perspective shows

[59] Brackets with Sanskrit terms introduced by Baldissera.
[60] Brackets with Sanskrit terms introduced by Baldissera.
[61] See the study of Gnoli (1968).

some similarity with the catharsis of Greek dramatic theory, whereas ancient Indian writers on literary aesthetics, the *alaṃkāraśāstrins*, were interested for centuries in this particular aspect of dramatic practice, and built a very articulate theory on the impersonalization of emotions in literary works which was based on drama. In their opinion, in fact, emotions should be expressed in artistic writing through mere suggestion, in order to be as effective as the ones portrayed in drama through *sāttvikābhinaya*, "suggestive acting," Their findings, that obviously came after many writers and poets had produced their works, helped to discover the peculiar Indian taste for what is only implicit, the suggested meaning of poetical connotation. Instead of flatly saying, for instance, that a young woman is longing for a distant lover, they would describe her spontaneous, unpremeditated actions as symptoms of longing, (*anubhāva*, the effects of emotion,) as well as give a picture of the attending circumstances (*vibhāva*, the causes of emotion). We have similar portrayals of emotions betrayed by spontaneous physical reactions in ancient Greek literature, like for instance in the poem Hero and Leander by Mouseon. Here young Hero is struck by the beauty of Leander, whom she sees for the first time: choked by emotion Hero is unable to speak, looks down, and, unaware of what her body is doing, draws circles in the sand with her toe, betraying her feelings (*Hero and Leander*, v. 162). This manner of expression in Sanskrit literature is the rule: the height of poetry is the oblique allusion to the unsaid, to what remains veiled, or is just evoked by a slight hint, and can only be imagined by a conscious effort. Similarly, in many religious rituals a creative effort of the imagination, *bhāvanā*, was required of the practitioner, who was meant to visualize a deity without the support of an actual icon. This particular aesthetic stand is the reason why, in drama and dance, emotions appear classified in dramatic theory, but are not enacted directly. What may have occurred spontaneously to the *kavi* (writer, poet) who observed life and interpreted it through his sensitivity, preferring in his diction suggestion to denotation, was later rendered into an articulate system of references. It was then in connection with this articulate lore that cultured audiences were expected to appreciate dramas, while at the same time the pathos rendered through *sattvikābhinaya*, the interiorized, expressive form of acting, involving sophisticated body language as well as verbal recitation, could immediately appeal to the less cultivated spectators.

As regards the audience's experience of dramatized emotions, their feeling of estrangement from ordinary experience, due to their impression of entering mythical time, or of being transported elsewhere, is described as the *adbhutarasa* (the marvellous, the *rasa* of wonder). This is the ultimate *rasa*, that according to Abhinavagupta should end a performance, so that it could remain with the spectators. Such experience of wonder, of being suspended in another time, is recorded also in the accounts of many spectators of western types of drama: writers of the past centuries, in particular, have often

written of their enchantment at witnessing some theatrical performance, or a striking *tableau vivant* that had the audience speechless, absolutely arrested in wonder.

Onstage: Emotions of the Performers

In Indian drama the performers, according to dramatic norms, should be able to impersonate the different emotional states without experiencing them directly: these states should actually appear to them as elements of a ritualized story that they only have to enact. For the time of the performance, they are the characters they play, and this should not interfere with their actual life outside the stage. Even trained actors, however, can find themselves at times carried away by the emotional charge of dramatic action. In the late 1970s, during a performance of Kathakali, the character of nymph Rambhā, played by a young actress, should have refused the erotic advances of demon Rāvaṇa, played by the great actor Kunju Pillai. The latter's eyes, however, were so eloquently amorous "that the woman playing Rambhā fell into his arms, to recover a few moments later and flee from the stage in total embarrassment" (Puri 1983, p. 31). Such an occurrence is extremely rare — though in a way this is really what happens to Mālavikā in the play of Kālidāsa. The difference being that, though the erotic emotion, *bhāva*, had arisen in both actresses, Mālavikā's training and background prevented her from acting directly upon it. Her pantomime only suggested the possibility of her being in love with the king, in a rather ambiguos way; our contemporary anonymous actress, on the other hand, forgot her training and resorted to direct action.

Emotions on stage: Who acts?

During the preparations for certain dramas of religious theme, the actors are given some private time, that can extend from four to six hours, to concentrate on their role before the performance in order to "put on" the character they have to impersonate. When these dramas are staged during religious celebrations, moreover, the performers at the beginning of the ceremony undertake a special temporary initiation, involving some form of physical restraint, which is meant to transform them for a limited period of time into the figures of the myth they are to enact.[62]

It is also interesting to investigate who dances or acts: sometimes it is a whole village, or a whole community, who usually celebrates harvest time or another important occurrence of the agricultural calendar. In that case, dances

[62] This happens, for instance, in the Bhagavata Mela Natakas of Andhra and Tamil Nadu, or in the ritual Cchau dances of Seraikella performed at the harvesting festival at Chaitraparvan (mid-April), or again in the Navadurgā dances of Nepal. Some of these dramatic representations are often followed by a séance of possession.

are usually simple rounds, in which both women and men take part, and they rarely tell a specific story by expressive gestures. In such performances the music is probably the most important feature, the element capable of suggesting renewed, ritualized emotions.

The more articulate dramatic performances, on the other hand, that involve verbal recitation, mimicry, and the telling of a particular narrative, are interpreted by professionals, or by certain chosen individuals, who for a time abandon their usual occupations and devote themselves entirely to the ritual enacting of a play, like in the case of the *swarup* of Raslīlā, or of some Teyyam and Bhūta dances of South India.

Onstage: Emotions of women, emotions of men

In many temples dance and drama were once part of the daily ritual of worship, for which kings offered special grants. On a similar level, at court and in the palaces of the great, dances and plays that followed prescribed rituals, and employed the same technique as in the temple, were performed to celebrate festive occasions. The two main emotions portrayed in either of these environments related either to devout eroticism and devout heroism, or to secular eroticism and heroism, as a reflection of the cultural milieu they arose from.

The two principal *rasa*s were then the amorous, sensitive one, *śṛṅgāra*, or the heroic, *vīra* that related respectively to the world of love, or to that of war. The first known descriptions of dance already present these main subdivisions in the emotional sphere; in Śiva's dance, which according to the oldest dramatic treatise is supposed to be the origin of all dances, both emotional currents are displayed. At the end of an eon Śiva dances the forceful *tāṇḍava*, a male, warlike, and horrific dance of destruction; in other situations he performs a wild, frenzied sexual dance that gradually gives way to the *lasya*, a graceful dance where the stance is extremely seductive. This is said to be the dance style of women, appropriate in erotic contexts.

Many dances in fact were performed by women, and especially by the *devadāsīs*, a class of female temple attendants sometimes employed as temple dancers, who performed in solos or in group dances to entertain the images of the gods.

There were then dances created specifically for men, like Kathakali or the Cchau dances of Seraikella, where dancers came from the warrior subcaste, and training for dance was similar to military exercises. With time, and with the development of the bhakti[63] Movement, in which devotees experienced strong feelings of amorous emotion towards their chosen deity, the amorous *rasa*, *śṛṅgāra*, assumed also a religious connotation, without however losing its erotic import. Whereas the western term "erotic" could be rather ambiguous

[63] See note 17.

because it could also be extended to pornography, *śṛṅgāra* subsumes a more delicate set of feelings, similar to those of western medieval courtly love. On the other hand, male devotees who undertook to perform extreme asceticism, or went as far as to sacrifice their life to a deity — usually to a goddess — were also called *vīras*, heroes.[64]

The NŚ provides a mythological explanation of these two main *rasa*s by relating them to divine dancers, but even the observation of actual representations of divine dances, on the stage or in sculpture, would yield similar results. The dancing deity can be either Śiva or Viṣṇu,[65] portrayed in one of these two main moods, and also, less frequently, Devī, the Goddess. There is also a smaller number of dramatic pieces where the main *rasa* is the compassionate, the horrific or the comic, though in some cases parts of a drama would use these "minor" *rasa*s to enhance the main *rasa* of the whole composition. In later plays, emotions related to *bhakti*[66] even in non-*vaiṣṇava* environment gain prominence, and sometimes they can be accompanied by unexpected concomitants. In Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava* of the 8th century, for instance, a drama set in the *rasa śṛṅgāra*, the amorous, sensitive *rasa*, there are some graphic descriptions of the burning ground, giving rise to bībhatsa, the horrific/repulsive *rasa*. This later is mixed with the apprehensive *rasa*, *bhāyanika*, in the context of the preparations for a human sacrifice. Here, moreover, two verses describe the dance of the terrific goddess Cāmuṇḍā (*Mālatīmādhava*, Act V, vv. 22–23). Her stance is one of absolute power over the elements and over life: it gives rise to the apprehensive *rasa*, *bhāyanika*, and at the same time the verses display the show of utter devotion to her majesty enacted by her two *śakta*[67] adepts, who sing and mime her apocalyptic dance. The ascetic Aghoraghaṇṭa (Bell of the non-terrific one) and the female

[64] A famous example of extreme asceticism is that of the first known Jain teacher, whose epithet is Mahāvīra, the great (mahā) hero (vīra), a hero of renunciation. He is usually considered the initiator of the Jain path, though he claimed to be the twenty-sixth in a line of teachers.

[65] Śiva is portrayed dancing in an erotic mood, or in an irate one in the dance of final destruction; the mythical story concerning Viṣṇu and drama, on the other hand, aims of providing an explanation for the *v tti*s, the particular "demeanours," stylized acts of communication used in drama and dance. During a fight against the demons Madhu and Kai abha Viṣṇu and the demons pass from a stage of verbal communication, *bhāratīv tti* (the demons scream insults and challenges) to one of agitated action, *ārabha īv tti* (the demons jump up and down in excitement), to one of precise gestures that require concentrated mindfulness, *sattvatīv tti* (Viṣṇu adapts the bow string, draws his bow and shoots his arrow), to a final one of tender, coquettish nonchalance, *kaiśikīv tti* (Viṣṇu after the victory rearranges his topknot with elegant, playful gestures).

[66] Rūpa Gosvāmin, who wrote *kāvya* in the 16th century, was the first writer to consider *bhakti* as a *rasa*. See note 17.

[67] Followers of the *śakti* cult, where *śakti*, "power, energy" is the powerful aspect of the Goddess.

devotee Kapālakuṇḍalā (who has skulls for her earrings) perform goddess Cāmuṇḍā's terrifying dance of power before worshipping her with an intended human sacrifice. The scene approaches to showing death and horror in a manner forbidden by dramatic norms, and is another instance of Bhavabhūti's originality and defiance of rules.

Comic dances of men: Dances of joy, wine and emotions, such as thwarted love

Indian dramas are relieved by comic passages or by characters traditionally considered comic, such as the *vidūṣaka*, the funny-looking Brahmin jester, trusted companion of the king in many plays. In Harṣa's *Ratnāvalī* the *vidūṣaka* dances for joy (*Ratnāvalī*, Act I, prose after v. 16) to celebrate the festival of love, accompanied, or rather pulled here and there by two female attendants. He performs again an amusing dance at the end of the play.

Pādatāḍitaka presents a roguish character, the Baktrian (*bālhika*) Bāṣpa, who dances inebriated with a wine cup in one hand in the middle of a revolving circle of drunken courtesans and menial workers. Though penniless, he always manages to beg a drink. In his frenzied dance he moves in such a way that his buttocks are bared again and again (*Pādatāḍitaka*, p. 39).

A more refined kind of humour is that of the Prakrit passages of Act IV of Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya* (*Vikramorvaśīya*, pp. 261–279).[68] Here king Pūruravas, maddened by separation, roams in the forest dancing wildly to different tunes and addressing all sorts of animals in his hope to discover the whereabouts of his beloved Urvāśī, who had left him to rejoin the heavenly nymphs.

The bhāva *of loving devotion embodied: the interpretation of the* devadāsīs

Female temple attendants, called devadāsī, slave of god, and also *mahari* in Orissa or *rudrakanyā*, "virgin of Rudra"[69] and *tali-cheri-pendugal* or "women of the temple" in South India — and for the purpose of simplicity called from now on *devadāsī*s — were employed in different capacities to tend to the holy images.

They were dedicated to a temple at an early age, and married with a solemn ceremony to the image of the presiding deity, even in the case of the deity being the Goddess, or to a devotional implement. The marriage to a divine spouse made them *nityasumaṅgala*, "always extremely auspicious", as they could never be widowed.

Their offices apparently went from the daily care of the images of the deities, such as worshipping them with various substances and rites, bathing

[68] This part, however, is usually considered a later interpolation.

[69] "The howling one," a particularly fierce epithet of Śiva, found already in the Veda.

and adorning them with garlands, sandal paste, and clothes, to dancing and singing as a devotional offering in the daily and festive ceremonies of the temple. Their elaborate ritual dances were intended for the entertainment of the images, in which the deity was believed to actually reside, and were imbued with loving devotion. The *devadāsī*s then were seen as the terrestrial counterparts of the heavenly nymphs, and represented the embodiment of the religious type of *śṛṅgāra*, the amorous *rasa*.

In literature they were often described as splendidly attired and seated in state next to the movable effigies of the gods when these were ceremonially taken around the city on their festival carts. *Devadāsī*s received special training in music and dance by learned temple priests, so that they sang the ancient hymns in praise of the gods at various junctures during the holy rites, and performed sacred dances either in public, during the religious processions, or in the privacy of the holiest of holy, in front of the sacred images. With the temple priests, at times they were the only people admitted into their immediate presence, and in fact assisted the priests in some daily rites.

Though their institution may be extremely old, the earliest inscriptions found so far that testify the establishment of royal grants to temples for the maintenance of *devadāsī*s date from the 11th century CE. The beginning of their institution is certainly earlier, as there is sculptural evidence of images of dancing women in cave temples of the 7th century, and from that time on in many temples' iconography their figures were among the most prominent ones, reproduced all over walls and columns. The farce *Kuṭṭanīmata* of the 8th century, moreover, mentions acting *dāsī*s in a temple (*Kuṭṭanīmata*, v. 794), engaged in the performance of the play *Ratnāvalī*, and they could well be *devadāsī*s.

All over India kings once had actually endowed temples with dancers and musicians, and granted gifts of land for their maintenance, as dance and drama performances were once part of the daily ritual of temple worship. The earliest reference to these young women dedicated to temples appears in a Tamil inscription of the Chola monarch Rajaraja the great, a *śaiva* devotee who accessed the throne in 985 CE. His inscription indicates that in 1004 the Bṛhadīśvara temple, the principal one in Tanjore, supported an establishment of four-hundred *tali-cheri-pendugal*, "women of the temple."

"They settled in the streets surrounding the temple and in return of their services received one or more shares, each of which consisted of the produce of one *veli* (26,755 sq. metres) of land, calculated at 100 *kalam* of paddy" (Hultzsch 1886–1902, Vol. II, Part III). Another early inscription was found in Chebrolu in the Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh, dated 1139 CE. The inscription records that some dancing girls, aged from eight years old onwards, were in attendance at the temple of Nageśvara (cf. Lewis 1886–1902, V, Ak, 105: 1139 AD). In the *vaiṣṇava* temple of Jagannath at Puri, in Orissa, an inscription of 1499 shows that King Pratāparudra of the Gajapati dynasty

established a special grant so that female temple dancers, the *maharī*s, would dance and sing every evening, at twilight, a portion from the *Gītāgovinda*[70] of Jayadeva. Again in the temple of Bṛhadīśvara, at Tanjavur, in the times of King Achyuttappa Nayak (1572–1614) four-hundred *devadāsī*s were called from the neighboring villages in order that they may dance during the daily rites.

On a different scale, in royal palaces dances and plays that followed prescribed rituals, and adopted the same technique used in temples, were performed to celebrate festive occasions such as births, birthdays, marriages, conquests, and new accessions to the throne. The cultural environment could be very sophisticated, for many kings and chiefs were devoted lovers of music and dance,[71] to the extent that they profligated large patrimonies to host the most splendid performances and extravagantly reward their favourite stars.[72] The *devadāsī*s, as auspicious women and extremely accomplished temple dancers and singers, were honoured guests and the main performers at these festive gatherings.

Devadāsīs' *eroticism, water and kings' fertility*

The *devadāsī*s' dance was often erotic in theme, evoking the *rasa śṛṅgāra*, the amorous *rasa* as it pervaded mythical stories and was meant to please the divinity they had married. At particular times of the year, to ensure the completion of the fertility rites, the *devadāsī*s had to celebrate ritual sex with the main priests of the temple. It seems that they were also meant to unite with the patron king, to stimulate fertility of his line and of his land. Both figures, king and *devadāsī*, embodied fertility, and both were connected with celestial beings, as the king's body was believed to contain portions of ten deities, while the *devadāsī*s were considered the embodiments of the *apsarases*, the divine nymphs born of the heavenly waters.

In some periods the symbolic connection of king and *devadāsī* seemed particularly strong. Between the 15th and the 18th century in Orissa, as well as in most of South India, *devadāsī*s enjoyed great prestige. In Orissa they were the only temple attendants who would work also in the royal palace, and they were considered part of the royal insignia. In the 16th century the priests of

---

[70] Poem in honour of K a (see note 20), 12th century CE.

[71] Two interesting movies of Satyajit Ray, *Jalsaghar*: *The Music Room* (1958), and *Shatranj Ke Khilari*: *The Chess Players* (1977), capture in arresting scenes this particular fondness of ineffectual though extremely cultivated kings. Each movie features a performance of a Kathak dance, resounding with erotic overtones.

[72] The star system in India is still extremely strong, with several daily tabloids, in both printed and electronic form, that report only stars' life. In these times they are film stars, rather than dancers or musicians, but in the commercial movies they still have to perform several dances, either "traditionally oriented" or "contemporary."

Jagannath temple in Puri called the king “the walking Viṣṇu,” and the principal *devadāsī* “the walking Lakṣmī.”[73] At the same time in the South Indian realm of Vijayanagara the Nayak kings were identified with gods, and the *devadāsī*s were equally considered divine beings. These professional women were often very wealthy, as attested by their conspicuous donations to the endowment of temples found in several ancient documents.[74] It is difficult however to establish exactly what their functions were at any given time in history for the lack of detailed records in the inscriptions found so far, especially as regards their role in fertility rites. The connection of their dances with fertility, beside its erotic connotations,[75] had also to do with water, as the *devadāsī*s were believed to share in the qualities of the nymphs of whom they were the earthly representatives, for *apsaras* means “the essence of the [celestial] waters.” Their ritual activity was intensified in summer, as it was supposed to attract and increase rain. During the festivities in honour of Lord Jagannath in Puri the *devadāsī*s used to dance on special festive boats on the river, and also took part in some erotic water games, meant to enhance the fertility of the king. During the main festival in the temple of Jagannath, the principal *devadāsī*, locally called *mahārī*, performed a secret dance for Balabhadra, the younger brother of Jagannath, a bachelor and therefore sexually free. She danced half-naked, in the semi-obscurity of the *garbhagṛha*, the inner sanctum, in the sole presence of three priests who fanned the idol (cf. Kulke 1978 and Marglin 1983). The rapid movement of her dancing generated droplets of perspiration that sprayed the idol. Her dance in fact, meant to cool Balabhadra, scorched by the sun’s rays, symbolized at once rain and the glow of love-making (cf. Marglin 1983 passim, and Kulke 1978, pp. 139–156), in accordance with many examples of poetic imagery.[76]

At the beginning of the 20th century the last scions of well-known *devadāsī*s’ families, when asked, did not like to dwell on that aspect of their former duties. A very well-known dancer from a *devadāsī* background, Balasaraswati of Madras, in several interviews given in the 1970s acknowledged the performance of erotic songs and dances in the temples, explaining that they were meant to express love towards the deity (cf. Balasaraswati 1982,

---

[73] The goddess of beauty and wealth, consort of Viṣṇu.

[74] Cf. Orr (2000), reporting on the number of inscriptions of the Cola period referring to *devadāsī*s.

[75] The dance of women, starting with that of the *apsarases*, the celestial nymphs, was always seen as seductive and conducive to love-making, or to sexual desire.

[76] Cf. for instance The Bhā a *Śāradātilaka* of Śa kara, vv. 12–13, describing the dance of actress Candralekhā:

Who is not delighted by this new dance,
which is brilliant with her skill of movement,
which captivates the mind as her breasts sparkle

pp. 37–43). These songs were preserved both in some temple archives, inscribed on copper tablets, and in old *devadāsī* families who kept a tradition of singing and performing *abhinaya* to their tunes. With time, there seems to have been a shifting of context in the songs, though the emotional import remained constant; initially expressing the yearning of the devotee for her divine Lord, the songs, and the singers, seemed to have moved towards a human plane. The Lord had been first equalled to the king of the land, and later to any rich customer, while the singer, though still presenting herself as a lovelorn devotee, assumed the character of a courtesan, well aware of her mundane value. When questioned specifically about an old Telugu erotic song, preserved only in *devadāsī*s' families, featuring a *devadāsī*/courtesan who asked for heaps of gold in exchange for her favours, Balasaraswati replied that though the song was in her repertoire, she had never performed it (cp. Baldissera 2001, p. 524 and pp. 527–530 and Ramanujan/Rao/Shulman 1994, p. 155).[77]

Decadence of the devadāsīs' *prestige*

The *devadāsī*s' auspicious status in fact had suffered a severe drawback with foreign domination. The Mogul had generally favoured palace dancers, actors, and musicians, and tolerated temple worship, but certainly they did not help to endow temples so that they could continue to support their artistic protégées. Thus already before the beginning of British colonization *devadāsī*s had to resort to other means of livelihood, which included, along with dancing in the homes of the new rulers, some form of prostitution. South Indian independence from the Mogul invaders lasted longer than that of other Indian regions, but in the end it also had to submit to their rule. Starting from the 17th century in Andhra Pradesh young male Brahmin dancers came to replace the *devadāsī*s, who were forbidden to perform Kuchipudi dances in the temples on charges of moral corruption, as by that time they were dancing mainly in royal palaces.

Whereas in the past some *devadāsī*s had been respected temple assistants and dancers, with the withdrawal of temple patronage by dispossessed lords they often had to resort to actual begging or to indiscriminate prostitution. From being considered the auspicious, prosperous spouses of the gods, who

---

with the necklace that glitters over her bodice studded with precious jewels,
and in which the anklets tinkle and she is covered in shining drops of perspiration? (v. 12)
With enticing gestures and with her limbs
that fawn-eyed one, beautiful in the bliss of love,
now promises love embraces in her dance (v. 13).

[77] The song is anonymous and particularly interesting, as it shows an ascending scale of prices, depending on the favour to be granted, that according to the authors of the study seems to parody "the list of rituals, each with its set price, performed for pilgrims at South Indian temples" (Ramanujan/Rao/Shulman 1994, p. 40).

were immensely superior to any woman, including the high-born ones, as they could never be widowed, the *devadāsī*s had become the playthings first of kings, and then of rich men, and performed at private venues and even in brothels.[78]

These temple dancers, after giving dance performances in the palaces of the ex-suzerains and in the homes of the wealthy, from the end of the 17th century provided a type of exotic-erotic amusement for foreign travellers and merchants, which the latter named "nautch" from the Sanskrit term *nṛtta*, "dancing." The naughty erotic nuances of their dances had been initially admired, up to the 18th century, by the officers of the East India Company, but when British rule became firmly established, and British women started coming to live in India, the same dances became the object of public blame. After the Islamic moral ideology imposed by the Mogul, a similar type of moralistic outlook on social behaviour had been propounded by the new British conquerors. What is more, their Victorian worldview had percolated into the new "bourgeois" portion of Indian society, who then stigmatized the figure of the *devadāsī* as a dubious character. Whereas in previous times it had been prestigious for high-caste men to be the patrons of a particular dancer or of a company of dancers and singers as it demonstrated their keen knowledge of the traditional performing arts, in the Victorian era puritanical concerns changed the outlook.

Thus the *devadāsī*s, in spite of their dramatic and religious accomplishments, were not perceived any more as reputed artistes, the upholders of an ancient tradition of temple worship, but were rather considered as common prostitutes uncommonly proficient in singing and dancing. Their public image went into decline, and their changed circumstances were more perceptible in the south, where temples housed the largest numbers of *devadāsī*s.

The renaissance of the Indian performing arts and the devadāsīs

In the years preceding the fight for freedom the traditional performing arts had faced an actual threat of extinction; the temples were no longer subsidized by the cultivated people who used to take pride in lavish displays of dance and drama both during the yearly religious festivals and as a form of daily worship. Once these patrons had been conquered and had lost the means to host performances in the temples or in their homes, dances and drama lost much of their public appeal. At the same time religious dancers, and especially *devadāsī*s, almost disappeared from the great temples of the south. In the second decade of the 20th century a group of cultivated people from Madras, belonging to the new Indian bourgeoisie, later hailed as the pioneers

[78] Cf. the introductory study "On Erotic DDevotion" in Ramanujan/Rao/Shulman (1994, pp. 9–40).

of the "Indian cultural renaissance," endeavored to restore the languishing performing arts. They tried to recover and "purify" the teachings of the NŚ, which they considered the one textbook valid for the whole of India.

They also went to the villages in search of the old traditional teachers and performers of ancient dances and dramas and invited them to Madras, so that they would teach there to a different set of pupils. These came from a variety of backgrounds, but the largest part were Brahmins or the children of the cultured and anglicized bourgeoisie. From the 1920s a well-known Brahmin barrister from Madras, E. Krishna Iyer, danced in public donning female garb, in the attempt to erase the stigma attached to the figure of the *devadāsī*s. He was still perplexed, however, by the openly erotic Telugu devotional songs of Kṣetraya, which he did not deem fit to be interpreted by the young women of respectable families (cf. Ramanujan/Rao/Shulman 1994, p. 28) who were to attend the new dance courses. His example was soon followed by Rukmini Devi, who had learnt ballet in Paris and had then proceeded to learn temple dance from the old *devadāsī* Gauri Amma of Mylapore. Rukmini Devi strove to create her own purified form of "ancient" Indian dance by mixing Indian aesthetic principles with western ones, but presented it as the authentic product of the NŚ's teachings.[79] With help from the funds of the Theosophical Society of Madras, she organized a dance convention in 1935, then started training high-caste women, and established an International Academy of Arts which was later renamed Kalakshetra.

The different emotional context of dance

Contemporary post-colonial studies, especially by scholars or practitioners acquainted with western contemporary dance, insist on the particular value of the bodily experience of the *devadāsī*s. They interpret it as a knowledge of the body, acquired through the body. They see that of the *devadāsī*s as a vibrating body, according to Fratagnoli (2010, pp. 126–128),[80] teeming with felt and perceptible emotions. Recent studies[81] try to locate and re-establish historically the great importance of the *devadāsī*s as vehicles of sacred meaning, and especially of emotions, *bhāva*, ritually enacted. Often these studies tend to idealize the former *devadāsī*s' social position, as they seem to ignore ancient texts, both dramatic and historical, that allude to their simultaneous status as courtesans.[82] It is also often overlooked that courtesans

[79] On this reconstruction cp. for instance Fratagnoli (2010) and Meduri (1996, 2005).

[80] It is interesting to notice that "vibrating," *vipra*, is also an ancient epithet of Brahmins, whose body vibrates in prayer and song.

[81] Cf. for instance Fratagnoli (2010), Gaston (1994), Meduri (1996, 2005a or b), Orr (2000), Vishwanathan (2008).

[82] Cf. *Ku anīmata* (8th century), *Rājatara gi ī* (12th century) and the findings of Ramanujan/Rao/Shulman (1994).

once could be very respected, as reputed poets, musicians, and dancers. Except for some women ascetics and the occasional learned queen, courtesans were the sole truly cultivated women, able to hold their own in literary contexts. At the same time contemporary scholars of Cultural Studies rightly lament the complete dismissal of *devadāsī*s from the South Indian dance scene, due to the decline of their moral prestige and to the extreme social divide between the "pioneers" and the temple dancers' subaltern origins. Most pioneers in fact came from Brahminical backgrounds, and strove to reorient the performances in accord with their newly found prudish outlook. In a few occasions they had invited some *devadāsī*s to perform in public theatres, attired in the voluminous clothes used for temple dances, with enthusiastic applause. But theatres were expressly chosen to differentiate the venue, that before would have been temple, palace, or brothel, and turn it into the ground for a civilized performance that could appeal to the new bourgeois taste.

The difference in the atmosphere must have made for a strange dislocation of feelings and emotions: the seductive dance meant to arouse a god, or its nearest paragon on earth, the king, was now displayed completely out of context.

These recreated "traditional dances," patronized, like once the *devadāsī*s had been, by the members of the affluent bourgeoisie, were a type of performance set in a sober, well-behaved mood, fit to be represented by respectable young women of good families. Such novel performances therefore were just as untrue as the old licentious "nautch" devised for the entertainment of the Moguls or the British had been. A particular deviation from authenticity, pursued for the sake of cultural recognition by the British establishment of the times, was the curtailing of the erotic import of many traditional and ritual dances. The ritual emotions at play in the original pieces had been completely overrun and displaced. The pioneers, and in particular Rukmini Devi, felt that eroticism had to be interiorized. Balasaraswati, as the first woman from a *devadāsī* family who had attained fame and respect in the 20th century, tried to protect the category and to promote the divine eroticism of the temple dances, meant to express feelings of real love towards the deity. In her words devotion to God is *śṛṅgāra*, the erotic *rasa*, "which brings out the great beauties of this [Bharatanatyam] dance, and can be portrayed with all the purity of the spirit. The flesh, which is considered to be an enemy of the spirit, having being made a vehicle of the divine in the discipline of the dance, *śṛṅgāra*, which is considered to be the greatest obstacle to spiritual realization, has itself, we shall realise, become an instrument for uniting the dancer with the divine" (Balasaraswati 1982, p. 41). And again, referring to the dedicated dancer, Balasaraswati says:

> Such a dancer will feel no need to 'purify' any item in the traditional order of Bharata Natyam. Indeed, the effort to purify Bharata Natyam through the

> introduction of novel ideas is like putting a gloss on burnished gold or paint on a lotus (Balasaraswati 1982, p. 42).[83]

Whereas Balasaraswati affirms the value of the erotic *rasa* in devotional dances, a reknowned dance critic, S. Kothari, in a previous number of the same journal had expressed the opposite vision. Kothari had declared:

> Rukmini Devi's entry [on the dance scene] raised the status of the art. She introduced welcome reforms in the presentation. Endowed with exquisite beauty, possessing great taste and high aesthetic sensibility, she removed the unpleasant elements from dance. She devised artistic costumes, used padams [sung verses] with spiritual import and contributed in removing the stygma of eroticism (Kothari 1979, p. 28).

A definite departure from the ritual dance of the temples was the new posture of the upright body.

The stance of the *devadāsī*s, which can be seen in the old photographs preserved in newspaper archives or in anthropological collections, shows a strong contact with the ground. Fratagnoli, herself a dancer, has studied this particular posture and collected a series of images, where a low barycentre keeps the dancer close to the ground, and contrasted it with the particular bodily attitude chosen by Rukmini Devi. This dancer sought to detach herself away from the earth, like in the western ballet she had studied, by projecting forward the corporeal space. In F. Fratagnoli's words, "The ideal project envisaged by Rukmini Devi, who had borrowed from the West an aesthetic correspondence between spirituality and bodily elevation, had definitely proscribed the 'earthly' corporeal quality of the *devadāsī*s" (Fratagnoli 2010, p. 112). Thanks to this device, the innovator obliterates the vibrating quality of the *devadāsī*s' bodies and has the dances crystallised in a rigid codification, where improvization is difficult and rare. By referring to the study of G. Vigarello (2001), Fratagnoli can further declare: "The definition of a technique ultimately corresponds to the definition of a social order" (Fratagnoli 2010, p. 130).

There was also, in some cases, a claim of the need to "return" to a pan-Indian dance form, that the pioneers believed would be derived from the *mārgī* (cultured, appropriate to the town) mode of operation defined in the NŚ. Accordingly, the old name of the *devadāsī* dance, Sadir-natyam, a Marathi term inherited from the times of the Maratha kings of Tanjavur, was transformed into Bharatanatyam, the *nāṭyam* (dramatic performance) of Bharata, the mythical author of the NŚ. At the time of the fight for Independence, such an artificial vision was employed as an efficient strategy to introduce the

[83] The latter rhetorical comparisons are typical *topoi* from ancient Sanskrit and Tamil poetry.

legitimacy and the spiritual importance of Indian original cultural values that were then presented as encompassing the whole of India.

The bill against the devadāsīs

In the end, however, the *devadāsī* institution was perceived only in its negative connotations by the Indian innovators and the colonials alike, and in the past century was abolished by the British in South India, first in 1910 in Mysore, then in 1930 in Travancore, until in 1947 it was declared suppressed by independent India. Several contemporary studies in Indian dance seem to suggest that *devadāsī*s had lost their temple function for good by the time of Indian independence (cf. Fratagnoli 2010; Meduri 1996). Contemporary *devadāsī*s, however, are still being dedicated from a very young age to small, little known temples all over India, and survive thanks to prostitution with the pilgrims. A meeting of *devadāsī*s called in 1977 by a French Catholic association in Nasik, Maharashtra, collected over five-hundred participants — and only the women who could afford the trip had attended it. Their office would seem not to carry any remnant of the past glory.[84]

As recently as in 1982 and 1984, moreover, the Indian legislators promoted special acts, and finally in 1984 a bill was passed in Karnataka to prohibit the dedication of young girls as *devadāsī*s, proving that the practice was still followed.

Cultural Hybridization: The Treatment of Emotions According to the Dancers of the Indian Diaspora

Many dancers of the diaspora present a heterogeneous mixture of traditional choreography and contemporary western stance that makes for a fractured vision. Some dancers claim to follow ancient models, and reproduce old modes of performing the devotional repertoire; others take only some formal elements from the traditional styles and rework them according to their own contemporary aesthetics. One could even wonder whether these attitudes may vary according to the religious environment of the dancers. In India the latter distinction is almost unnoticeable, because for centuries the realm of music and dance has been equally shared by artists of different communities and religious background, some of whom, however, also in recent times have drawn some inspiration from dance and music stages attended in the West. Thus for seventeen generations the Muslim family of the Dagar brothers has sung *dhrupad*, called *nādabrahma*, (the Brahman, the absolute in terms of

[84] Oral communication by Father Poidevin (at De Nobilis College, Pune, 1979) who attended the meeting. He declared that many of the women acknowledged that they had resorted to prostitution in order to support themselves and their children, as other types of work would have been more onerous.

sound of the Brahminical tradition) in all auspicious occasions in Brahminical or Islamic festivities. At the same time the Parsi (Zoroastrian) Jhaveri sisters of Mumbai danced Odissi dances of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, while in Madras a Christian priest, Father Francis Barbosa, danced Christian stories choreographed in Bharatanatyam style. Now in Ahmedabad and in theatres all over India Aditi Mangaldas, from a Jain family, dances her own fusion/contemporary brand of Kathak (a northern style started in the middle ages to enact *bhakti*[85] stories, but later appropriated also by Mogul culture), while the desert dancers of Rajasthan are often accompanied by a mixed orchestra, numbering both Hindu and Muslim musicians.

Bhakti-*induced emotions, that kept being recreated and re-enacted according to the expectations of devout audiences*

One of the most interesting protagonists of this contemporary fusion between liquid Indian movements — in this case taken from Kathak — and a rigorous, seemingly emotionless contemporary stance, is the London- based Pakistani dancer Akram Khan.[86] His contemporary Kathak to a traditional sensibility would probably seem "puppet-like,"[87] because his performance would strike a public used to a well-defined type of ritual training as a sort of automatic animation, which they would consider devoid of *rasa*, aesthetic quality, because of its apparent lack of feeling. This type of "automatic" performance could appear similar to that created in the "Ballet mécanique" by the French artist Leger and the German artist Schlemmer, at the beginning of last century. Khan instead captivates his contemporary public in London and Paris with the absolute attention he gives to the fluidity of movements and the plasticity of the body. Khan projects a surprising dislocation in time and space, because of the tension maintained at a very high level in his extremely rapid pirouettes performed with an impassable face. Still he seems to give his best in his western repertoire, where his stance does communicate real emotion.

Even more minimalist is the stance of Padmini Chettu, a pupil of the first choreographer of modern Indian dances, Candralekha. Padmini has created a rigorous group technique that shuns any trace of emotional involvement for her all-female dance company, and is used to upset traditional audiences by presenting disturbing pictures of women plight.

It is as if an emotional parabola had concluded its arc. It began as a ritual characterized by an expression of feelings guided by a canonical text, and interpreted with emotions at once divine and secular. It ended in a progressive

---

[85] See note 17.

[86] Cf. the interesting study of his choreography in Fratagnoli (2010, pp. 178–241).

[87] This is a very old term of comparison, found already in the *Pādatā   itaka* to indicate an expressionless performer.

shedding of emotions, which culminated in a rarefied performance built only on the tension and release of a movement executed with hieratic perfection.

References

Primary Literature

Abhijñānaśākuntala of Kālidāsa – Kale, M. R. (Ed.) (1969): Abhijñānaśākuntala. – 10th ed. – Delhi/Patna/Varanasi.

Āgamaḍambara of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa – Dezsö, C. (Ed.) (2005): Much ado about Religion. – New York. (Clay Sanskrit Library)

Hero and Leander of Mouseon: Orsini, P. (Ed.) (1968): Héro et Léandre. – Paris.

Hultzsch, E. (1886–1903): South Indian Inscriptions, 3 Vols. – Madras.

Kuṭṭanīmata of Dāmodaragupta – Dezsö, C./Goodall, D. (Eds.) (forthcoming): The Bawd's Counsel.

Lewis, B. R. (1886–1902): Epigraphia Carnatica, Vols. 1–7. – Bangalore.

Mālatīmādhava of Bhavabhūti – M. Coulson (Ed.) (1989): A Critical Edition of the Mālatīmādhava. – Delhi.

Mālavikāgnimitra of Kālidāsa – Devadhar, C. R. (Ed.) (1977): Mālavikāgnimitram. – 3rd edition – Reprint: Delhi/Patna/Varanasi.

Nāgānanda of Harṣa:

– Sāstrī. T. G. (Ed.) (1917): The Nāgānanda of Śrī Harṣa Deva: With the Commentary Nāgānandavimarsinī by Śivarāma. – Trivandrum. (Trivandrum Sanskrit Series Vol. 69)

– Skilton, A. (Ed.) (2009): "How the Nagas were Pleased" by Harsha and "The Shattered Thighs" by Bhasa. – New York. (Clay Sanskrit Library)

Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni:

– Kavi, M. R. (Ed.) (1926): The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni with the Commentary of Abhinavaguptācārya, Vol. 1: Chapters 1–7. – Baroda. (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Vol. XXXVI)

– Kavi, M. R. (Ed.) (2001): The Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni with the commentary of Abhinavaguptācārya, Vol. 2: Chapters 8–18. – Revised Edition by Kulkarni, V. M./ Nandi, T. – Vadodara. (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Vol. LXVIII)

Pādatāḍitakā of Śyāmilaka: Dezsö, C./Vasudeva, S. (Eds) (2009): The Kick. In: Dezsö, C./Vasudeva, S. (Eds): The Quartet of Causeries. – New York. (Clay Sanskrit Library)

Priyadarśikā of Harṣa

– Kale, M. R. (Ed.) (1928): Priyadarśikā. – Bombay.

– Kangle, R. P. (Ed.) (1928): Priyadarśikā of Śrī Harṣa. – 1st edition – Ahmedabad.

Rājataraṅgiṇī of Kalhaṇa: Stein, M. A. (Ed.) (1989): Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅgiṇī: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr. – Reprint. – Delhi.

Ratnāvalī of Harṣa:

– Bhattacharya, A./Das, M. (Eds) (1967): Ratnavali of Harsha. – Calcutta.

– Doninger, W. (Ed.) (2006): "The Lady of the Jewel Necklace" and "The Lady who Shows her Love". – New York. (The Clay Sanskrit Library)

– Dutt, M. M. (1858) (Ed.): Ratnāvalī. – Calcutta.

– Kale, M. R. (Ed.) (1921): The Ratnāvalī of Śrī Harṣa-Deva. – Delhi.

Śāradātilaka of Śaṅkara: Baldissera, F. (Ed.) (1980): The Bhāṇa Śāradātilaka of Śaṅkara. – Pune. (Bhandarkar Oriental Series No. 14)

Ubhayābhisārikā of Vararuci = Dezsö, C./Vasudeva, S. (Ed.) (2009): The Mutual Elopement. In: Dezsö, C./Vasudeva, S. (Eds.): The Quartet of Causeries. – New York. (Clay Sanskrit Library)
Uttararāmacarita of Bhavabhūti – Pollock, S. (Ed.) (2007): Rama's Last Act by Bhavabhuti. – New York. (The Clay Sanskrit Library)
Vikramorvaśīya of Kālidāsa: Kale, M. R. (Ed.) (1967): The Vikramorvaśīya of Kālidāsa. – Delhi.

Secondary Literature

Balasaraswati, T. (1982): Bharata Natyam. In: Doshi, S. (Ed.): Aspects of the Performing Arts of India. – Bombay, pp. 37–44. (Marg Publications 34, 3)
Baldissera, F. (2001): Corpo d'amore: la danza delle devadāsī in India. In: Arru, A./ Di Michele, L./Stella (Eds): Proprietarie. Avere, non avere, ereditare, industriarsi. – Napoli, pp. 517–530.
Baldissera, F./Michaels, A. (1988): Der indische Tanz. – Köln.
Deszö, C. (2005): Part 1: Introduction. In: Dezsö, C. (Ed.) (2005): Much Ado about Religion. – New York, pp. iv–lxxii. (Clay Sanskrit Library)
Fratagnoli, F. (2010): Les danses savantes de l'Inde à l'épreuve de l'Occident: formes hybrides et contemporaines du religieux. – Paris. (Unpublished PhD thesis, Université de Paris 8)
Gaston, A. M. (1994): Secularization and De-secularization of Indian Classical Dance. In: Tepper, E./Wood, J. (Eds): South Asian Horizons: Enriched by South Asia. – Ottawa, pp. 15-34.
Gnoli, R. (1968): The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta. – 2nd ed. – Varanasi.
Karnad, G. (2007): Foreword. In: Pollock, S. (Ed.) (2007): Rama's Last Act by Bhavabhuti. – New York, pp. 17–25. (The Clay Sanskrit Library)
Kothari, S. (1979): History: Roots, Growths and Revival. In: Kothari, S. (Ed.): Bharata Natyam: Indian Classical Dance Art. – Bombay, pp. 23–30. (Marg Publications 32, 3)
Kulke, H. (1978): Early Royal Patronage of the Jagannath Cult. In: Eschmann, A./ Kulke, H./Tripathi, G. C.: The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa. – New Delhi, pp. 139–155.
Marglin, F. A. (1983): Kings and Wives: The Separation of Status and Royal Power. – Princeton.
McEwan, I. (2001): Atonement. – London.
Meduri, A. (1996): Nation, Woman, Representation: The Sutured History of the Devadasi and her Dance. – New York. (Unpublished PhD thesis, New York University).
Meduri, A. (2005a): Challenging the Euro-American Read on South Asian Dance. In: Pulse, Vol. 10 (Spring issue). – New York, pp. 26–27.
Meduri, A. (Ed.) (2005b): Rukmini Devi Arundale: A Visionary Architect of Indian Culture and the Performing Arts. – New Delhi.
Meduri, A. (2009): Le bharata natyam: une forme historique mondiale. In: Rousier, C. (Dir.): Danse et identités, de Bombay à Tokyo. – Paris, pp. 225–244. (CND, Pantin)
Orr, L. C. (2000): Donors, Devotees, and Daughters of God. – Oxford/New York.
Pollock, S. (2007): Introduction. In: Pollock, S. (Ed.) (2007): Rama's Last Act by Bhavabhuti. – New York, pp. 27–62. (The Clay Sanskrit Library)
Puri, R. (1983): The Dance in India. In: Journal of Arts and Ideas, Vol. 3 (April–June), pp. 21-32.

Radicchi, A. (1966): Introduzione allo studio di documenti del teatro indiano. In: Saggi sul teatro Indiano: Mālavikāgnimitra, Act II, v. 4. – Firenze.
Ramanujan, A. K./Rao, V. N./Shulman, D. (1994): When God is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Kṣetrayya and Others. – Berkeley.
Spivak, G.C. (1988): Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography. In: Guha, R./ Spivak, G. C. (Eds.): Selected Subaltern Studies. – Oxford/New York.
Vigarello, G. (2001): Le corps redressé. Histoire d'un pouvoir redressé. – Paris.
Vishwanathan, L. (2008): Women of Pride: The Devadasi Heritage. – New Delhi.
Warder, A. K. (1972): Indian Kāvya Literature, Vol. 1: Literary Criticism. – Delhi.