

Overview of the Volume. Part I

In her paper on the unique “art of attentiveness”, **Hermina Cielas** discusses various aspects of performative and ritualistic features of Avadhāna. This complex tradition, based on the public showcasing of memory skills, the power of concentration and knowledge pertaining to a variety of show types—be it Sāhityāvadhāna, Nāṭyāvadhāna or Citrāvadhāna—first of all denotes a plethora of performative arts. Being staged, Avadhāna attracts crowds eager to watch both those who pose specialized tasks (*prcchakas*) and those who demonstrate their knowledge and skills while fulfilling them (*avadhānis*). The techniques used by *avadhānis* during the partially improvised spectacles draw on the mnemonic tools developed for the sake of Vedic recitation applied to the rites. Yet, as Cielas claims, from the religious point of view Avadhāna cannot be referred to as ritualistic in its nature. Instead, taking into consideration that, *inter alia*, it is performed for a given purpose in a particular time and space (in earlier times also in temples) and abounds in symbolic, prescribed actions, the author suggests viewing it as a secular form of rite, or “‘the ritual of memory’, celebration of innate and developed mental techniques performed by an *avadhāni* in front of the audience”. Nevertheless, depending on its type and context, the intensity and range of performative and ritualistic traits attributed to Avadhāna may vary, hence in conclusion Cielas proposes to situate it somewhere in-between the domains of performance and ritual.

Marianna Ferrara's paper opens with a rich overview of the long-term interdisciplinary debate regarding the relationship between theatre and ritual, which has recently culminated in speculation on the mutual influences between the social sciences and performance studies. Having reflected on conventional terms such as 'performance' and 'performative' as well as on the various dichotomies resulting from their application in different disciplinary fields—for instance 'performativity' versus 'theatricality', 'self' versus 'role'—Ferrara questions the definitions of a ritual text as exclusively 'religious' and suggests rethinking it in terms of 'performative' and 'theatrical'. The focus of her study is the performative effect of the recitation of Vedic texts intended, according to the author, to display the skills and authority of the officiants. As she concludes, the level of performativity and theatricality displayed in Vedic rituals implies that the dissociation of entertainment from religious acts should be reconsidered.

Drawing richly on extensive anthropological research on the one hand, and on Kūṭiyāṭṭam literature written in Malayalam and Sanskrit on the other—especially the Cākyar's acting and production manuals (*āṭṭaparakāram* and *kramadīpikā*), as well as an anonymous Sanskrit text on Kūṭiyāṭṭam entitled *Naṭāṅkuśa* (16th century A.D.?)—**Virginie Johan** discusses the uses and functions of ritual dance, or rather of 'dancing the ritual' (*kriya*), in the context of the only living practice of ancient Sanskrit drama, namely the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre of Kerala. The fundamental questions posed by the author in her attempt to emphasize "the ritual aspects of dance and its aesthetic resonance in the specific Kerala praxis" concern the reasons and conditions under which dance is interwoven into the theatrical performance at given moments. Having examined the range of distinct features of the ritualistic and acting realms, the author concludes that, in the case of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, dance is attributed with a 'cohesive role', provided by its ritual nature, by which the actors manage to 'touch' the divinity through theatre.

With the aim of sketching the boundaries between ritual and theatre, **Thomas Kintaert** launches the presentation of his vast and detailed study, planned as a series of articles, on ritual performances

in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The first essay focuses on a variety of ritual items, scattered in the various chapters of the *Treatise on Theatre*. By means of a systematic presentation of appropriate data, not only does Kintaert provide us with a rich and sound database for ritual and theatre studies, but he also offers a complex picture of distinct features of ritual performances. This will eventually provide new elements to determine the ritual background of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and fuel the debate on the dating of this text.

The focus of **Natalia Lidova**'s article is the genesis of Indian theatre contextualized within the *pūjā*-cult of the early post-Vedic period. As she argues, such designations as Pañcama Veda and Nāṭyaveda point to the fact that, since the early phase of its development, theatre was in its essence ritualistic and didactic rather than entertaining. In order to support her view, Lidova challenges previous assumptions by demonstrating that the *pūjā* ritual, which she regards as closely connected with the rituals described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, was not associated with the sacrificial cult of the Vedic *yajña*, the latter being often perceived as closely linked to Bharata's text and the origins of Indian theatre. She advances a working hypothesis, according to which theatre originated in the milieu of Atharva-vedins who, in search of a remedy for the socio-religious crisis (symbolically described by the *Nāṭyotpatti* myth of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*), adopted a new form of ritual, namely the *pūjā*. For the sake of promoting the new religion, which can be perceived as an early form of Hinduism, they "started the practice of the religious sermon in the form of scenic performances of the myth, *de facto*, the earliest form of drama".

The essay of **Marianne Pasty-Abdul Wahid** concerns Muṭiyēttu', a ritual theatre performed in the Hindu temples of central Kerala as an offering to the goddess Bhadrakālī. Basing her investigation on ethnographic data, the author discusses how the sequential and highly theatricalized enactment of the myth of *Dārikavadham* ('Slaying of Dārikan [by Bhadrakālī]') accompanied by music played on drums and cymbals and using theatre props, acts at the same time as a ritual which is supposed to bear results for its viewers. In the view

of Pasty-Abdul Wahid, the complexity of Muṭiyēttu', characterized by a blending of theatrical performance and ritual meaning, the boundaries of which are nevertheless blurred, arises from the concept of imitation, seen as a process of embodiment. In the context of Hindu worship, this particular idea "allows the materialization of the goddess—and its culmination in possession—using theatrical and performative tools to create life, hence giving substance and ritual legitimacy to Bhadrakālī's physical manifestation that is at the core of the power assigned to Muṭiyēttu'".

David Pierdominici Leão investigates the connections between theatre and ritual, the latter meant as the undertaking of a rite within the play itself. The point of departure for his considerations is the *Hāsyārṇava*[*prahasana*] by Jagadīśvara Baḥṭṭācārya (14th century A.D.?) which, most probably due to its obscene language and profusion of suggestive sexual elements, happens to be one of the least discussed Sanskrit farces. Like many other plays belonging to the comic genre, the dramatic action of the play is framed by the celebration of the Spring Festival (Vasantotsava). Through its affinities with themes of regeneration, youth and sexuality, the Spring festival is generally associated with the cult of Kāma, the God of Love. The originality of the Vasantotsava's depiction as seen in the *Hāsyārṇava* stems from the fact that its main action is situated in a brothel, where a young and vital courtesan, Vasanta, is going to be ritually initiated into erotic life. In the view of Pierdominici Leão, the grand and public character of the celebration of the Spring Festival is hence mocked through symbolically confining it to a brothel, where a charming woman embodying all aspects of Spring might be ultimately accessed and enjoyed only by a few selected men.

Anna Tosato analyzes the connections between dance and ritual from the perspective of temple sculptures. Her case study focuses on the Hoysalesvara Temple in Halebīd, whose sculptures overflow with dance scenes and postures. Taking into account both the teachings of textual sources on drama and dance (*nāṭya-śāstras*) and the locations of the sculptures within the premises of the temple, Tosato

explores the hypothesis that the temple sculptures were deliberately infused with various meanings applied by the sculptors acquainted with the ‘technical language of dance’. These meanings were in turn analogous to those expressed by certain *karaṇas*—common to both sculpture and theatre—especially used to communicate certain feelings, as for example wonder in the case at hand. In this connection, Tosato also poses the question whether the dance, so to say, locked in a sculpture, might have informed the practice of circumambulating the temple, by communicating to the devotees a peculiar feeling of wonder and awe connected to the temple and the deity enshrined, beside the pleasure of marveling at the lively scenes and postures rendered in stone.

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