

CHAPTER I

TRADITIONS AND TEXTS

Drama in India--The Sanskrit Tradition

The earliest extant drama of the Greeks are the mighty plays of Aeschylus. They emerge glistening from a muddy pool of uncertain depth where the name of Thespis floats just under the surface, fragments of dithyrambs and rhapsodes swim slightly deeper sparkling in the radiant light of Homer, ritual processions and phallic dances stir up the mud on the bottom, a tufted goat grazes on the grass nearby, and Dionysus, invisible, watches from above. The exact origin of drama in Āryan India is even more uncertain and what is probably the earliest extant work of dramatic art is just as spectacular. It is, however, not a monumental play, but rather a startlingly complex, thorough, and detailed manual on the art of acting.

This Nāṭyaśāstra 'Treatise on Dramatic Art', a work of almost 6,000 verses, discusses all the issues Aristotle considers in the Poetics and in addition gives detailed instructions to the actor, the director, the playwright, and the producer of dramatic performances. Aristotle writes his notes on the theatre from the point of view of a knowledgeable and sensitive audience member, analyzing the effect of the drama on its audience in order to understand the mechanisms responsible for that effect. While the Nāṭyaśāstra also concerns itself with the issues of dramatic structure and the effect of dramatic performance, its author, unlike Aristotle, is an actor, director, and producer of plays.

In addition to those elements of the drama which especially interest the audience and critic, he gives details which actors and technicians need in order to put a play on the stage.

Manomohan Ghosh, in the introduction to his English translation of the Nāṭyaśāstra, organizes the topics of the thirty-six chapters as follows:

- i. Mythical origin of theatre, its coming down on the earth (I, XXXVI);
- ii. Construction of a playhouse, a stage, a tiring-room and auditorium, etc., ceremonies relating to the construction (II, III);
- iii. Preliminaries to a dramatic performance: ceremonies including songs, chants, dances, and instrumental music (V);
- iv. Choreographic elements: dance, gestures, and movements of different parts of the body (head, neck, eyes, hands, legs, etc.) and body in some conventional postures (IV, VIII--XIII);
- v. Costumes and make-up (XXIII);
- vi. Classification of plays, analysis of their structure (XX, XXI)
- vii. Poetic aspects of plays, and metres and figures of speech used in them (XV, XVI, XVII);
- viii. Theory of music, metres of songs, chants, elocution, modes of playing instruments (vinas, flutes, and drums) and tālas (time-measure) to be observed during songs, and playing of instruments (XXVII-XXXIII);
- ix. Roles and characters in plays: their classification, description, and training of actors and actresses, members of theatrical troupes, and qualifications of an ideal stage-manager (XXXIV-XXXV, XXII-XXIV);
- x. Criticism of a dramatic performance (XXVII).¹

Strangely, Ghosh leaves out of his list several major topics covered: speech and dialects for the stage (XVIII, XIX); different styles of presentation (XXII); "Harmonious Representation" , i.e., how certain situations and types of characters are represented vocally and bodily (SSIV); and a chapter devoted entirely to dealings with courtesans (XXV).

Yet the most significant chapters, in terms of the attention they receive from later critics and scholars, are chapters six and seven. In them, for the first time in Indian literature, rasa 'sentiment' and bhāva 'emotional state' are defined. Though there are a few later works, like the Abhinayadarpaṇam 'Mirror of Gesture', which are concerned with the details of performance, especially of dance, most later writers on the drama were, like Aristotle, more concerned with the dramatic effect of a play on the audience than with the score of the performance responsible for this effect. The Nāṭyaśāstra brings up aesthetic principles only in order to justify the style of performance. The bulk of the chapters which include the germs of later aesthetic theory give techniques for communicating the emotional states of a character to the spectator. Specific gestures of the hand, arms, eyes, head, even nose are named and analyzed for their effect.

Dates of Indian texts are frequently difficult to pinpoint because the authors tend to regard themselves as mythological rather than historical individuals and early commentators on the works seem uninterested in assigning them specific dates. The Nāṭyaśāstra proves to be especially frustrating in this respect. The earliest extant text may date from no earlier than the eighth century A.D., but several scholars have dated the core of the work around 500 B.C.² The most conservative scholars assign the majority of the text to the the third or fourth century A.D., but also acknowledge that the earliest extant dramas (from the first century) follow the precepts laid down by the Nāṭyaśāstra.³ The dating is confused by the fact that, though the mythology and the language of Nāṭyaśāstra is certainly quite old, there are no extant direct references to it by other writers until the seventh century A.D.⁴

Bharata, the author of the Nāṭyaśāstra, describes himself in the opening chapter of the work as a sage who has received the knowledge of drama and dramatic performance from the gods. At the request of the "high-souled sages" who come to visit him and his one-hundred sons he gives an account, called nāṭyotpatti, of the origin of the drama. It describes how Bharata came to learn dramatic technique from the gods and then produce the first play as a diversion for them. Indian writers often regard the nāṭyotpatti as a factual account of the birth of drama, but modern scholars have dismissed the account as an unreliable source of information⁵ or have tried to find in the myth some remnant of the historical development of the drama⁶ or, seeing mythology as an important medium for the communication of psychological or philosophical information, have mined the story for clues it might give on the meaning of the drama in ancient India.⁷ A brief account of the myth will not be out of order here, for in its course, the classical conception of drama is defined and a foundation is laid for understanding the relationship of the actor to the performance.

Bharata speaks to the "high-souled sages" thusly:

Get yourselves cleansed, be attentive and hear about the origin of the Nāṭyaveda devised by Brahmā. O Brāhmins, in the days of yore when the Golden Age passed with the reign of Svāyambhuva (Manu), and the Silver Age commenced with the career of Vaivasvata Manu, and people became addicted to sensual pleasures, were under the sway of desire and greed, [were benumbed (sammudha)] by jealousy and anger and (thus) found their happiness mixed with sorrow, and Jambudvīpā [the "continent" which included India] protected by the Lokapālas (guardians of the worlds) was full of gods, Dānavas, Gandharvas, Yaksas, Rākṣasas and great Uragas (Nāgas) [i.e., both gods and demons], the gods with the great Indra as their head, (approached) Brahmā and spoke to him, "We want an object of diversion, which must be audible as well as visible. As the . . . Vedas are not to be listened to by those born as Sūdras, be pleased to create another Veda which will belong (equally) to all the Colour-groups (varṇa)."

"Let it be so;" said he in reply and then having dismissed the king of gods (Indra) he resorted to yoga and recalled to mind the

four Vedas.

He then thought: "I shall make a fifth Veda on the Nāṭya with the Semi-historical Tales (itihāsa), which will conduce to duty (dharma), wealth (artha) as well as fame, will contain good counsel and...(traditional maxims), will give guidance to people of the future as well, in all their actions, will be enriched by the teaching of all authoritative works (śāstra) and will give a review of all arts and crafts.⁸

Although the gods, with Indra, the king of the gods, as their spokesperson, ask Brahmā, the creator, for an "object of diversion" (actually krīdanīyakam 'plaything'), when Brahmā resorts to yoga, or complete concentration, to devise the drama, what emerges is not merely a diversion or plaything but an instrument for teaching two of the traditional goals of living (called puruṣārthas): dharma 'duty', and artha 'wealth'. Kāma 'pleasure', the traditional third aim of life is conspicuously absent. Though Indra and his friends want a 'plaything', Brahmā decides to create something that gives more than entertainment: he is eager to exploit drama's potential as an educational tool.

Sitanshu Mehta, in his dissertation "A Comparative Study in Indian and Western Aesthetic Theory" points out the significance of the fact that Bharata has placed the genesis of his drama not in the mythological Golden Age (Kṛta Yuga), the age of perfection, but in the second age of man, the Silver Age (Tretā Yuga).

The high-tide of culture had ebbed away and the period of perfection was over. Drama was not a part of this perfectly structured age. Bharata has selected a period of crisis for the birth of drama.... Drama...is the product of a time of transition and any concept of art-form contained within his theory of drama is shaped within this context.⁹

To create the drama, Brahmā draws speech, song, bodily representation and rasa each from a different one of the four Vedas, the holy books of the Āryans.¹⁰ He calls his design the Fifth Veda and presents it to

Indra, asking him to pass it on to the appropriate gods. Significantly, Indra refuses:

"O the best and holy one, gods are neither able to receive it and to maintain it, nor are they fit to understand it and to make use of it; they are unfit to do anything with the drama."¹¹

So Brahmā himself passes the Nāṭyaveda on to the human sage, or ṛṣi, Bharata and his one-hundred sons, who prepare to present their drama before the gods. At a conference during the preparation of the production, Brahmā seems to rethink his earlier omission of kāma and suggests that Bharata include the "graceful style" appropriate to the Erotic Sentiment (śṛṅgāra rasa) by adding women and gentle movements. To aid the apparently daughterless Bharata, Brahmā creates apsarasas 'nymphs' from his own mind. Nevertheless, these creatures seem to take no part in the first drama.¹²

The first play is performed before the god Indra at the very popular Banner Festival in his honor. It is a violent play depicting the defeat of the Asuras, Daityas and Dānavas by Indra with "altercation and tumult" and "cutting off and piercing of limbs or bodies."¹³ Quite naturally the malevolent creatures thus depicted are upset: "This has put us in an unfavorable light!" they say. Along with the Vignas 'difficulties' they try to interfere with the performance. They "resort to magical power and paralyze the speech, movement, as well as memory of the actors."¹⁴ Indra sees fit to deal with them directly:

Then with eyes turning in anger he, adorned with all bright jewels rose and took up that best banner staff. With this Jarjara, Indra smashed to pulp the Asuras and the Vighnas who were hanging about the stage.¹⁵

It is intriguing to contemplate the relationship between the drama and reality which is here so graphically presented. Both the Asuras, whose

destruction is being imitated by Bharata with his hundred sons and the Vignas, the difficulties which must be overcome to bring any action to a satisfactory conclusion, are "smashed to pulp" by Indra who represents the audience of gods.

Anxious that Indra might not be present at every performance to handle such emergencies, the actors plead for means of protection. So Brahmā requests that a playhouse be built with deities to guard each part and to protect each actor. In addition the gods themselves, applying sound military psychology, encourage Brahmā to try to conciliate the Vignas; and if this does not work, to try offering them gifts; this failing, to create dissention among them; and finally as a last resort to apply force. Brahmā, being an effective and powerful speaker manages to propitiate the Vignas just by analyzing for them the social function of the drama and defining its value for all creation:

In it there is no exclusive representation of you or of the gods: for the drama is a representation of the States of the Three Worlds (i.e., all aspects of life).

Sometimes there is (reference to) duty, sometimes to games, sometimes to money, sometimes to peace, and sometimes laughter is found in it, sometimes fight, sometimes love-making and sometimes killing.

This teaches duty to those who would go against duty, love to those who are ill-bred or unruly, promotes self-restraint in those who are disciplined, gives courage to cowards, energy to heroic persons, enlightens men of poor intellect and gives wisdom to the learned.

This gives diversion to kings, and firmness (of mind) to persons afflicted with sorrow, and (hints of acquiring) money to those who are for earning it, and it brings composure to persons agitated in mind.

The drama I have devised is a mimicry of action and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions, and which depicts different situations. It will relate actions of men good, bad, and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all.

The drama will thus be instructive to all, through actions and States depicted in it, and through Sentiments arising out of it . . . when human nature, with its joys and sorrows, is depicted by means of Representation through Gestures and the like. . . it is called drama.¹⁶

For Bharata, the purpose of dramatic art (nāṭya) is manifold. It provides entertainment, wisdom, guidance, and emotional sustenance, but most important it is an educational tool for an imperfect age when man is no longer complete and requires relief from frustration created by unfulfilled desires. The exploits of heroes, gods, and demons are to be mimicked by human beings for the enlightenment of other human beings and the gods.

The enormous scope of the conception of theatre here presented is reflected in the myriad forms which the drama of the Āryans may take. Four basic styles--bhāratī 'serious', sāttvatī 'heroic', kaiśikī 'graceful' or 'comic', and ārabhatī 'melodramatic' or 'illusionistic'--are combined in various ways to produce the different types of performance structures. The two major and most common forms are the nāṭaka, which has a well-known king or mythological figure as its hero, and the prakaraṇa, which has an original plot. Both may include up to ten acts and each act may cover as much as a whole day's events in the story and be preceded by a prologue which fills in events occurring since the previous act. Some other dramatic forms are the prahasana, a one-act farce, the vyāyoga, a one-act drama of battle and conflict, and the bhāṇa, a one-act monologue on erotic themes. The Nāṭyaśāstra also mentions solo dances, short sketches or blackouts, simple songs and poems acted out by women, etc. as forms of performance. Altogether more than 35 types of theatrical events are defined by Bharata. Elaborate rules are laid down for the thematic content, structure, and character types permissible in each form.¹⁷

Nowhere else in the ancient world is there a conception of drama which has a theory and practice of such complexity as that described in the Nāṭyaśāstra. It is surprising to realize that only Greece and India devel-

oped a true drama (i.e. a drama with a written text and with actors playing scenes). Both the Romans and the Medieval churchman had the Greek drama before them as models, as the dramatists of China and Japan had the Indian. It may be that even the Indians got the idea of drama from the Greeks during the invasion of Alexander in the third century B.C., but it is not impossible that ancient Greek travellers to India might have seen dramatic performances in India before the fifth century B.C. and returned to Athens to report them. (This idea has never been seriously considered by scholars, but if the Indian drama is really as ancient as some researchers have suggested it is not out of the question.) However, if the impulse to create drama came first from Greece or India, the evolution that followed in each area led to a drama of vastly different form and content. Though not the equal of the Greek drama in emotional size and international influence, the Indian drama is undeniably richer in detail and in theory.

A "deep mystery" still hangs over the problem of the historical origin of the Sanskrit drama.¹⁸ In the earliest literature of the Āryans there might be remnants of a drama and references to actors, but the evidence does not point conclusively to the existence of true drama. In the Rgveda, the most ancient work of the Āryan tribes, there are hymns which are in dialogue form and whose exact purpose is unknown. These hymns have no function in the later ritual form taken by the Veda and recited in Vedic sacrifices. They seem to be a remnant of a style of poetry which died out in the later Vedic period.¹⁹ Certain scholars, impressed by the Cambridge school's investigation of the ritual origins of Greek tragedy, attempted to connect these hymns with a ritual drama out of which the later classical drama grew. Some of these hymns are fascinating as poetry and they suggest to modern ears some sort of dramatic presentation. In the most dramatic of

these, King Purūravas confronts the nymph Urvaṣī who has been stolen from him. Some have argued that the Vedic dialogues were in fact acted out by priests who took the roles of gods and divine creatures. Most scholars have severely criticized this view.²⁰ There is no evidence to support a direct relationship between the dialogue hymns and the drama, and the major charm of the arguments supporting a Vedic origin of the drama is their ingenuity. (The same might be said for the conclusions of the Cambridge school.) Since Else has put forward such convincing arguments that the Greek theatre was the creative invention of two inspired individuals, Thespis and Aeschylus,²¹ the whole question of the interrelationship between the ritual of a "primitive" people and the drama has been looked at in a different light.

Keith turns to the ritual practices of the Vedic Āryans and finds certain dramatic elements there which he takes to be germs of the later drama. He claims that there were moments when the performers of the rites "assumed for the time being personalities other than their own."²² Certainly the ritual itself can have a powerfully dramatic effect. The film The Altar of Fire by J. F. Stall and Robert Gardner, which records the 12 day Agnicayana ritual gives a sense of the dramatic potential and emotional power of a major Vedic ritual.²³ But the priests are not taking on roles, and it is extremely doubtful that there were true dramas during the early ritual period. Keith notes that in the Yajurveda there are long lists of "persons of every kind covering every possible sort of occupation, and the term nata, which is normally the designation of the actor in the later literature, is unknown."²⁴ There were probably dancers and singers and no actors.

Pāṇini, a grammarian of the fourth century B.C. mentions Nāṭasūtras 'manuals for naṭas' ascribed to Śilālin and Kṛṣāśva. Keith and Konow argue that these naṭas cannot be regarded as actors per se but only as 'mimists'. Nāṭa is derived from the root nṛt 'to dance' and the naṭas are presumed to be popular performers who may sing, dance, tell stories, and perform tricks, but not take part in dramas:

Now all that we have seen above agrees with the belief that the art of the naṭas--the old popular mimists occurred principally in dance, song, and instrumental music. Not only one sees them--but also hears them and they are mentioned frequently in combination with dance and song and occasionally with sweet words. They appeared in festival gatherings, which are mentioned as . . . samāja, where all kinds of amusements were found--principally dance, song, and music, besides other sources of entertainments like stick-fight, ring-fight, all kinds of juggler's tricks and so also fights between hens and other beasts. The visit to such gatherings was prohibited to the snātaka [the upper three castes of Hindus] as well as to the Buddhist monks,--a phenomenon which speaks of its popularity and also of its high age.²⁵

From this it is apparent that, though street entertainment was very popular among ancient North Indians, the Brāhmins discouraged Āryan attendance at, let alone participation in, these kinds of performances. This attitude is a far cry from the respect that Bharata expects in the Nāṭyaśāstra for his actors.

Keith sees in the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali, dated about 140 B.C., evidence of the killing of the wicked Kaṃsa and the binding of the evil Bali by actors in dumbshow. Keith takes this reference to the acting out of epic stories to be the first positive indication of the existence of drama.²⁶ Byrski, on the other hand, argues that since there is no reason to assume that naṭa mentioned by Pāṇini in the fourth century B.C. does not have the meaning that it has in later times, there is still a distinct possibility that these naṭas were actors as we under-

stand the term.

Byrski and other scholars (Keith not among them) place Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra between 321 and 296 B.C. It is primarily a treatise on politics and administration. In it there are several references to naṭas and other performers, but since there is no mention of nāṭya 'drama' it is not certain that these performers were actors in true drama. However, the Arthaśāstra is a lively source of information on political attitudes toward performers. Kauṭilya employs several different terms for entertainers in addition to naṭa, including nartaka 'dancer', gāyaka 'singer', vādaka 'musician', vāgjjivan 'story-teller', and kuśṭlava 'bard'. All these entertainers are relegated to the lowest classes of society. Naṭas are "thieves in effect, if not in name."²⁷ The author objects to kings taking time out of their duties for entertainment, for their subjects invariably suffer as a result. "He is unmoved by the entertainers' aesthetic appeal but practical enough to exploit their utility."²⁸ He admits that performers may be very useful in espionage activities and even encourages them to help a prince who is being kept as a hostage in a foreign territory to escape by digging a secret tunnel for him or smuggling him out with the musical instruments! He suggests that during performances the entertainers should make the "chiefs of the ruling council fall for beautiful young dancers of the troupe and make them quarrel among themselves at the cost of their unity."²⁹ Even though a king may have kept entertainers at court or offered state patronage to them, it hardly seems as though his motives would have been artistic or cultural. The Arthaśāstra is particularly pragmatic with respect to artists, still it is certainly true that performers of Kauṭilya's time were not in the upper strata of ancient North Indian society nor were they regarded with

any particular respect by the ruling classes. As true drama emerged, at least by the early centuries of the Christian era, poets, and perhaps actors as well, became more respectable members of the society. It may be, as Shekhar tries to prove, that the South Indian respect for the arts is reflected in the Nāṭyaśāstra and may have influenced this gradual shift in attitude. The plays themselves, as we shall see, show in certain poetic usages the influence of the Dravidian literary tradition.

What is probably the earliest dramatic text extant exists only in fragments. The author is Aśvaghōṣa, who is well known otherwise for his Buddhacarita, a popular narrative of the life of the Buddha. Aśvaghōṣa has been dated to the middle of the second century A.D.³⁰ On the basis of the fragments his drama seems to have followed the precepts of the Nāṭyaśāstra.³¹

The next extant plays probably are the thirteen ascribed to Bhāsa. They evidence a fully developed dramatic tradition which, in the main, follows the outlines dictated by the Nāṭyaśāstra.³²

All the plays ascribed to Bhāsa were once a part of the repertoire of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, and the manuscripts of the plays have been found only in Kerala, the South Indian home of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Yet the plays were most probably written in the North, and they brilliantly represent the Sanskrit dramatic tradition at an early stage. Abhiṣekanāṭaka, one of the plays which is currently performed by Kūṭiyāṭṭam actors, will be analyzed in the following pages as an example of the form of drama evolved by the Āryans.

In 1912, T. Gaṇapati Sāstrī published for the first time manuscripts of thirteen Sanskrit plays he had found in Kerala. The names of the

author or authors were not mentioned in the manuscripts though it is the usual practice in classical Sanskrit drama to do so. Sāstrī argued that all the plays were the work of one playwright, and he concluded that that playwright was Bhāsa, a writer who had before been known only by reputation and by a few scattered quotes from his work in other sources. In several of these sources a play called Svapnavāsavadattā 'The Dream of Vāsavadattā' was associated with the name of Bhāsa, and this play was found among the thirteen. Many scholars accepted Sāstrī's assignment of these plays to Bhāsa, though the issue was hotly argued. It has given rise to an enormous number of vehement articles by Sanskrit scholars both in India and the West.³³

The first objections to ascribing the works to Bhāsa came from Kerala. A few scholars who knew the plays to be in the repertoire of Kūṭiyāṭṭam argued that at least some of the plays were written in the South, perhaps by Cākyārs, the actors of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. These arguments were severely trounced by other scholars.³⁴

Of Bhāsa himself little is known other than what can be gathered from the plays themselves. He was an inspiration to later poets like Kālidāsa and was highly regarded in classical times. The dating of the plays is another highly controversial issue. Scholars have variously assigned the writing to almost every century from 6th century B.C. to 11th century A.D.³⁵

The stories of six of the plays come from the Mahābhārata and two come from the Rāmāyana. The Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana are the two great epics of India; they are the source of the majority of India's classical literary works. The other five plays come from stories of

Kṛṣṇa, from katha 'story' literature, and folklore. Several of the Mahābhārata plays are one-acts--vyāyogas and utsrṣṭikāṅkas--and there is a three-act samavakāra. They are the only extant examples of these types of shorter plays. The two plays based on the epic Rāmāyaṇa are nātakas of six and seven acts. Abhiṣekanātaka is one of these.

The Rāmāyaṇa is the more literary of the two great epics. It is probably later than the main narrative portions of the Mahābhārata, though the Mahābhārata, running to 90,000 stanzas, four times the length of the Rāmāyaṇa, has seen many later emendations, among which is a summary of the events of the shorter epic. Both works probably had a long history of oral presentation before they were committed to writing in the last centuries before Christ. Bhāsa assumes an audience intimate with the epics and so understanding the plays based on them requires knowledge of the myth.

The events of the Rāmāyaṇa concern the royal family of Ayodhyā, the modern Oudh in Uttar Pradesh, in Northern India. The king Daśaratha has three wives and four sons. Rāma is the oldest son; the others are Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna. Rāma wins the hand of Sītā in an archery contest and is about to be installed on the throne of his aging father when Kaikeyī, the mother of Bharata, demands that a boon she had won from the king be granted to her immediately: she wants her son crowned and Rāma banished. When Rāma hears of Kaikeyī's request he insists that it be fulfilled, though Bharata and the rest of the court object. Rāma voluntarily goes into exile with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa who ask to accompany him. Daśaratha, left behind, dies of grief; Bharata takes the throne but only as a regent for Rāma.

In the forest, Lakṣmaṇa constructs a hut at Pañcavatī for Rāma and Sītā, and the brothers wound and kill many demons who are disturbing the meditations of ascetics. Śūrpaṅakhā, the sister of Rāvaṇa, the demon King of Laṅkā, is one of their victims. She rushes to her brother with her ears and nose cut off by Lakṣmaṇa and insists that she be avenged. Rāvaṇa accordingly devises a ruse and steals Sītā, carrying her off in his aerial chariot. The brothers, following Sītā's trail to the south, make an alliance with Sugrīva, a vanara 'monkey', and Rāma seals it by killing Sugrīva's brother Bāli, who has usurped Sugrīva's throne and stolen his wife. Sugrīva, now the king, sends out emissaries to find Sītā. Hanūmān, a monkey general, leaps from India to Laṅkā and locates Rāvaṇa's palace and nearby, in an Aśoka garden, the captive Sītā. With the aid of the demon Vibīṣaṇa who defects to Rāma's camp, the army of monkeys and bears assembled by Sugrīva bridges the strait to Laṅkā. After many battles Rāma slays Rāvaṇa, the demons are defeated, and Sītā is rescued. In order to prove that she has remained chaste in spite of Rāvaṇa's seductive advances to her while a captive, Sītā throws herself into a fire. Agni, the fire god, knowing that she is innocent, saves her from burning. Rāma returns to Ayodhyā and is crowned the king. In a strange and fascinating epilogue, rather embarrassing to most modern Indians because of the shadow it throws on Rāma's character, the people of Ayodhyā begin to doubt Sītā's purity in spite of her ordeal by fire. Rāma, whose duty as king is to please his subjects orders her banishment. Years later they meet again, Sītā presents Rāma with twin sons who were born in the interval, and calls upon Mother Earth to swallow her up if she is indeed innocent. The earth opens, and she disappears. Rāma returns to heaven and again takes the form of the god Viṣṇu.

Both the Rāmāyaṇa plays of Bhāsa end with the coronation of the hero, but the bodies of the plays concentrate on different aspects of the story. The Pratimānāṭaka 'Statue Play' begins early in the story with the preparations for the first coronation of Rāma (Act I) and proceeds through the epic, highlighting major incidents until the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa (Act VI). Then the play skips to after the war, the events of the interval being briefly recounted in an interlude, and ends with the brothers' reunion and the coronation of Rāma (Act VII). The Abhisekanāṭaka 'Coronation Play' takes as its organizing theme three coronations from the Rāmāyaṇa, and it dramatizes the events leading up to them. Thus the death of Bālī and the subsequent coronation of Sugrīva as King of the Monkeys is the subject of Act I. Acts II-V relate Hanūmān's visit to Sītā, his capture by Rāvaṇa and subsequent escape, Vibīṣana's banishment after he tries to convince Rāvaṇa to release Sītā, and the battle in Laṅkā leading to the killing of Rāvaṇa and the coronation of Vibīṣana. Finally Act VI treats of Sītā's ordeal by fire and the coronation of Rāma with Sītā as his queen.

Bhāsa's two Rāmāyaṇa plays are both represented today in the repertoire of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The two plays taken together with Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi, another seven-act nāṭaka based on the Rāmāyaṇa and definitely written by a Southern playwright, create a 20-act epic which dramatizes the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa. A Kramadīpikā, or actors manual, gives details for performing all 20 acts of these plays in Kūṭiyāṭṭam style.³⁶ A complete presentation of this epic drama was to have taken a full year. Today only two acts of Pratimānāṭaka and two acts of Abhisekanāṭaka are still staged.

Though the Abhisekanāṭaka is not very highly regarded by critics

because it lacks the invention of some of Bhāsa's other plays, its straightforward presentation of some of the best-loved scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa has contributed to its popularity in Kerala. The acts of it still performed, Acts I and III, tell the stories of the death of Bāli and Rāvaṇa's capture of Hanūmān respectively. Act I is known as Bālivadhā 'The Slaying of Bāli' and Act III is known as Toraṇayuddhā 'The Battle at the Gates'.³⁷

As the name implies, the Abhiṣeka is a nāṭaka, which is the chief of the ten major types of play defined in the Nāṭyaśāstra:

The Nāṭaka has for its subject matter a well-known story, for its hero a celebrated person of [self-controlled] nature. It describes the character of a person born in the line of the royal seers, his divine protection, his many superhuman powers, his exploits and successes, and his amorous pastimes. It has a suitable number of acts and interludes.

When the joys and sorrows of kings are revealed in acts expressing in various ways the Psychological States (bhāva) and Sentiments (rasa) it is called a Nāṭaka.³⁸

A single rasa is to dominate the nāṭaka. Though in the majority of classical plays the rasa is śṛṅgāra 'erotic' and the plot therefore revolves around the amorous exploits of the hero and heroine, in Abhiṣeka the rasa is vīra 'heroism' and all the elements of the drama are constructed in order to bring out this emotional value.

Only certain types of characters are permitted to be the heroes a nāṭaka. These types fall into four general categories; the self-controlled and light-hearted, the self-controlled and calm, the self-controlled and haughty, and the self-controlled and exalted. Rāma is of the latter category for he is of "great strength and nobility, firm of purpose, but free from vanity, forbearing, and without egotism."³⁹ The nāṭaka must have from five to ten acts, each act covering a maximum

of one-day's events, with no more than a year between the acts. Any act may be preceded by an introductory scene which, through the dialogue of some minor characters, informs the audience of events that have occurred since the last act. The act itself should focus on the hero and/or heroine. The whole play is expected to end happily--no tragedy is permitted--though the death of secondary characters is occasionally the subject of an act, such as Act I of Abhiṣeka.⁴⁰

The focus of the action of the play is to be the quest of the hero for something he desires. In the case of Abhiṣeka, Rāma's goal is the rescue of Sītā from Rāvaṇa. The principle subject matter of the play (ādhikārika) is concerned with actions directly related to this principle objective of the hero; the incidental actions (prāsaṅgika) are secondary episodes and though they may not be directly related to the goal, they should at least indirectly further its achievement. Thus the killing of Bāli in Abhiṣeka is a prāsaṅgika: though it does not actually move Rāma closer to finding Sītā, it secures an alliance with Sugrīva who then is willing to send out his army to find her. Thus, the Nāṭyaśāstra insists that all actions in a play be related in some way to the hero's major objective. This injunction will certainly be familiar to Western actors conversant with Stanislavski's concept of the super objective.

Stanislavski's thru-line-of-action, at least that of the hero of the drama, is also defined in general terms in Indian dramatic theory. The action of the nāṭaka is to proceed in five stages (avasthās) leading to the attainment of the desire (phala 'fruit') of the hero. These avasthās are: 1) ārambha, the 'beginning' of desire to gain the fruit;

2) prayatna, determined 'effort' to gain it; 3) prāpti-sambhava, when the hero suspect that there is a 'possibility of attaining' the end; 4) niyatā phala-prāpti or niyatāpti when there is 'certainty of attaining the goal; and finally phala-yoga or phalagama, when the fruit belongs to the hero.⁴¹

The Nāṭyaśāstra also makes a significant observation about the avasthās: that these five successive stages of an action are the same for any action begun by any person looking for a result.⁴² The drama is to be like life in that the action of the hero is to follow the pattern of any action in life. Of course in life we may not be aware of these five stages while in the nāṭaka each of the five stages must be dramatized. In other, shorter, more decorative types of entertainment all of the five stages may not be shown, but in the nāṭaka all the avasthās--desire, effort, continuation, assurance or obstruction, and conclusion--must be clearly delineated.⁴³ The actors and the dramatists are to understand this pattern so that the logical steps toward the completion of an action are clearly presented to the audience. It may seem simplistic that any action begins with a desire for some fruit and that the gaining of that fruit is to proceed in a logical series of steps, but Stanislavski revolutionized the training of the actor by re-emphasizing these very ideas--that the actor must have an objective and he must proceed to his goal via a logical thru-line-of-action. The Nāṭyaśāstra in its analysis of action concentrates on the action of the hero, but when it states that all actions are to have the characteristics of the action of the hero it implies that the action of every character in the play should also conform to this pattern, though the playwright is not obligated to show each stage or even clarify the objective of these minor

characters. The Nāṭyaśāstra presents a system of analyzing characters in the drama in terms of objective and thru-line-of-action which it expects both the playwright and actor to understand and utilize.

M. Christopher Byrski in Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre argues that this view of action lies deep in the Vedic tradition. He compares the nāṭya to the yajña 'Vedic sacrifice', which the Āryans regarded as the penultimate and archtypal action. The yajña is a complex ritual with priests carrying out prescribed actions mirroring a mythological event, very much as the drama is a mirror of events which it represents. In the mythological sacrifice the gods are the actors and the action proceeds in five stages, as does the drama: desire, effort, continuation, obstruction, and conclusion. In the mythology of the sacrifice as it is presented in the Brāhmaṇas (the books attached to each of the Vedas explaining how the ritual is to be performed) the impulse for the ritual comes from the desire of the gods for some end: "The gods desirous of smiting death, the evil, and desiring identity of world and union with Brahman saw this Abhiplava six-day rite." The Rgveda itself states, "In the nāṭya also the first stage, ārambha is defined as the awareness of the desire to gain some end. As in the drama, in the sacrifice the end is kept firmly in sight throughout:

The gods Agni, Indra, Soma, Makha, Vishnu and the Viśve Devaḥ. . . performed a sacrificial session. They entered upon the session thinking "May we attain excellence, may we become glorious, may we become eaters of food". . .they spake, "Whoever of us through austerity, fervour, faith, sacrifice and oblations shall first encompass the end of the sacrifice, he shall be the most excellent of us, and shall be in common to us all."⁴⁹

But inevitably, along the way, the Asuras, created by Prajāpati along with the gods, come to disturb the sacrifice:

. . . the Asuric force of darkness and evil has unceasingly been engaged against the action of the gods. Sometimes the gods in order to defend themselves construct ramparts, strongholds or enclosures. Sometimes they hurl bricks at the Asuras or employ any other conceivable means of defense. . . In other cases they entrust the defense to one of the gods.⁴⁶

This god is most often Indra, the god who also saved the drama from attack by evil forces in the nāṭyotpatti. Finally these opposing forces are overcome and the sacrifice is completed.

Thus in the mythology of the ritual, it is through the ritual as performed by human beings that the gods are able to obtain what they desire. But at the same time the yajamāna, the human being for whom the earthly sacrifice is performed by the priests, also receives benefits. In its mythology the sacrifice is designed to reconstruct the dismembered body of Prajāpati, the creator. Byrski argues that in so doing it fulfills all desire, both of the gods and of human beings:

Multiplicity and separation give birth to desire. The sacrifice is designed so as to overcome that multiplicity and separation at the very root of it--viz, it is conceived as the reconstruction of Prajāpati's dismembered body. Once the multiplicity and separation cease to exist, the desire having been thus fulfilled disappears as well. That is to say, once the dismembered body of the Lord of the Creatures has been reconstructed, the universal metaphysical cause of the existence of desire in any form and scale and at any place disappears. This is why the desires of those who perform the sacrifice are fulfilled.⁴⁷

The drama in order to represent the true states of the three worlds must also utilize the pattern of action of the sacrifice, the archtypal action as perceived by the Āryans, in its plot structure. Kūṭiyāṭṭam, however, presents only one act of a play at a time and so the grand sweep of the action of the play paralleling the events of the Āryan sacrifice is lost. As we shall see, the pattern of action Kūṭiyāṭṭam takes is more consonant with temple worship in Kerala than with the Āryan sacrifice itself.

The Sanskrit drama is not written entirely in Sanskrit. Certain characters speak various dialects of Sanskrit called Prākritis. Seven major dialects are specified by the Nāṭyaśāstra; it indicates which characters are to speak Sanskrit and which Prākrit and in some cases which of the several Prākritis the latter are to speak. Heroes, most Brāhmans, ministers, gods, and the like are assigned Sanskrit while women (except heavenly nymphs, queens, and educated courtesans), children, persons of low birth, lunatics, the Viḍūṣaka 'jester', etc. speak Prākrit. Sometimes the Nāṭyaśāstra gets very specific: Māgadhī is assigned to guards of the royal harem and to heroes "while in difficulty" for their self protection; Oḍri (one of the minor dialects) is to be assigned to diggers of subterranean passages, prison-wardens, and grooms for horses; Śābarī to charcoal-makers and hunters. Originally these Prākritis may have been dialects spoken in partially Āryanized regions of India but in the extant dramas they are artificial languages, primarily phonetic variants of Sanskrit.⁴⁸

In literary form the drama alternates short four-line verses of various meters with prose passages. The plot moves forward in prose comparable to opera recitative, while the verses, like opera lyrics, generally nurture a particular emotional state or describe a place or event. Verses are almost always in Sanskrit; few Prākrit-speaking characters have verses.

Since its method of presentation in Kūṭiyāṭṭam will be discussed in detail below, a brief analysis of the literary form and content of Abhiṣekanāṭaka 'The Coronation Play' will be given here. Abhiṣekanāṭaka begins, as do all Sanskrit plays, with a prologue (called sthāpanā in

Bhāsa) in which the Stage Manager (sūtradhāra) and an assistant introduce the subject matter of the play. The opening śloka 'verse', called maṅgalaśloka 'auspicious verse', asks for the protection of a deity or hero, often the hero of the play if appropriate, as it is in Abhiṣeka:

He who drove off those who disturbed Viśvāmitra's sacrifice,
He who overcame the valour of Virādha, Khara and Dūṣāna in battle,
He who slew the arrogant Kabandha and the haughty King of Monkeys
He who demolished the family of the King of Demons,
May He (Rāma) protect us.⁴⁹

The first three events referred to in the verse have happened before the play begins; the last two occur during the course of the play. The assistant then enters and asks in verse the source of the piercing sounds he hears. The Sūtradhāra answers him in a few lines of prose and so fills in more of the background of the play--the noise he hears is the battle cry of Sugrīva who is about to meet his brother Bāli in face-to-face combat.⁵⁰ He concludes the prologue with a verse in the common śloka meter.

Now Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa have arrived
To return to Sugrīva the kingdom he lost
Just as Hari and Hara
Gave Heaven back to Indra.⁵¹

The Stage Manager and his assistant then retire and Rāma, Sugrīva, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanūmān enter together. Rāma has the first verse, and it sets the tone of the act and of the play.

Rāma: Sugrīva! This way, follow me--
On this day your enemy will soon fall to the ground
His body pierced, chopped, and shattered by my arrows.
O King! Abandon your fear and stay close to me
And today you will see Bāli slain in the fight.

The Sanskrit verses of the dramas are written, for the most part, in strict rhythmical patterns in which the length of every syllable is

specified. Hundreds of different meters have been used by the classical playwrights; fifteen different meters appear in the Abhiṣeka alone.

This verse is in vasantatilikā meter. Each quarter verse (pada) has the following pattern:

- - u - u u u -, u u - u - -

The accents come on syllables with long vowels or syllables ending in one or more consonants. There are no real stress accents in Sanskrit, so the metrical effect is more subtle than in English rhythmic patterns but still pervasive.

The play begins on a high note; the violent battle between Bāli and Sugrīva is imminent. Intense beginnings are common in Sanskrit plays. Bhāsa's Svapnavāsavadattā begins with guards yelling "Out of the way!" in order to clear a path for the royal procession. Kālidāsa's Śakuntalā begins with the king and his charioteer racing through the forest after a deer, and his Vikramorvaśī 'The Hero and the Nymph', which is a dramatization of the story of Purūravas and Urvaśī, begins with the nymphs crying out for help. Other examples could be sighted, and though it is certainly not a universal characteristic of the drama, it is a frequent device. Little more than a brief prologue introducing the story is needed as exposition, for the stories are already familiar to the audiences, and so the dramatist often strives for immediate emotional impact. In Abhiṣeka the heroism of Rāma is given immediate display. His opening speech is the last in a series of actions and arguments designed to convince the ousted monkey ruler to trust him to kill Bāli and re-install Sugrīva on the throne he deserves. To do so Rāma paints a vivid picture of the shattered Bāli who can no longer harm

Sugrīva and then encourages him with his pro-offered protection. He gives him courage to face Bāli in the battle which is to follow. It is a simple verse, but it is an effective way of introducing a drama which is designed to show the heroism and valor of the central figure.

There are many qualities of the Sanskrit drama which might be difficult for a Westerner to appreciate. One of them is the apparent infallibility of the heroes and heroines. Rāma has so many good qualities and his course of action so obvious and apparently easy for him that it is difficult, especially in this play, to find any human foibles in his character which would allow audience identification. Even Superman has his Kryptonite; Rāma seems undaunted and cool in the face of every obstacle. Among the responses to such a criticism, two seem especially significant. In the first place Indians seem willing to accept perfection of character while Westerners tend to suspect it. They embrace the idea that it is possible for a human being to become perfect; it is deeply imbedded in their religious thought to expect a certain number of individuals in every generation to be fully realized, and they see their mythological heroes and heroines as embodiments of that perfection. These heroes may still struggle with the exigencies of human existence---a perfect being is not one who has no problems, but one who takes care of each difficulty in its course, without strain, worry or uncertainty. Though he may seem racked by despair, deeply in love, or full of terrifying anger, he is still in perfect self-control, never overwhelmed by emotion but only displaying it in order to influence others.⁵²

In the second place, thorough understanding of the given circumstances, taken for granted by the Indian playwright and rarely emphasized, may alter one's perception of the hero, and Bhāsa, in the very simplicity

and directness of his writing, allows certain ambiguities of character to remain where later writers would have felt obligated to clarify and prettify them. For example in Abhiṣeka Rāma appears to approach the killing of Bāli with startling casualness. Bāli and Sugrīva are in the midst of their hand-to-hand combat. Bāli is roaring dreadfully, burning with rage like the all-consuming fire (verse 13). Sugrīva's nobility slackens as in the midst of the fray he reverts to acting like a simple beast (verse 14). Sugrīva falls, Hanūmān rushes to Rāma: "My master is weakened. Remember your pledge." (verse 15) Rāma replies: "Hanūmān, don't be anxious. I will attend to it." He shoots an arrow. "Ah! Bāli has fallen." With utmost casualness Rāma shoots the evil Bāli in the back in the midst of the fight. To the spectator who knows his Ramāyana this action is full of complexity and irony. Bāli, the eldest brother in the royal family, had first claim to the throne. He was also the greatest fighter of his race. In the course of protecting his kingdom, he had chased a demon into a cave telling Sugrīva who was following him to guard the entrance until his return. Sugrīva waited one year. Then a horrible noise issued from the cave and blood poured out from the entrance. Sugrīva, eager for the throne himself, jumped to the hasty conclusion that Bāli was dead and pulled a huge rock before the mouth of the cave. He then took the throne and began to rule. Some time later Bāli returned. He had in fact killed the demon. It was the demon's blood that had spewed forth, and Bāli had barely escaped through the blockaded mouth of the cave with his life. He banished Sugrīva and took Sugrīva's wife for his queen.

Rāma's killing of Bāli is taken as an example of the morally questionable acts even heroes are forced to perform in this corrupted present

age called Kaliyuga. Sugrīva comes to Rāma as a suppliant, and it is Rāma's duty as a Kṣatriya 'warrior' to accept him. When Sugrīva asks Rāma to kill Bāli he must also accept the charge, and in exchange Sugrīva pledges to hunt for Sītā with his army of monkeys. Also, because of a boon from Indra manifested in a golden necklace he wears around his neck, Bāli can never be vanquished in face-to-face combat. Rāma must kill Bāli from behind while he is off guard, for example when he is fighting with Sugrīva. The ethical complexity of this situation is not spelled out by Bhāsa but it is suggested by the thoroughly unsatisfactory arguments Rāma gives for his slaying of Bāli. Bāli falls and then regains consciousness in order to upbraid Rāma for his ignoble act:

Bāli--O Rāma, is it right for you, a hero following the dharma of kings, to cheat me so foully in battle? You are supposed to be free from confusion about what is right and to put an end to deceit among the people. O Rāghava, though you wear bark like an ascetic, your action contradicts your dress. It was certainly unworthy of you to slay me stealthily while I was fighting with my brother.

Rāma--What, you say this act is unworthy of me?

Bāli--Do you doubt it?

Rāma--It is not so. You see
Beasts may be slaughtered by resorting to snares and concealment. You were taken by me from behind because you are a beast and deserve to die.

Bāli--You think that I deserved to be punished?

Rāma--Do you doubt it?

Bāli--Why?

Rāma--For adultery.

Bāli--For adultery? But monkeys are allowed to do that.

Rāma--Sir, is it right at all,
That you, the Lord of the Monkeys, who can distinguish between right and wrong should be able to take your brother's wife, arguing that you are a beast? . . .

Bāli--But how is it that I alone am punished for embracing my brother's wife, O Rāghava?

Rāma--Because an elder brother should never touch the wife of a younger brother.

Bāli--Alas! I have no answer. (verse 17 ff)

The two arguments Rāma gives here are indeed the two arguments that Vālmīki gives to Rāma in the Rāmāyaṇa, though here they are given in the reverse order. Not unreasonably most commentators react to them unfavorably. Griffith in his translation of the Rāmāyaṇa notes of this passage:

I cannot understand how Vālmīki could put such an excuse as this into Rāma's mouth. Rāma with all solemn ceremony has made a league of alliance with Bāli's younger brother whom he regards as a dear friend and almost as an equal, and now he winds up his reasons for killing Bāli by coolly saying: "Besides you are only a monkey, you know, after all and as such I have every right to kill you how, when, and where I like."⁵³

The modern interpretation of the killing of Bāli is succinctly summed up by Rajagopalachari in his version of the Rāmāyaṇa:

Vaalmeeki has it that Raama gave some explanation with which Vaali [Bāli] was satisfied. But I am omitting all this as pointless and pray that the learned may forgive me. What I think is that an avataar is an avataar and that among the sorrows that the Lord and His consort had to endure in their earthly incarnation, this liability to have their actions weighed on the earthly scales is a part.⁵⁴

Bhāsa strengthens Rāma's arguments by reversing their order and calling on Bāli's duty to obey the law, and yet his coldness and two-faced attitude towards Bāli's monkeyhood is if anything thrown into relief by the brevity of the argument. He is merely a beast so he can be killed in any manner, but he deserves to be punished because as a conscious being he is expected to live by human law regarding the taking of women in marriage, though monkeys are usually exempt from such rules. Dramatists

often feel obligated to clean up the moral flaws in their hero's character, but Bhāsa keeps Rāma thoroughly ensconced in his.

Bhāsa even encourages the audience to sympathize strongly with Bāli, one of the villains of the play. After Rāma squelches Bāli's arguments, Sugrīva approaches Bāli and weeps for his brother's fate, but Bāli urges him to silence his grief. Women, crying offstage, are prevented from entering. Bāli's son Aṅgada enters and falls to the ground lamenting his father's agonies as death approaches. Bāli apologizes to Rāma for their behavior and then offers Sugrīva the golden necklace which has protected him until now. His final speech--

Bāli (having sipped water)--Life appears to leave me. Great rivers like the Ganges and nymphs like Urvaṣī have come to me. I see a chariot drawn by a thousand swans. It is the car which Death sends to take heroes to him. Very well. Here, I am coming.

Thus the heroes in the Sanskrit drama are not always without stain, and the villains are not denied sympathetic, even sentimental, portrayal. Though the end may be clear from the beginning, as is the case of almost all epic stories, and though happy endings are certainly the rule and this "little tragedy" which Bhāsa permits in the first act of Abhiṣeka the exception, the characters are certainly not always black and white, especially to those who know the myth well enough to fathom the implications of the actions presented,

Several technical devices used in the drama are important for its general effect. Some of these have been adopted or adapted by Kūṭiyāṭṭam and so they will be briefly examined here. Monologues and asides taken directly to the audience are frequent. Often two people inhabit the stage together for a considerable time while either one or both do

not know of the other's presence. Thus the second act of Abhiṣeka begins with the captive Sītā on stage surrounded by rākṣasīs 'female demons' lamenting her fate. Hanūmān, having just jumped over the sea, enters, describes Laṅkā's capital, and walks around the stage as if exploring the whole city looking for Sītā. Then he says he is entering the Aśoka garden (where Sītā is being held prisoner). In two verses he describes the beauty of the garden. Finally he sees her. In fact she has been next to him on stage all the time. The Sanskrit stage cannot, according to the descriptions given of it in the Nāṭyaśāstra, have been a very large one, so considerable suspension of disbelief is required to accept the reality of this scene.⁵⁵

Apparently there were few properties and little or no scenery on the Sanskrit stage. The burden of setting the scene is taken up by elaborate descriptions. Characters may spend several verses describing where they are or what they are seeing. The playwrights take considerable advantage of the freedom of movement that results from such a convention. Characters often cover large distances in the course of a few lines, even fly through the air or climb a tree in an instant. Place often reflects or contradicts the state of mind of the characters in it, or it may be used in other ironic ways by the dramatist. Hanūmān spends five verses and several prose passages describing the beauty of Laṅkā. Later when Hanūmān reeks havoc with the city and destroys a good portion of it, the audience can identify with the anguish Rāvaṇa feels at the news.

In contrast to the more abstract drama of the Greeks, the Sanskrit drama is firmly grounded in place and environment. Metaphors drawn from nature appear in almost every verse. Hanūmān searching for Sītā

finally catches a glimpse of some radiant object in the distance. As he approaches he sees it is a woman.

Hanūmān--Who is this lady? Surrounded by hideous demonesses,
a woman with a slender waist gleams like a streak of light-
ning in the midst of dark clouds.

He draws closer and realizes that it is indeed Sītā and that her brilliance comes from the austerities she has submitted herself to in order to keep herself from yielding to Rāvaṇa's advances.

Her mind must be set on her husband for her body,
emaciated by fasting, has a waist the span of a hand.
She wears a single braid that looks like a black snake.
Her face is bathed in tears. She looks like a rich gar-
land of lotus flowers that has been left to lie out in
the sun. (verse 8)

All of these lines are asides. Soon afterward Rāvaṇa enters with guards bearing torches and tries again to seduce Sītā. Hanūmān takes to a convenient tree (probably a stool) to watch unobserved. Rāvaṇa has three verses and intervening prose to describe in asides how Sītā is avoiding his advances even though his "broad chest is scarred by the tusks of the angry elephants of the gods," evidence of his heroic stand against the gods. He is proud and haughty because he defeated the gods in battle, he chides the moon who has caused him to fall in love with Sītā, and then he describes Sītā among the rākṣasīs "shining like a digit of the moon in the midst of a shower of rain." Hanūmān overhears Rāvaṇa's speeches while Sītā of course does not. Finally there is a brief scene of confrontation between Sītā and Rāvaṇa, with asides by Hanūmān. Rāvaṇa is noble (or haughty) enough to insist that Sītā first respond to his advances--he will not take her by force. He continues to press her, finally she curses him: "I curse you." Rāvaṇa is truly shaken: "Ah!" he cries, "The spiritual power (tejas) of the faithful

wife! Gods including Indra were crushed by me in battle. Now such a person is troubled when Sītā speaks three words." Tejas also means luster or brilliance, and it is the intensity of her latent power as a faithful wife, manifesting itself as light, which provides the source of the metaphors of the moon and lightning in the previous verses.⁵⁶

In this act there is a pattern common in the Sanskrit drama which is emphasized by the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance. The scene begins with extensive preliminaries. Each party involved expresses its view of the situation directly to the audience. Finally there is a confrontation in which the rival forces come briefly in contact with one another.

While Rāvaṇa is still recovering from Sītā's curse, an offstage voice (presumably that of an attendant) informs Rāvaṇa that it is time to look after other duties. Offstage voices are frequently used in the plays of Bhāsa as a device to get the action moving. Voices apparently issued from one of the two doors of the green room located at the back of the stage. Occasionally Bhāsa used the device cleverly for ironic purposes. In Abhiṣeka's fifth act Rāvaṇa is again seeking the affection of Sītā. This time he tries to convince her that her husband and brother-in-law are dead by showing her models of their severed heads supposed to have been cut off by Rāvaṇa's son Indrajit in battle. Instead of yielding Sītā asks that Rāvaṇa kill her:

Sītā--Good sir, with the same sword with which this dreadful deed has been wrought on my lord, slay me too.

Rāvaṇa--Since that wretch along with his brother Lakṣmaṇa has obviously been slain by Indrajit in battle, by whom will you be saved?

(offstage voice)--By Rāma, by Rāma . . .

The voice is that of a Rākṣasa who enters in panic to tell Rāvaṇa that Rāma, far from being dead, has slain his own son Indrajit. Of course Rāvaṇa's subterfuge fails miserably, and the tables are turned completely around. It is Rāvaṇa who now falls to the ground in grief. This is a powerful scene, intensely theatrical, and it turns on an offstage voice.

As in the Greek drama messengers are popular in Sanskrit plays, and onstage violence is usually avoided in preference to descriptions of what has happened or even what is happening off stage. In Abhiṣeka the interlude before Act VI is taken up with an elaborate description of the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa by minor celestial beings, Vidyādhara in 18 verses with intervening prose. The human, or in this case the divine, reaction to events is more important to the dramatist than the depiction of the events themselves. It is the reaction of the perfected human being that is most respected, though demons and comics are fallible and their inappropriate responses to situations are played up by the author and enjoyed by the audience.

Even long stretches of offstage singing are tolerated. In the last act of Abhiṣeka the celestial Gandharvas sing two verses of praise to Rāma as the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu while the stage action stops. Verses which the playwright indicates are to be sung occur occasionally in the plays and are evidence that most of the verses were not to be sung. They were to be spoken, albeit most likely in a heightened fashion. Instrumental music which is described in great detail in the Nāṭyaśāstra was supposed to accompany certain verses and types of action, but it was not to be used throughout.⁵⁷ Kūṭiyāṭṭam, however, incorporates a particular accompanied vocal style for both the prose and

verses of the text. A description of this style will be taken up in Chapter II.

Compression of time is another important conventional device of the plays. Time, like space, is treated as a very fluid medium. Thus in Act IV when Rāma, after angrily threatening to discharge a divine arrow, causes the god of the waters, Varuṇa, to enter and promise him safe passage, the waters part and in the course of one verse, Rāma with his army of monkeys and bears cross the strait to Laṅkā:

Rāma--Dear Lakṣmaṇa, friend Vibhīṣana, great King Sugrīva, friend Hanūmān, all of you, look. Oh, the wonder of the ocean! For it belches out foam in one place and its water is infested by fish in another; one part is strewn with shells, another is dark like a blue cloud; on one side waves billow, on the other crocodiles threaten; here there is a dreadful whirlpool, there the waters are quiet. (verse 17)

And so the ocean is crossed! There is no reliable information about how such a passage might have been acted. Probably a particular gait was adopted (many are specified by the Nāṭyaśāstra), and the company walked slowly across stage while Rāma recited the passage. There might have been instrumental accompaniment for this type of verse.⁵⁸

Another type of time-lapse is common. Frequently a messenger is sent off on some task only to return immediately, the task accomplished. In this play in Act III Rāvaṇa repeatedly sends his minister Śaṅkukarna off to capture Hanūmān, who after his meeting with Sītā is on the rampage, destroying Rāvaṇa's pleasure garden, his city, and finally single-handedly vanquishing his soldiers in battle.

Rāvaṇa--Order the Force of a Thousand to capture the monkey!

Śaṅkukarna--As the great king commands! (Exit. Re-enter.)

That fighter, armed with our own huge trees crushed the force of great strength in no time. (verse 5)

That last adverbial phrase is certainly no exaggeration! The other times Saṅkukarṇa is sent out Rāvana has an onstage verse to pass the time, but Saṅkukarṇa returns with the story of a battle that might have taken several hours or days. Obviously both time and space are flexible entities in these plays. Events are often shortened in time enormously, and though less frequently in Bhāsa than in the later playwrights, moments may be extended as well. As we shall see Kūṭiyāṭṭam takes advantage of this natural flexibility.

The purpose of the Sanskrit drama as codified by the Nāṭyaśāstra is to allow the audience to experience fully a complex of feelings that accompany a particular primary emotional state. This experience is called rasa, and each moment of the drama is to be designed to illuminate for the spectator a different aspect of the rasa. Thus for Abhiṣeka the rasa is vīra 'heroism' and the sthāyibhāva 'primary emotional state' connected with it is utsāha 'valor' or 'fortitude'. In his choice of incidents to dramatize and in his method of presentation, the playwright is guided by his desire to show vyabhicāribhāva 'feelings' or 'secondary emotional states' which accompany the primary one. Thus his first concern is not with the action and the plot or the characters but with setting up, by means of character and plot, situations which will provide a multitude of feelings associated with the main one chosen. In Abhiṣeka the author has provided incidents which allow the experience of feelings such as fear, discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy, weariness, anxiety, agitation, stupor, arrogance, de-

spair cruelty, assurance, and death, all secondary emotional states complementary to the primary emotion of valor or fortitude.⁵⁹ The focus of the playwright is on emotion rather than on action (which Aristotle would have us believe that Greek dramatists had as their primary concern). The Nāṭyaśāstra, though it offers a detailed analysis of the plot structure of the play, spends more of its verses analyzing various emotional states and ways in which the actor can show these states in his acting. The issue of emotion and the actor will be explored more fully when the techniques for expressing emotion in Kūṭiyāṭṭam are described in Chapter II.

Later dramatists followed Bhāsa's lead, and little evolution in form, structure, or intent is apparent in any of the later plays of the classical period. Kālidāsa, Śūdraka, Bhavabhūti, and Harṣa, the chief among the later dramatists, concentrated instead on enriching and refining their language and imagery and illuminating more subtle and complex emotional states. Most shied away from vīra rasa and chose instead śṛṅgāra rasa 'erotic sentiment'. They took love-sick kings as their heroes as did Bhāsa in his most famous play, Svapnavāsavadattā. Bhavabhūti took heroic material in the Rāmāyaṇa as the basis for his History of Rāma (Mahāvīracarita), but his more renowned play is the Later History of Rāma (Uttararāmacarita) in which the final banishment of Sītā by Rāma recounted in the last book of the Rāmāyaṇa is the basis for a play with karuṇa 'pity' as its rasa. Yet, since it is a drama, it must end happily, so unlike the version told by the Rāmāyaṇa, in Bhavabhūti's play Sītā and Rāma are reconciled at the end. In spite of the beauty and refinement of these plays, no later playwright matched the simplicity and directness of the plays attributed to Bhāsa, and it

may be for this reason that they were and still are so popular on the Kerala stage.

The Āryans and the South

The land that the Āryan tribes invaded from the north in the third millenium B.C. was not uninhabited. A sophisticated urban-dwelling society lived in the Indus valley, present day West Pakistan, until the early part of that era. This civilization was connected to that of the Egyptians on the Nile and the Sumerians on the Euphrates of about the same period. The fate of this culture is uncertain. Either barbarian pre-Āryan tribes destroyed it or the Āryans themselves overran and absorbed it completely. Apparently the language of the Indus valley culture is related to the Dravidan language of the present-day inhabitants of the South rather than to the Indo-European language of the Āryans, though the written documents of the Indus valley are so few that positive translations of the remains are almost impossible.

The origin of the Dravidian-speaking people who inhabit the far south of India is still uncertain. They may have been the original occupants of the whole of India, or they may have come across the sea from Western Asia at a later time, perhaps the first millenium B.C., to settle in the land south of the Deccan. There are certain similarities between the Dravidians and the ancient Sumerians. Perhaps the most interesting are the striking parallels between the worship in Sumerian temples and the temple worship in South India. The ancient Sumerian epic Gilgamesh paints a culture remarkably similar to that revealed by the later classical poems of the Dravidians.

By a series of invasions and migrations the Āryans gradually ex-

tended their influence from their original territory in North India all the way to the southern coasts. The Vedic Indians knew only the country from the Himalaya Mountains in the north to the Vindhya Range which runs from present-day Gujarat ENE toward Varanasi (Banāras). Pāṇini, the grammarian who wrote around 400 B.C. mentions nothing further south than Aśmaka (present-day Paithan) on the Godāvarī River, about 200 miles ENE of Bombay. Thus their knowledge of the Indian sub-continent barely extended into the peninsula proper. By 275 B.C. the empire of the Buddhist king Aśoka extended as far south as the Veṅkaṭa Mountains, which stretch west from Tirupati, a temple city just north of Madras, and form the northern border of present-day Tamilnadu. However his influence spread even further south. Buddhism as well as the Āryan's Vedic religion established firm footholds there during this period.

The oldest literature of the Dravidian-speaking people is a set of 2,381 poems appearing in eight anthologies and ten songs. This collection is generally known today as the Sangam literature. It is written in Centamil, a language related to modern Tamil much as Chaucer's English relates to modern English. The poems seem to date from the first, second, and third centuries A.D. Almost no significant epigraphical or artistic material has survived from such an early period in the South, so these poems are at present the major source of information concerning the culture and history of the Dravidians in early days. Though the works are distinct from Sanskrit literature of the same period, in certain respects they show the influence of Āryan culture, and many of the poets are of Āryan origin, judging from their names.⁶⁰

Dating the poems precisely has proved difficult. Many of the 473 poets named in the collection praise their patron-kings, but they fail to mention the dates of their reign, and so precise historical reconstructions from the poems are almost impossible. The only direct literary evidence for dating the Sangam literature has been found in the later epic Cilappatikāram. It mentions that Ceṅkuṭṭuvan, a Cēra king praised in the early anthologies, was the contemporary of King Gajabāhu I of Ceylon. He is known to have reigned from 173 to 195 A.D. Recently discovered inscriptional evidence supports this date.⁶¹ One of the anthologies, Patittūppattu 'The Ten Tens', contains poems addressed to ten (though only eight of them are extant) Cēra kings in chronological order. The Cēra kings ruled over the geographical area which is now Kerala State, and so the history of Kerala during this period can be better reconstructed than that of other parts of South India.

After examining literary parallels between the Sangam literature and an early Prakrit work from Maharashtra, George Hart in Poems of Ancient Tamil concludes that a culture which inhabited the Deccan, i.e. central India between the Vindhya and Venkata mountains, contributed to the literature of both the Tamil-speaking Dravidians and the Sanskrit Āryans:

. . . Both poetries appear to be refined developments of a common popular, and undoubtedly oral (that is, unlettered) tradition. This tradition must have flourished all over the Deccan in a culture that was extraordinarily conservative . . . In such a conservative and homogeneous culture, it is not surprising that literary forms were quite uniform. Thus it is quite plausible that one literary tradition spread all over the Deccan should have been drawn upon to produce remarkably similar bodies of poetry in Maharashtra, where Āryan and Deccan culture mixed, and in Tamilnad, whose civilization evidently developed from Deccan culture with little outside stimulus, Āryan or other.⁶²

Some scholars have assumed that these poems were survivals of an oral tradition, the product of illiterate bards. Hart argues that the poems incorporated the style and often the themes of earlier oral poetry, yet they were separate literary compositions, not oral compositions of the type recited by the epic bards (Rhapsodes) in Greece.

. . . the poems of the Tamil anthologies were composed by poets called Pulavaṅs, who were men and women of high status. The poems were modeled on the compositions of illiterate and low-class performers, of whom there were many sorts in Ancient Tamilnad; but chiefly they were modeled on the compositions of the Pāṅaṅs, who would sing in modes called paṅs to the accompaniment of the yāḷ (lute) and sometimes other instruments. Some of their poems, but not many, were modeled on the songs of the drummers, the kiṅai players and the tuṅi players, who would recite as they played the drum. The Pulavaṅs were of recent origin, arising only after the introduction of the Brahmi syllabary in Tamilnad about the second century B.C.; however the bards whose works they copied must have been far more ancient.⁶³

Judging from their names, many of the best of the Pulavaṅs were Brāhṁans, who were, traditionally, the priests of the Vedic religion and the only ones allowed to take part in the Vedic ritual. At the same time, as Hart states, "their poems do not mention Sanskritic ideas or customs any more than those of non-Brahmin authorship."⁶⁴ so there must have been Brāhṁans, important members of Āryan society, who migrated to the south at an early time and became completely absorbed in the Tamil cultural tradition. One could certainly expect Āryan movement toward the south during the time of Aśoka, but there were earlier settlers as well:

The first Āryan pioneers must have peeped into this Dravidian country some five hundred or four hundred years before the Christian era in the course of their Southward expansion. They were mostly agriculturalists lured by the possibility of cultivating virgin lands, and traders who risked everything for money, a few missionaries who carried forward the banner of Vedic culture. More and more Āryans followed in the wake of the Jain exodus into the South under Chandragupta Maurya and the Buddhist missionary activity organized by Aśoka. They came in large numbers representing the more advanced civilization of the North.⁶⁵

However the poems also speak of Brāhmins in the South who maintained regular practice of their ritual, who set themselves apart from the indiginous religion and yet were treated with respect. Hart concludes that the great influx of Brāhmins at the time of Aśoka adopted South-Indian ways and prepared for the immigration of later Brāhmins.

The first Brahmins who came to Tamilnad must have found a society utterly alien to them and their way of life . . . but they did the only thing they could do if they were to stay in Tamilnad: they associated themselves with the kings, who were considered by the people to be the representatives of the sacred on earth, and they attempted to gain their backing. Thus they had to participate in such unbrahminical activities as the war sacrifice and cutting the bodies of those who had died in bed. They also served as envoys for kings and as advisers; many of them became Pulavans, or poets, who advised kings and were very much respected by the people. Through these activities, the earliest Brahmins made themselves a place in the society of ancient Tamilnad. As other Brahmins came to Tamilnad, they found that they were accepted and did not need to change their accustomed ways of life--not, at least, as much as the earliest arrivals.⁶⁶

By the time of the epic Cilappatikāram, several hundred years later than the Sangam poems, the mythology and culture of the Āryans and Dravidians had mixed inextricably and the results were profound and long-lasting for both the South and the North.

The Dravidian Tradition in the Performing Arts

The early literature of the Tamils reflects a society in which the arts, especially music and dance, form an integral and significant part of the life of the people. The Tamil poets used five conventional environments, or landscapes, as the organizing principle for the images of their poetic creations. These five were: the mountains, the forest-land, the countryside, the seashore, and the wasteland. Each landscape had conventional attributes which were brilliantly exploited by

the poets. Each landscape was named after a characteristic flower of the region. For example, the kuRiñci land was mountainous and the kuRiñci flower was a mountain flower which bloomed only once in twelve years.⁶⁷ The land was overseen by Murukan, "the red-speared god of war, youth, and beauty."⁶⁸ Its characteristic time was night, its bird the peacock or parrot and its tree the jackfruit. In the love poems the kuRiñci landscape or one of its attributes usually symbolized lovers' union. It was also the home of the famous sword or spear dance of the Vēlan:

A goat was killed; then its meat, rice mixed with its blood, and toddy were offered to Muruga [Murukan]. A Kurava then, in ecstasy, danced as Muruga, and the other Kuravas joined in the dance. This dance was intended to find out diseases and their cures. The ecstatic dancer, the central figure of the dance, was believed to be the god Muruga, and whatever he uttered in that ecstasy was accepted as the truth. The Vēlan was priest as well as medicine man of the community.⁶⁹

The poems are filled with references to dancing. One of the most popular was the kuravai, in which seven or nine women would join hands and sing as they danced together. Many of the poems celebrate battle, and poets, performers, and priests usually accompanied the soldiers to the battlefield. There custom ruled that the performers should be safe from enemy attack and so even battlefield provided stages for dances in celebration or in mourning for the day's events.

The Kurava girls danced their dance and sang the Vallai song when the Kuravas buried their dead warriors, to the beating of war-drums, and planted stones (Virakkal) over the tomb in honour of the dead.⁷⁰

Kings were also known to have joined the dance:

In the battlefield, in front of the shining lamp when the dancing women danced the 'death dance' this king joined them

and danced like a roaring bull to their joy.
The queen, hearing of this aimed at him in anger
the small red Kuvalai flower.⁷¹

On the battlefield dance and song mingled with sacrifices of Āryan
priests in remarkably colorful ways. One of the Tamil poets exclaims:

Like a ship propelled by the wind
on the black deep of the vast sea,
you pushed through the field on your elephant.
And in the wide space where you had pushed battle aside
you brandished your bright-bladed spear,
stirring up the fight and seizing the drums of fallen kings
to spread your fame.
Then, making a hearth of crowned heads,
putting on it a pot with blood instead of water,
and stirring up that food with a bangled arm for a stick,
you made sacrifice on the field of carnage,
Ce^liyān of murderous battle!
you completed the ancient sacrifice
with a retinue of sages of the four Vedas [Brāhmans]
who had vows of restraint and great learning
and with kings who did their bidding.⁷²

This Vedic ritual with its spectacular, non-traditional beginning must
have shared the battlefield with the ever-present circle dance of the
women to create an awesome sight. Women, professional dancers, court-
poets, minstrels, and ritual Brāhmans all gathered on the battlefield
with the king and his soldiers to invoke and entertain the spirits of
victory and to appease the forces of defeat.

Festivals were frequent in these times, and they provided ample
opportunity for performing artists to display their skills. Apparently
there was a stage or platform set up for such performances. One of the
poems laments:

At the festival where warriors have assembled,
or at the tuṅankai dance
where girls clasp on another,
nowhere do I see him.
I am a dancing girl (literally "girl of the dancing platform")
and he is a dancing man.⁷³

Dravidians thrived on music. Sastri in Sangam Literature: Its Cults and Cultures suggests its influence and its close ties with nature:

. . . the people having risen from the indigenous and almost tribal life had a traditional bias for music and dance and folklore. It was in their very blood. It was only enlarged and perfected . . . with the onset of urban life and a deliberate cultivation of the social graces. The rhythms of natural phenomena themselves produced a romantic ebb in their hearts and their instinctive predilection was for the sights and sounds of nature.⁷⁴

Hart translates a Sangam poem where music and nature are inextricably combined:

He from a land
 where the summer west wind makes flute music
 in the shining holes bored in swaying bamboo by bees,
 where the music of the cool water of sweet-songed falls
 is the thick voice of gathered concert drums [mulavu],
 where the harsh calling voices of a herd of deer⁷⁵
 are the brass tūmpu,
 where the bees on the flowering mountainside are the lute [yāl],
 and where
 as a court of monkeys looks on entranced,
 loud in their appreciation as they hear the melodic music,
 a peacock swaying in dance on that slope thick with bamboo
 looks like a ViRali entering the stage.⁷⁵

The ViRali 'professional dancer' was the wife of the Pāṇan. The Pāṇan was a bard whose name was taken from paṇ, a word used to denote a mode of music. Different paṇs were appropriate for different moods and different times of day. The Pāṇan played the yāl, a plucked stringed instrument related to the modern vīṇa. This yāl along with the flute were the most important of the melody producing instruments.⁷⁶ The bards and their wives were generally itinerant, but often they would stay for long periods at the courts of kings or in the houses of rich men. Their clan is mentioned with two other clans--the Tuṭiyaṇs and the PaRaiyaṇs--in a poem which seems to indicate that all these musi-

cians were considered low-born.⁷⁷

By the number of references to them, drums must have been the most common and important musical instruments of the Sangam period. (Certainly this is the case in Kerala at the present time.) Drums mentioned in the poems include the mulavu, 'concert drum'; tannumai, a huge war drum carried by an elephant and used to assemble soldiers,⁷⁸ muracu, 'king's drum'; parai, 'kettle drum'; kinai, a drum made in the shape of an elephant's foot and played by the PaRaiyans; tuti, shaped like an hourglass and played by the fingers and palm by the Tuṭiyans; and three small drums--tatari, paRai, and ākuli.⁷⁹ Many of these were used in battle: "the tannumai drums would roar out, urging the men on; the royal muracu would be beaten invoking the sacred power present in it."⁸⁰

In the drum resided sacred power. The victors in battle would take their enemy's drum to symbolize their right to his kingdom. Some drums were even worshiped as if they were temple deities. In one fascinating Sangam poem the kindness of a king is exemplified by the way he treats the poet who accidentally lay on a table reserved for a drum which had temporarily been removed in order to receive a sacred bath:

Before they brought back from its bath
the fearful drum, which thirsts for blood,
its black sides lined by leather straps
and adorned with a sapphirelike garland
the bright eyes of long peacock feathers
and with golden-shooted uliñai
unknowing I climbed upon its bed,
which was covered with soft flowers
as if the froth of oil had been poured upon it.
Yet you stayed the edge of your sword, which cuts in half.
Just that was sufficient for all of Tamilnad to know of it.
But you were not satisfied with only that.
You approached me,
and, raising your mighty arm, which resembles a concert drum (mulavu),
you fanned me and made me cool.

Did you do that act, mighty lord,
 because you have heard and understood
 that, except for those whose fame here spreads over the broad earth,
 no one can stay there in the world of high estate?⁸¹

Though there was an abundance of music, dance, singing, recitation of stories, and poetry, there is no mention in these poems of drama per se. It certainly seems that if actors and playwrights existed, they would have been mentioned in the Sangam literature, for performing arts of other kinds are mentioned very frequently. We must assume that there were no plays or actors of true drama at this time in the South.

There is however an aspect of the poems of the period that echoes the form of the drama. All of the short akam 'love' poems, of which there are many, are written in dialogue form. Each poem is assigned to a different character who speaks or thinks the poem. These characters are not given specific names and they are by convention restricted to a small number: the hero, the heroine, the hero's friends and messengers, the heroine's friend and foster-mother, the concubine, and passers-by.⁸² "no poet here speaks in his own voice, and no poem is addressed to a reader. The reader only overhears what the characters say to each other, to themselves, or to the moon."⁸³ True dialogues are, however, very rare, and though the poems are often arranged by the commentators into something like a narrative sequence they actually stand independently.⁸⁴ An understanding of the conventions of the poems makes the situation of each perfectly clear. They do not require other poems to make them meaningful. They are lyric poems set into dramatic situation without specific plot or characters. A plotted drama could not be constructed by assigning these poems as speeches to actors and actresses, but a reading of them with the heroine and her friends and fos-

ter-mother in one group and the hero and his friends and concubine in another could make a very effective dramatic presentation. Two examples will be given to show the dramatic possibilities of these poems.

What He Said

I had, as you'd wish,
 courtesy
 friendship
 honor
 usefulness
 culture
 and a considerate way with others,

I had them all
 before I set eyes
 on the cold rich eyes
 of this woman.⁸⁵

Here we glimpse the emotional turmoil, the spontaneity which plays havoc with conventional behavior that the onset of love brings. Dramatic tension is ironically held through the poem until the last words, and significantly it is the glance, the eyes, the cold, rich eyes which bring on the storm. Emotion undermines proper social behavior frequently in the poems. The situation implied is eminently stageable, as many playwrights have proved.

What Her Girl-Friend Said

when she sees that her friend's love-sickness is being misunderstood and rites of exorcism are performed to cure her

Cutting the throat of a sacrificial goat,
 offering special platters of grain,
 and sounding many instruments on the dry islets
 in a running river,

none of this will help: they'll put on a show,
 but will bring no remedy
 for our girl's disease.

And this calling on all the great gods
 except the right one, her lover,
 as if some demon possessed her--

it's really painful,
 when she is only being faithful
 to her secret lover
 from the tall hills where
 the clouds play games.⁸⁶

In this poem the given circumstances are set down in the title. The solution to the heroine's problem is not to be found in the zeal of the sacrificers and their religious rite but in the simple expedient of bringing her to her lover. The irony between the secular and the religious in this situation is intensely dramatic, and the poem paints this irony in the richest colors.⁸⁷ Certainly there are dramatically expressed emotions in these poems and a sense of dramatic form and character development, but significantly the Tamils never developed a classical drama of their own. All the early drama in the South was written in Sanskrit and followed the rules given in the Nāṭyaśāstra.

There is a dramatic form mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra called the bhāṇa which was very popular in the South, though at a later period than that of the Sangam literature. These bhāṇa's are dramatic monologues. Konow describes one of them, the Śṛṅgārabhūṣaṇa 'Ornament of Love' as follows:

The chief Viṭa Vilāsaśekhara comes from the embrace of his beloved and desires to celebrate the Prathamārtava festival of Anaṅgamañ-jarī towards the evening. He proceeds through the street of the courtesans and chats with the maidens and the young men, gives his advice when the latter fall out among themselves, maintains the life in the streets with ram-fighting, cock-fighting and fist-fighting, becomes a witness to a bloody fight between two rival lovers, describes the different times of the day and takes part in the festival . . . where all counterpleas are pronounced by himself partly as his own words and partly as his reproduction of the talks of others, who are mentioned by him but are not seen by the spectators.⁸⁸

One could venture a guess that bhāṇas were popular in the South because

they parallel the poetic tradition of the akam poets of the classical period. These poems are dramatic monologues, and so it is natural that those familiar with the conventions of the Tamil poems would be comfortable with the dramatic form in which a single character reports and describes the events he sees and hears around him. Also most of the bhāṇas take place on or near the streets of the courtesans and have as their subject matter the amorous play of the young men of the cities, and so their themes are all of the akam type. These bhāṇas provide a wealth of detailed information about the everyday life in the cities in the medieval period. One early play from Kerala, the Viṭanidrā, described the capital of the Cochin royal family at Mahodayapura, especially the street of the courtesans, with brilliant detail.⁸⁹ As we shall see, the monologue technique of the bhāṇa is very similar to that used by the Cākyār in much of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

Of the elements that influence the Tamil poems and also effect the South Indian notion of dramatic performance, perhaps none is as significant as the conception of sacred power or anaṅku. The ritual of the Vedic Āryans was designed to influence transcendent deities in order to bring about certain material and spiritual results for the sacrificer. The Tamils were less confident of their relationship with the divine and were more in awe of the mystery of its workings. As such their poets appear more humble and more "human" in the sense that we often take it in the West: the poets seem to be more at the mercy of forces beyond their control. Hart has translated this philosophical poem:

All lands home, all men kin.
Evil and good are not from others,
nor are pain and its abaying.

Death is not new,
 and we do not rejoice
 thinking life is sweet.
 If there is something hateful,
 even less do we find it cause for grief.
 Through the vision of the able ones
 we have come to know
 that hard life takes its course
 as if it were a raft upon the waters
 of a mighty river
 roaring as it ever flows on rocks
 while cold drops pour from flashing skies,
 and so
 we do not wonder at those big with greatness
 and still less
 do we despise the small.⁹⁰

On the other hand the classical Tamils did recognize that certain people were in touch with divine power and that these people could shape the destiny even of kings. Their idea of the sacred was essentially different from that of the Āryan tribes. The Vedic Āryans visualized the forces of nature as transcendent gods: Varuṇa was the god of the waters, Agni was the god of fire, and Urvaṣṭī was the mist of the dawn that disappeared at the rise of the sun Purūravas. For the Āryans the ritual was the means of communicating with these deities in order to achieve riches, happiness, and knowledge. The gods of the ancient Tamils were not transcendent deities but rather mysterious forces often associated with particular places or objects rather than with natural phenomena like the sunrise. Seers in the North explained man's suffering on Earth through the doctrines of karma and reincarnation: what one is suffering or enjoying in this lifetime is the result of merit or demerit accumulated in previous incarnations. For the Tamils, on the other hand, their

. . . explanation for the seemingly undeserved suffering with which the world abounds was that a wild and capricious power was working its unpredictable will. This power they called anaṅku, a

word that also means "fear" and "malevolent deity." The most distinguishing quality of anañku is that it is capricious; in other words, it is characterized by disorder.⁹¹

Anañku was conceived of as a potentially destructive force which had to be brought under control in order to avoid chaos. Those who were in closest contact with this sacred power were also considered dangerous, yet their activities were essential in order for society to function properly.

Significant among those of the Tamils who were thought to be most closely associated with anañku were the performers: the bards, dancers, and drummers. Their musical instruments and the performances of their art provided means to control the power. Performers and instruments were present at battles, deaths, marriages, and in the court of kings—places and events where, because of the powerful presence of anañku, potential for the greatest disorder lurked. Here the divine forces could most easily surge out of control; it was here that people most in contact with these capricious forces were most needed. Performers contacted the power through sound and movement and controlled the power by means of the complex form which their art took. Order was required to control anañku, and so music, dance, and ritual acts became intricate. Hart notes:

. . . the more complicated and intricate an event is, the more order is present in it. That is . . . why those low castes whose primary function was to control sacred power were musicians (the Pāṇans), drummers (the Tuṭiyans and PaRaiyans), or dancers (the Vēḷians), for music and dance are highly ordered and can help keep under control the forces of disorder. This fact is shown vividly by those poems about wounded heroes: the first thing that had to be done when a man was wounded was for a bard or drummer to stand next to him and to play.⁹²

He also points out as an example of the precision required for control

of anañku that the functions of musicians were finely demarcated: the Tuṭiyans played only the tuṭi drum and the PaRaiyans played only the paRai drum. It might be noted here that in Kūṭiyāṭṭam also the functions of the participants are carefully differentiated. The drummer, a Nambyār, is of a separate caste than the actor, a Cākyār. The wife of the drummer, a Nañnyār, sings and takes feminine roles, while the wife of the Cākyār, called Ilottama, can have nothing to do with the theatre.

Concerning control, Hart further comments:

Like all ancient peoples, the ancient Tamils found it important to have regulated contact with the sacred, for through such contact the future could be predicted and exorcisms of the possessed performed. Such contact took place when a priest or other susceptible person went into a trance and danced (and it still does today). It is important that such behavior did and does not take place at random, but rather in carefully controlled situations.⁹³

The words I have underlined above are vital for our understanding of the actor as the South Indian theatre perceives him. The power that always lurks behind and often manifests itself in the performance of an actor is perceived as both fearful and auspicious. It is the control that is required to encourage and at the same time appease this power that informs much of Indian theatre. The Dravidians seem to have been the source of this conception, but the Āryans with their vivid and profound understanding of the workings of the underpinnings of the sacred encouraged even more elaborate control in the performing arts in the South. As their culture infused that of the Tamils, music and dance increased immeasurably in complexity so that more refined effects could be produced both aesthetically and spiritually.

There is one literary aspect of the poems that is related to the

concept of anañku, has had a significant influence on poetic forms in both Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages, and has affected the performance of Sanskrit texts in Kūṭiyāṭṭam as well. The major poetic device of the Tamil poems is their reliance on suggestion, what is termed dhvani by the Sanskrit poetic theoreticians. A poem which has dhvani is one in which the implied or suggested meaning is more significant than the expressed meaning. Here is a simple poem from the KuRuntokai, one of the eight anthologies, which is rich in dhvani:

What She Said

Bigger than earth, certainly,
higher than the sky,
more unfathomable than the waters
is this love for this man

of the mountain slopes
where bees make rich honey
from the flowers of the kuRiñci
that has such black stalks.⁹⁴

The meaning of the words is: my love for the man of the mountain slopes is bigger than all of nature. The poet relies on the reader's knowledge of the conventional landscapes to introduce dhvani. The poet identifies the landscape by referring to "mountain slopes" and mentioning the kuRiñci flower. This flower is associated with lovers' union. The union is not mentioned, but it is also suggested by the bees making honey. The lover is like the mountain on which he lives, the kuRiñci flower is his body from which "she" and the bee both wish to imbibe nectar. The poem progresses from the generalized love she feels, which fills all creation, to the specifics of sexual union. The fact that the kuRiñci flower takes twelve years to mature suggests the maturation of the young girl in about the same time. It may also suggest that as all of creation participates in the production of honey, so her love, which

encompasses all of creation, may reach fruition when she unites with her lover. Thus through the power of dhvani the poem goes far beyond the simple meaning of its words to suggest the heroine's intense desire for union with her beloved and its potential fulfillment.

Hart derives the Tamil poets' use of suggestion from their perception of the power lurking underneath the exterior of objects and events: "omnipresent concentration of power that could at any moment go out of control and cause trouble."

The Tamil poets and their audience had become accustomed to seeing beneath the surface of every object and event a sacred power that inhered in it and gave significance to it. It is scarcely surprising that when they described important and moving events in their poetry, they kept their ability to see beneath the surface and created one of the world's finest poetries of suggestion.⁹⁵

Since this poetic device hardly appears in Sanskrit poetry before Aśva-
goṣa, who wrote at the same time as the Tamil poets, he argues that "suggestion" originated in the South in the poetic tradition of bards of the Deccan and then influenced both Sanskrit and the Centamil poetry of the Pulavaṅs. However it took a different form in the North than in the South. In Sanskrit poetry there is usually only one event or idea suggested, and so the poem takes the form of a riddle: the reader is to guess what is suggested. In the Tamil poems the suggestion is not usually one-to-one, and so the poetry becomes more reverberant; like a hall of mirrors it resonates in the mind of the reader. The Sanskrit poem has an immediate lightning-flash effect, while the Tamil poem resounds and echoes.⁹⁶ As we shall see, the Kūṭiyāṭṭam actor is fascinated by suggestion of the latter type and so the power and reverberation of each word of the Sanskrit dramas which are his text are fully exploited.

The first epic poem in Tamil is the Cilappatikāram 'Lay of the Ankle Bracelet.'⁹⁷ In it there are extensive references to performing arts in South India as well as the first mention of a Cākyār, the professional actor who performs Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The author is Iḷankōadikal 'younger prince-ascetic,' who says that he is the younger brother of the Cēra king Śenkuṭṭuvan, celebrated in the poem itself and in the earlier Sangam literature. If he were in fact in the family of Śenkuṭṭuvan the poem could be dated to the later half of the second century A.D., for Śenkuṭṭuvan's dates have been precisely determined. But scholars today, judging from language and style and the fact that the influence of Āryan culture is more evident in it than in the Sangam literature, assume that Iḷankō was a poetic name and the poet was writing about events that preceded him by at least five centuries. It is also generally thought that he was a Jain monk living in a monastery at the Cēra court, for the poem shows the influence of Jainist ideas.⁹⁸

Cilappatikāram recounts the tragic fate of a very young couple from Kāveripaṭṭnam, a port city of the Cōḷa empire on the east coast of South India. In the first of the three books comprising the work, Kōvalan, the husband and the son of a rich merchant abandons his twelve-year-old wife, Kaṇṇaki for Mātavi, a danceuse at the king's court. While describing their liason the poet takes many opportunities to portray the dancing of Mātavi and the milieu in which she works. At the end of the celebration of the great banner festival to Indra (coincidentally or significantly the same festival at which the first drama in Nāṭyaśāstra was presented) Kōvalan and Mātavi quarrel. Kōvalan returns to Kaṇṇaki to ask forgiveness. She accepts him back, and he resolves to leave for Maturai where he plans to make his fortune.

Kaṇṇaki asks and receives permission to accompany him, and she offers him her anklets to sell. In the second book they travel to Maturai. Upon their arrival Kōvalan leaves Kaṇṇaki with a family of cowherds and goes off with one of the anklets to find a goldsmith. The goldsmith he meets has stolen the queen's anklet which happens to be identical to Kaṇṇaki's. He seizes the opportunity to take Kōvalan to the king and accuse him of the theft. Without a thought the king orders Kōvalan executed. A drunken soldier cuts Kōvalan's chest open. At home the cowherdess notices evil omens and arranges for a performance of kuravaikkūttu, the circle dance popular in Sangam literature, to honor Māyavān, the trickster god whose exploits are reminiscent of those of the boy Kṛṣṇa of the Āryans. After the dance people run up to Kaṇṇaki to report the death of her husband. In her grief she rushes to the palace and accuses the king of murder, showing him that her anklet contains a ruby while that of the queen contains a pearl. The repentant king faints and dies, but Kaṇṇaki is unsatisfied. She tears off her left breast and throws it into the city. Maturai is engulfed by fire. In the third book Kaṇṇaki travels west to a hill sacred to Murukan in the land of the KuRavas and ascends to heaven in a divine chariot driven by Kōvalan. Her epiphany is reported to the Cēra king Śenkuṭṭuvan, and he leads an expedition to the Himalayas to bring back a stone to be carved into her image. A temple is built to honor her, and its consecration, accompanied by elaborate performances of music and dance, is described in detail.

The epic glorifies and warns of the power, anaṅku, of the chaste woman, especially the chaste widow whose husband is no longer alive to provide the appropriate outlet for the power that she naturally pos-

esses.⁹⁹ Mātavi, the courtesan and dancing girl, does indeed lure Kōvalan away from Kaṇṇaki and thus brings about tragic consequences. Still she and the other performing artists who appear in the epic receive sensitive treatment by the poet. Their arts are described in minute detail. It is obvious that the influence of performing art was significant and its occurrence prevalent in this period. Though the events described are supposed to have taken place in the second century, the poem was likely written no earlier than the eighth century. It would seem from comparing the dance in Cilappatikāram with that described in the Sangam literature that the poet is anachronistic, introducing into his account forms of dance and theories concerning the dance from his own time.

It will be appropriate to quote here an extensive passage from the poem as an example of the peculiar combination of poetic sensitivity and factual detail which is characteristic of this work and which has influenced all later thinking on the dance in South India. Mātavi, after a quarrel with her lover, sends a message to Kōvalan, who replies by pointing out the dissemblance of which a dancing girl of Mātavi's skill is capable.

Thus pale Mādhavi, perfect in the sixty-four arts, wrote on the wreath, showing the naked depth of her passion. While she was carefully writing, she hummed. like a small child, a mode (pān) and its prelude (tiram).

When the evening had brought her peace, she sent for Vasanta-mālā, her handmaid, and bade her go to Kōvalan, to repeat before him all the words inscribed on the wreath of flowers, and to bring him back to her arms. Vasanta-mālā, who had long eyes like arrow-heads, carried the garland to Kōvalan's home near the grain merchants' residences. She herself placed it in his hands.

Kōvalan refused the garland and murmured:

"A dancing girl in love once performed the prelude (kankū-duvari), with a red mark on her brow and flowers in her hair.

Her thin eyebrows were dark; her eyes, resembling two water lilies, sent alluring glances. Her nose was like a kumil bud, her lips a kavvai flower.

"Then this girl with the long dark eyes showed us an inviting variation, the kānvari, coming forwards but shyly withdrawing again, her moonlike face oppressed by the weight of her hair, heavier than the rain clouds. Her eyes were like quivering carps, and her enticing smile showed the pearls of her teeth set in the coral of her lips.

"She next revealed a character-dance (ulvari). Her piercing eyes were sharp as spears: she could well see that after our quarrel I was desperate and forlorn.

"Feeling weary, at the hour of low tide, she appeared disguised as her own servant girl, comforting me with words sweeter than a parrot's. Her walk was as graceful as the swan's, her grace subtler than the peacock's.

"Intoxicated by desire, she danced the brief, lewd dance of lust (puravari). Her frail body could not bear ornaments: she danced on the steps of my home to the rhythm of her swaying belt, the music of her ankle bells. She knew I desired her but would not embrace me. She performed the dance of indignation (kilarvari). Her innocent forehead was framed by curls of the hair which, with its load of flowers and pearls, whipped her shoulders. The weight of her breasts forced her frail waist to bend. She appeared unconcerned that her tresses were undone. When a messenger placed at her feet a letter telling her my love, she feigned to misunderstand it.

"Then she danced the theme of anguish (tērcivari), crying out to the four winds the pain caused her by our parting and the unbearable desire that draws her toward me. She committed the impropriety of revealing her anguish to members of my family. Next, wearing a wreath that drew swarms of bees to her, she performed the dance of despair (kātcivari). She told her misery to all the passers-by. She pretended to faint (eduttukkōlvari), and, more than once, did lose consciousness. Those into whose arms she fell recalled her to her senses and tried to comfort her.

"But for this girl, adorned with jewels, whom I once dearly loved, such dances are a daily performance. She is only a dancing girl."¹⁰⁰

The eight varis described here are certainly "dramatic" dances, or dances in which emotional content is the most important element. Such dances are called nāṭya in Sanskrit, the same word used for dramatic performance in general, and are differentiated from nṛtta 'pure dance,' or dance without specific emotional content, which is represented in

the Sangam literature by, especially, the kuravai dance. A kuravai dance is elaborately described Canto VIII of Book Two in Cilappatikāram. Obviously this poet is intimate with an elaborate vocabulary of the dance not found in the Sangam poems. He assumes his readers also know it and are interested in minute details of performance practice. For example note the account of Mātavi's debut at court. First the qualifications of her teacher are described in detail:

Her dancing master knew the characteristics of the two schools of the dancing art. He could effectively combine the different dancing poses with the viladdu song. He had a clear knowledge of the established rules of the eleven modes of body-movement and limb-movement (ācal), of the songs (paṭṭu), of the resounding instruments (kottu), as also of the dance (ādal), of gestures (pādal), of the measured beats (pāni) and of time-beats (tūkku).

During the course of the exhibition of the dancing art, composed of the foregoing elements, he knew when only one hand had to be used for gesticulation (piṇḍi), and when both the hands had to be used (pinaiya). He also knew when the hands had to be used for exhibiting action alone (toḷiRdai), and when for graceful effect alone (eḷiRdai). Knowing as he did the conventions at the time of dancing, he avoided the mixing up of the single-hand demonstration (kūtai) with the double-hand demonstration (vāram) and vice-versa, as also the mixing up of pure gesture with gesticulatory movement and vice-versa. In the movements of the feet also, he did not mix up the kuravai with the vari. He was such an expert.¹⁰¹

Mātavi is said at the beginning of the chapter to be descended from Urvaṣī, the celestial nymph of the Vedic dialogue, and so her art is firmly established in the tradition of the Āryans. The pattern of differentiating single hand and two hand gestures is found in the Nāṭyaśāstra, though the terminology used in the passage above is not Sanskrit. The categories of hand gestures also correspond to the Nāṭyaśāstra which lists 67 gestures of the hands: 24 single-hand gestures, 13 gestures of the combined hands, and 30 gestures used only for dancing.¹⁰² These latter would correspond to those for "graceful

effect" in the passage above.

Next in the description of Mātavi's debut, the construction of the stage is detailed. This stage is similar in some respects to the stage described in the Nāṭyaśāstra. Both have two doors upstage into the green room, painted pictures of deities placed over the stage proper, and a graceful lamp illuminating the stage. Mātavi's stage had a curtain controlled by ropes. On the Sanskrit stage the position and mechanism of the curtain is not clearly defined. It might be noted here that the Kūṭiyāṭṭam stage, called kūttambalam, also has two doors, carved figures of nine deities over the stage, and a lamp down center. The small curtain is held by two people.

Mātavi's stage was decorated with a talaikkōl, a "sacred rod made of bamboo":

This phallic column, now used as the shaft of a magnificent parasol, was part of the booty that the monarch had taken from another proud and powerful king on the field of battle. It was gilded with pure gold from Jāmbūnada and in its joints were set nine different gems. The talaikkōl stood as the emblem of Jayanta the Victorious, son of the god Indra, and was the object of a cult in the palace of the royal Chōla, whose unstained parasol is born high as the symbol of the security he ensures to the realm. Each time a royal dancer gave a performance, she sprinkled the sacred bamboo with holy water brought in a golden vase and wreathed it with garlands of flowers. It was then carried to the theatre on a huge elephant, whose broad brow was adorned with sheets of gold and draperies embroidered with glittering spangles.¹⁰³

This staff bears a striking similarity to the jarjara or staff on Indra which 'beat to pulp' the asuras and vighnas in the story of the origin of drama in the Nāṭyaśāstra. It is to be given an honored place on the Sanskrit stage and worshipped:

Having worshipped all the gods as well as all the musical instruments, the master of dramatic art should offer Pūja to the Jarjara for attaining good success at the performance. "Thou art

Indra's weapon killing all the demons; thou hast been fashioned by all the gods, and thou art capable of destroying all the obstacles; bring victory to the king and defeat to his enemies, welfare to cows and Brahmins, and progress to dramatic undertakings."¹⁰⁴

Later different colored cloths are to be tied to the joints of the bamboo staff, and incense and unguents are to be offered.

Finally Mātavi's dance for the king is briefly described. Her performance was successful:

Because her dance was perfect and scientifically correct, the king, who protected the world, in due recognition presented her with a green leaf-garland and one thousand and eight kalanjus of gold, which was the customary present given to a dancer who held the talaikkōl and exhibited her talents for the first time.¹⁰⁵

Other significant parallels to Nātyaśāstra theory can be found in Cilappatikāram. The closing words of Book Two include two terms that Bharata uses to describe the forms, or styles, of drama:

Thus ends the Maduraikkāṇḍam which describes the virtues, victories, and heroism of the dynasty of the Pāṇdyas, who held the distinguished spear in their hands among the dynasties of the three crowned monarchs. It also describes the great glory attached to their ancient and famous capital, the richness of their festivals, the approach of the gods to the city, the unfailing happiness of the village communities, the abundance of their rich foodstuffs, the fertility yielded by the great Vaigai river, the two viruttis called ārapati and sātuvadi, and the songs and dances in which these were exhibited.¹⁰⁶

Here is a passage that is closer in content to the puRam poetry of the anthologies and songs, but the descriptive matter has become more elaborate and shows the influence of the Sanskrit epics. The cataclysmic events of the book--the death of Kōvalan and the destruction of Maturai by Kaṇṇaki--are referred to only by the use of terminology found in the Nātyaśāstra. Ārapati (ārabhaṭī in Sanskrit) and sātuvadi (sāttvatī in Sanskrit) are two of the vr̥ttis described by Bharata in Chapter XXIII.

The other two styles are kaiśidī and bhāratī. The sāttvatī vr̥tti is a style suitable for a situation of intense conflict. Challenges and the exchange of harsh words mark the style--"characters in it should be mostly majestic and defying one another."¹⁰⁷ Such a style could certainly be suitable for the actions of Kaṇṇaki and the king, Kōvalan and the goldsmith in this book. The ārabhatī vr̥tti is defined as follows:

The style which includes mostly the qualities of a bold person . . . speaking many words, deception, bragging, and falsehood, is to be known as Energetic (ārabhatī).

The style in which illusionistic properties are used or there is a representation of falling down, jumping, crossing over, piercing, deeds of magic and conjuration, and varied ways of fighting, is called Energetic.¹⁰⁸

Panic and conflict are appropriate to this style. The tearing off of the breast of Kaṇṇaki and the burning of the Pāṇḍya capital would certainly call for this style of presentation. In his final passage of Book Two the author of Cilappatikāram alludes to the climactic moments of the book by using stage terminology. It is obvious that he must know Bharata's work or another work using the same terminology. It would seem that a detailed treatise on the art of dancing, including specific ways of producing emotional expression, was well known in the south at the time of the Cilappatikāram. Dance theory in the South adopts, in a few instances, categories and terminology of the Nāṭyaśāstra. By the time of the epic the dance has become much more codified and complex than it was at the time of the anthologies. There must have been a significant influence from the North on the performing arts between the second and eighth centuries A.D., but there is no mention of dramatic texts or of dramatic scenes on stage in any extant documents, even though by this time in the North the classical period

of the drama, the age of Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti, had already come to a close.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless it is in the Cilappadikāram that the name Cākyār, referring to the caste of professional actors who will later perform Kūṭiyāṭṭam, first appears in literature. The dancer so named takes the stage at the court of the Cēra king during the ceremony to consecrate the statue of Kaṅṅaki. The passage in which he figures brilliantly fuses the secular and the religious in ways which later characterize Kūṭiyāṭṭam:

The god of Lust established himself as the supreme ruler of all the terraces that the moon bathed in its cooling light. He triumphed also in shadowy groves, carpeted with fallen petals, in dance pavilions where fine sand had been spread, under dark fragrant bowers, on soft beds, on cool verandas.¹¹⁰

The queen appears, surrounded by her maids and the court entertainers, and the poet gives a vivid picture of the life at court in Kerala of this time:

Vēnmāl, the virtuous queen, came to look at the moon. She was followed by maids wearing brilliant bracelets, who carried lamps. There were also girl musicians, playing drums tuned with clay paste and harps shaped like bows, and singing tender and moving melodies. Then came dwarfs and hunchbacks, bringing musk and white sandal paste. Eunuchs, dressed like women, carried incense sticks and perfumes. Young girls brought mats strewn with flowers, while servants carried the mirrors women constantly need, as well as fresh garments and brightly painted jars. It was to an exquisitely furnished roof that the king, lord of the sea-encircled world, ascended with his queen.¹¹¹

At this climactic moment the Cākyār appears. Danielou's translation is not accurate in some details, but his description of the dance is vivid:

To amuse the king, a Brahmin boy dancer from Puraiyūr, famed for the art of its priests learned in the four Vedas, performed the dance of the hermaphrodite which the god Śiva once danced after uniting with Uma in a single body. The circlet at his right ankle rang, a small drum resounded in his swiftly moving hand, his red-

dened right eye expressed changing moods, his tuft of matted hair shook briskly when he moved; yet all the while the anklet bells on his left foot remained silent, the bracelets at his wrist showed no movement, his belt did not vibrate, his breast did not quiver, the jewels did not swing on the feminine half of his person. His carefully set hair did not uncurl.¹¹²

In the original text the "Brahmin boy" is named Śākkaiyan, a Tamil variant of Cākyār; PaRaiyūr from which he comes has been located in central Kerala;¹¹³ his dance is called kotticcēdam, a dance sacred to Śiva in his ardhanārīśvara (half-man, half-woman) form; and his instrument is the paRai, the drum beaten by the PaRaiyans, one of the low-caste, power-related clans. There is, however, no indication in this passage that true drama is being enacted. Though this is the first mention of a Cākyār in literature or epigraphy, this Cākyār is not portrayed as an actor in plays. Nevertheless there is an item in the present-day Cākyārs' repertoire to which this kotticcēdam dance might be related. It is a section of Nityakriyā (the offertory benediction in Kūṭiyāṭṭam) called keśādipādam 'from head to foot' where the actor describes Śiva and then Pārvatī, or Uma, Śiva's consort, from head to foot in gesture language. Although I have never seen a Cākyār try to express different emotions with different halves of his body, a good actor often expresses one emotion in the face and another with his body.

The earliest inscriptional evidence of the Cākyārs connects them directly with the Sanskrit drama, Ārya kūttu, although the relevant inscription was found in Tanjore district, Tamilnad, rather than in Kerala where the Cākyārs now act.

It refers to a land grant given as nr̥tyabhōga (grant for acting-dancing) on behalf of the Śiva temple of Gomuktiśvaram at Tiruvādutarai (Tanjore District), in the year 994 by the assembly of Chattanur to a Kumāran Śikantan who had śākkai-kāṇi (freehold land for temple service) for acting seven aṅkas (acts) of

Āriya kūttu in the temple on festival days in the month of Purat-taṣi. Provision is also made for the supply of rice flour, ghee (for mixing collyrium), and turmeric for makeup.¹¹⁴

So it is evident that Cākyārs were performing Sanskrit drama in the South by the end of the tenth century. Certainly by this time the South, which had encouraged other arts so effusively in the past, was a fertile ground for the growth of the Sanskrit drama which had flourished in the North some centuries before. Southerners began to write plays in Sanskrit as early as the eighth century A.D., and several of these were taken into the repertory of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. These dramatists and their plays will be discussed in the next section. The Southerners adopted the Sanskrit drama wholeheartedly because of their own positive attitude toward the arts. Out of the confluence of the traditions of the Āryans and the Dravidians a new form of presentation of the plays of the Āryans was to evolve.

The Kerala Tradition

The name Kerala 'land of the Cēras' refers today to a geographical area along the south-west coast of India stretching 350 miles from just south of Mangalore in South Kanara, Mysore District, to about 30 miles north of Cape Cormoran, the southern-most point of India. On the west its beaches touch the Arabian Sea, and on the east it is contained by the hills called the Western Ghats which are never more than 100 miles from the ocean. The highest peak of the Ghats is less than 9,000 feet, but the range effectively separates Kerala from present-day Tamilnadu to the east, the only ready access being through the Palghat Gap at about the center-point of the state. The word Malayāḷam, denoting the language of Kerala, seems to be a compound of two words malai 'hill'

and āRam 'depth' and so meaning 'the land of hills' or 'the land between the hills and the sea.' M.G.S. Narayanan, the historian who in the past few years has managed to gather enough information from literature and inscription to construct the first reliable chronology of the early history of Kerala, describes the land as "a secret shared between the sea and the mountain, an illegitimate child of the two natural forces, protected by and provided for by them in a special way."¹¹⁵

Trade by sea with foreign countries flourished from the earliest days, and Kerala grew wealthy exporting its natural resources. Great numbers of the Roman dinara have been unearthed in the capital of the ancient Cēras. Most were probably paid for pepper which was popular for seasoning and preserving food in Europe. Kerala had a monopoly on this expensive product. Pliny condemned the Roman craze for pepper because it drained the empire of its gold.¹¹⁶ Narayana conjectures that when the Āryans moved down from the North, they took active part in inland trade with the rest of the Dravidian South, but they did not like the sea and regarded sea trade and fishing as vulgar professions. They left shipping mostly to the indigenous population and to foreigners. In those days the traders were Muslims, Christians, Greeks, and Jews, and even today the fishermen in Kerala are primarily Christian. Thus the rulers of Kerala, who were Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist, were economically dependent on members of minority sects. The religious tolerance for which Kerala was proud and famous was based on the practical realities of economy and not particularly on any innate virtue of the ruling class. "The traditional policy of religious tolerance was a byproduct of trade, fostered by necessity and ambition on both sides."¹¹⁷ Still the tolerance in Kerala to foreigners and their religious prac-

tices was unique in India and influenced the land politically, socially, and culturally. Kolam, a city in North Kerala, is described in Muśakavamsakavya, a Sanskrit work of the eleventh century:

Different deities co-existed in peace like wild beasts forgetting their natural animosity in the vicinity of a holy hermitage.¹¹⁸

The Cēras ruled in South India in two eras, the first contemporary with the Sangam literature of the first three centuries of the Christian era and the second from c. 800 to 1124. About the period from 300 to 600 little is known of the political history in the South. It is thought that a tribe called the Kalabhras, "a mysterious and ubiquitous enemy of civilization,"¹¹⁹ upset the political order. In this interim period Kerala was divided into petty principalities which were unified during the rule of the later Cēras.

The first of the early Cēras was Uthiyan Cheral. His name appears in several of the Tamil poems. In one, the poet "wants the heroine, who is suffering the pangs of separation, to be as happy as the bards singing the glory of Uthiyan Cheral who enlarged his territory by conquering other lands."¹²⁰ Though the kingdom of the Cēras began on the west coast in present Kerala State, the territory was expanded far eastward through the Palghat Gap where a capital called Vañci was established. There has been much controversy over the location of this capital, but it is now thought by most scholars to have been located at present-day Karur, 50 miles west of Tiruchchirappalli (Trichy) in Tamilnadu. A recent study of Kerala monuments notes:

. . . the only archaeological evidence of the early Cheras comes from a rock-shelter at Pugalur, near Karur, District Tiruchchirappalli, which incidentally produced several hoards of Roman coins ranging in dates from A.D. 37 to 180.¹²¹

The first Cēra empire was socially and culturally allied with the rest of the Dravidian kingdoms during the Sangam age and like them was exposed to Āryan influence. During this period the Cōḷas ruled in the East and the Pāṇdyas in the Far South.

From A.D. 550-850 there are records of mutual conflict of the Calukyas of Bādāmi, the Pallavas of Kāñcī, and the Pāṇdyas of Maturai. The Cōḷas practically disappeared to re-emerge only at the end of the period with a capital at Tanjore. In Kerala the land was divided into small political units each ruled by a chieftan. Sastri describes the political attitude which allowed such a situation to continue for so long in Kerala:

Anyone who felt equal to the task of ruling a certain area and did not hesitate to do so was more or less readily accepted as the ruler. He had to maintain a liberal court, patronize learning and the arts, cause paraśatris to be composed, and had to be vijigīṣu 'one who wishes to conquer.' So the political structure did not have a profound effect on the social structure.¹²²

It is during this period that a group of Brāhmins, known as Paraśurāma Brāhmins, who might have migrated into Kerala from Mysore and Gujarat on the north-west coast, began to take an active part in the government and society of Kerala. Paraśurāma, who has been called "a rather unlovable Puranic figure symbolizing an aggressive Brahmanism,"¹²³ is a mythological hero who figures prominently in an early Brāhmin-oriented history of Kerala, called Kēralōtpatti 'Origin of Kerala.' He slew his mother Renukā at the command of his father, and to expiate his sin he had to exterminate all the Kṣatriyas, the warriors of the Āryans, who had become in the legend enemies of the Brāhmins. This he did in twenty-one expeditions. Then by order of Viśvāmitra he gave the whole earth to the Brāhmins. Left with no land for himself, he obtained a

boon from Varuṇa that he could claim land on the Malabar coast which would emerge from the sea as far as he could throw his paraśu, or battle-axe. So Paraśurāma claimed the land from Cape Cormoran to Goa. To inhabit it he imported Brāhmins from the North who settled in 64 gramas. They were presented with arms to help them protect and rule Kerala. Thirty-two of these settlements were south of the Netravati, or Perumpula, River and thus in Kerala.¹²⁴ The myth may, as Chaitanya suggests, derive from an incident mentioned in the fifth "Ten" of Paṭiṭṭuppattu, the Tamil song in praise of ten Cēra kings, concerning Velkezhu Kuttuvan. He is praised as being so powerful that the ocean retreated and land came into existence at his command.¹²⁵

The Paraśurāma Brāhmins, whose caste name was Nambūtiri, must have associated themselves with the chieftans of Kerala, whom they dubbed Kṣatriyas. They supported the kings, and the kings must have readily accepted the Brāhmins as superior people, for they soon began to champion the cause of caturvarṇa, encouraging the division of society into four classes of the Āryans. The social structure changed. Privileged classes were established and many of the indiginous, low-born people were left outside the system with few rights or opportunities:

A new theological pretext for supporting inequality acted as a balm to soothe the harshness of communal conflict and class struggle. A fatalistic view of life scotched all progress in the modern sense but it paved the way for stability and social harmony through the ages.¹²⁶

The Brāhman settlements, called gramas, were centered around a temple governed by a temple committee and a village assembly. Its influence was so strong that Kerala society became the most completely Āryanized of any in South India.

By the seventh century a second Cēra dynasty began to arise, perhaps through the encouragement of the Brāhman elite. Apparently this line of kings was a branch of the original Cēras, but the new capital was located on the west coast at Makōtai, or Mahodayapura (now Koḍu-ññalluḥ, or Cranganore, north of Cochin). This capital also took the name of Vañci, after the capital of the early Cēras in the East. Through the efforts of two modern historians of Kerala, Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai and M. G. S. Narayanan, who were the first to draw on the wealth of inscriptional evidence available in Kerala, the chronology of these kings is beginning to emerge from mythology into history. It is sometime during the reign of these Second Cēras that the drama began to flourish and Kūṭiyāṭṭam to become established as a dramatic form. One of the Cēra kings, who as a dramatist called himself Kulaśēkhara Varman, wrote two plays whose extensive commentaries give us the first positive literary evidence that dramatic performances were popular in the courts and temples of Kerala. But because of the variety of names each of the Cēra kings takes, it has been difficult for scholars to determine just which of the Cēras this Kulaśēkhara Varman is.

The first king at Makōtai, or Vañci, was Rāma Rajaśēkhara, also known as Ceramān Perumāi Nāyanār, one of the greatest of Śaivite saints (i.e., a saint devoted to Śiva). He wrote a collection of hymns popular among Śaivites and travelled over the South with his friend Sundaran visiting Śiva temples. Sundaran died after their return to the capital at Vañci, and the king, his heart broken, died soon after. "Many of his subjects are said to have committed suicide on hearing of his death."¹²⁷

He was followed to the throne by Sthāṇu Ravi Kulaśēkhara, who has

been identified with Kulaśēkhara Āḷvār, a Vaiṣṇava mystic (i.e., devoted to Viṣṇu).¹²⁸ The date of his ascendancy to the throne has been fixed by astrological data to A.D. 844.¹²⁹ Kulaśēkhara Āḷvār is known to have composed two extant works, one in Sanskrit and one in Tamil. Since the tenth century the latter has been frequently read in all the Vaiṣṇava temples in South India. Elamkulam equates this king with the playwright Kulaśēkhara Varman, but many take exception to his view.¹³⁰

A Rāma Varma Kulaśēkhara ruled in Kerala from 885 to 917. He was the patron of the poet Vasu Bhattathiri, who praised him as the ruler with "the tread of an elephant, fierce in battle and solicitous of the welfare of his people."¹³¹ K. Kunjunni Raja has equated the royal dramatist with this Cēra ruler.¹³² To this writer he seems the most likely choice.

After 985 when Rājarāja ascended the throne of the Cōḷa empire in the East, Kerala began to be threatened by this eastern neighbor, and the history of Kerala becomes filled with records of skirmishes and battles between the two powers. It is an important period of cultural transition which Narayanan has called "a watershed in the history of Kerala."¹³³

The Second Cēra Empire comes to an end with the reign of Rāma Kulaśēkhara. He retained complete authority over the Hindu religion and temples of Kerala, the "supreme powers of the state, both secular and religious, were vested in him. His palace was burnt by the Cōḷas, and in consultation with the Nambūtiris he converted a major section of the Kerala army into suicide squads (chaver) for the effective defense of the country."¹³⁴ He occupied the throne between 1090 and 1122.¹³⁵

It seems that Rāma Kulaśēkhara may have been the source of the legend in the Keralōtpatti that the last of the Perumāls partitioned Kerala and "was induced by the . . . Jains to precede to Mecca."¹³⁶ Before he left the throne he managed to drive the Cōlas out of Kerala, but the kingdom suffered:

. . . the aftermath of the war created political and economic problems which an aged ruler with an exhausted treasury, divided counsels, and tortured conscience could not even attempt to solve. Thus the abdication of the Perumāl (Rāma Kulaśēkhara), and the consequent dismemberment of the kingdom, may be seen as the natural culmination of a war of attrition.¹³⁷

After examining all the available literary data on the dramatist-king, N.P. Unni, in his study of Kulaśēkhara, concludes that the dramatist must have written in the period 1050-1159. Thus he identifies the dramatist with this last king of the Cēras of Kerala.¹³⁸

The unity that the Cēras had established ended with the abdication of the last Kulaśēkhara. There arose a number of small states between which skirmishes were to become a matter of daily life. Kerala's association with the rest of Tamilnadu was sharply curtailed. But the artistic refinement and sensitivity characteristic of the Kulaśēkharas continued to influence the people of Kerala, and a new period of internal cultural growth arose. The seeds of dramatic performance were certainly planted by this time, and the art of Kūṭiyāṭṭam would now develop and grow.

Kēralōtpatti, the legendary Brāhman chronicle of Kerala, provides certain information that is useful in defining the character of the Brāhmins that settled there and the influence that they had on society and the arts. Though the chronology it supplies cannot be taken as historical fact, some information has been corroborated by inscription-

al evidence. Some of the Brāhmans who migrated to Kerala, 3600 in all according to the account, were permitted to carry arms. They were designated 'half-Brāhmans,' but they did learn the Vedas as well as receive military training and training in other arts and sciences. An elaborate educational system was developed with eighteen universities called sabhāmathas divided into three categories: karmisabhāmatha for Vedic instruction, śāstrasabhāmatha for arts and sciences, and sannyāsi-sabhāmatha for philosophy.¹³⁹ In the period after the last Kulaśēkhara, ten of the gramas, or large villages, volunteered to take arms to defend the land. These warriors were called cāthirar or cattar. They were allowed to keep all their privileges as Brāhmans in spite of their bearing arms, an action normally deemed inappropriate for the Brāhman elite.

A Jain Prākṛit work of the eighth century, Kuvalayamala by Udyōtanāsūri of Rajasthan in the North, describes a monastery of cattar in the big city of Vijayanagari in the western part of South India. This might have been a city in Kerala, but more probably it was located in Karnataka, north of Kerala.¹⁴⁰ Narayanan summarizes the description of the cattar college in that work as follows:

There he [the hero] finds cattar who were natives of various countries. In one place they were engaged in practicing archery, fighting with sword and shield, with daggers, etc. He found others learning painting, singing, practicing on musical instruments or staging plays (bhāṇaka) or dancing. There were other groups inside the building engaged in discourses or teaching of different sciences . . . Some groups were practicing arts and sciences like mineralogy, astronomy, medicine, juggling, doing tricks of magic and sculpting . . . They are described as young men of gluttonous habits, with undressed hair, and big moustaches, big fleshy bodies and high shoulders walking with a jerky gait, indifferent to dharma, artha and kama. It is stated that they had put on a good deal of flesh, obtaining free food of others, that they are devoid of relations, friends, and property, and that they

loved to gaze at young girls and other's wives, with the conceit that they themselves were beautiful.¹⁴¹

It may be, as Narayanan suggests, that the caṭṭar college had come into existence originally "for the specific purpose of spreading the Vedic Āryan culture with a missionary sense." He concludes that the Ghaṭikas or Śālais referred to in inscriptions of the eighth and ninth centuries in South India were "institutions mostly attached to temples where the caṭṭar or cāthirar, proficient in Vedas and Shastras and also military activities, lived under the patronage of kings who considered their establishment and maintenance a great privilege."¹⁴²

The bhānaka mentioned in this passage could be a dramatic performance of several different types. In the Nāṭyaśāstra bhāna is one of the major forms of drama: the dramatic monologue discussed above. The word bhānaka itself is not mentioned in Nāṭyaśāstra, but Abhinavagupta refers to it in his commentary on Nāṭyaśāstra, and Bhoja partially defines it in his Śrīngāra Prakāśa as one of the minor forms of drama. Abhinavagupta says that instrumental music is to dominate in the bhānaka, but that the work is to be of a didactic nature, "inculcating principles of dharma, etc., through symbolic descriptions of animals-- lion, boar, bear, buffalo."

According to Bhoja, bhāna, bhānaka, bhānika constitute the singing of praises of the deities Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, Skanda, Sūrya, etc. Bhoja's description of this type includes a number of music and dance details. It is to be in seven sections, employing one, two or more languages and dances in both forceful and delicate styles.¹⁴³

Both of these descriptions are suggestive. It might be that the Brāhman students would participate in the presentation of songs which enacted the attributes of the various deities. The mimicry of animals is

a traditional feature of both the Kerala military training and of the Kerala theatre. In kalarippayatt̃, the system of training for combat that was taught throughout Kerala in the medieval period, there are basic poses and attitudes which are used for offensive and defensive purposes. These poses have the names of animals--elephant, lion, horse, wild boar, etc., eight in all--though bear and buffalo mentioned in the definition of bhāṇaka are not among them. Traditionally the pose in its complete form includes the repetition of mantras and breathing techniques.¹⁴⁴ Both Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kathakalī are fond of scenes in which animals are mimicked through facial gesture and body movements. It may be that the dramatic form that was observed at the cattar college was a mimicry of animal gaits with rhythmic accompaniment that could provide both physical training and entertainment. Such performances might have been adopted by Kūṭiyāṭṭam. It is doubtful that Brāhmins would be engaged in the full-scale production of drama. There was an entertainment called, among other things, Yātrakalī performed regularly before 1900 which used Brāhmin performers. It included hymns to the deities, but the Brāhmins who performed it were considered impure and were not allowed to recite the Vedas.¹⁴⁵

During the period when the Cēras ruled at Makōtai, the temple played a major role in the development of the arts. The temples attracted the social elite of the indigenous society, were supported by the kings, and apparently were a major factor in converting the population to the Āryan religion. Elamkulam suggests that it was the Brāhmins' close relationship to the Gangas, Pallavas and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, the peoples to the north of Kerala who "staged dramas in temples for the diffusion of religious knowledge and gave properties as Raṅgabhogam

for the maintenance of such arts" that is responsible for the Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kūttu in Kerala.¹⁴⁶

It is most certainly in the period of the Second Cēras or shortly thereafter that the temple theatre called kūttambalam must have come into existence. Since music and dance had been popular with the people from early times, theatrical performances provided a perfect means to attract them to the temples for education into Āryan lore, religion, and culture. The Nātyaśāstra emphasized the educational power of the arts, and the Brāhmins of Kerala exploited this aspect of performance fully. To involve the indiginous population in the activities of the temple they converted or hired local people to perform the many functions that were required to keep the temple operating. The castes of temple servants that evolved were called Amablavāsis. They included the Cākyārs and Nambyārs who performed the drama as well as Potuvāḷs, Vāriārs, Piṣarotis, Puṣpakas, Nambiśśans, and Mārārs.

The most celebrated of the women employed in temples were the Devadāsis (Sanskrit 'servant of God;' the Malayāḷam form is tēvarādī-acci, shortened to tēvadicci). They were often well-born and highly educated women, proficient in the arts. Widows of Brāhmins could not remarry and often gave themselves to the temple as dancers. In the Sangam age the future of widows was bleak:" they did not wear ornaments. They caked their shaven heads with mud . . ., and they slept on beds of stone."¹⁴⁷ By devoting themselves to the service of the temple as Devadāsis, they could achieve fame and live comfortably. The earliest reference to the Devadāsi in Kerala literature is in Ādiyā by Cēramān Perumāl (eighth century). The earliest mention in Northern literature

is in the eleventh century Katha-sarit-sagara. Perhaps the Devādasi tradition originated in the South.¹⁴⁸ In the Kerala work the saint-king "celebrates the love of the dancing girls of all ages towards the Lord Śiva. He gives a dramatic account of the reception accorded the deity by these girls when he goes out in procession."¹⁴⁹ The setting of this procession is probably Trichur in central Kerala where a twelfth-century inscription records that a great number of dancing girls were attached to the temple. The largest kūttambalam still in use today is in this same temple in Trichur. The stage, used now only for Kūttu and Kūṭiyāṭṭam may have been the location of many kinds of performances in early days. By the fourteenth century the word tēvadicii had become a synonym in Malayāḷam for prostitute.

This corruption must have been a gradual process which coincided with the full development of feudalism in Kerala after the 12th century following the disintegration of the Chera empire. In that fallen condition the tēvadiccis or female servants of God seem to have become servants of powerful chieftains, Brahmins, merchants, etc. Instead of worshipping Gods they entertained princes. The Kūttu or dance was used as advertisement for prostitution.¹⁵⁰

Of course Kerala always housed courtesans as did all of India. They are frequently described in both Sanskrit and Tamil literature. We have met one of the most famous, also a dancer, in Cilappatikāram. They were often educated and highly regarded. The Nāṭyaśāstra ascribed Sanskrit to the veśyā 'courtesan' as to the hero and other educated male characters while most women speak Prākṛit.¹⁵¹ But the gradual transformation of the Devadāsi, the sacred, chaste temple dancer into a courtesan reflects the growing secularization of the arts in the temples in Kerala from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. Dancing as a sacred art is always perilously close to dancing as a very secular

one; Kerala provides no exception.

By the fourteenth century a whole group of romantic poems had been composed with courtesans as the heroines. "There is evidence that the Devadāsis liked poems being composed about them. They and their lovers patronized the poets who composed such poems and gave them liberal grants of money."¹⁵² The temple had become a "palace of pleasure," a place where the sacred and the profane joyously mingled. It was the "hayday of the Nambūdiris in Kerala."¹⁵³ The Nambūtiris even made a law that the women of Kerala need not observe chastity.

In 1600 there was a strong moral reaction to social licentiousness expressed in the work of Tunchattu Ezhuttacchan, a mystic poet of a low caste. He called the people once again to the life of devotion to God that had been praised in the ninth century by the Cēras. As we shall see, the move toward secularism and amorality and the reaction to it toward deep devotion to God have both left their imprint on Kūṭiyāṭṭam, where elegance and austerity share almost every moment.

Early Malayālam Literature

As we have seen, the earliest works by Kerala writers were in Centamil, the language of the classical poems. Cilappatikāram, the first great epic of the South was composed by a Kerala writer. Cēra kings contributed devotional hymns in Old Tamil. This language was apparently not exactly the spoken language of the South, but it was highly influential in shaping modern Tamil, which is spoken today in Tamilnadu. The Brāhmans, of course, brought Sanskrit with them from the North and encouraged the writing of works in that language. By

the fourth century Kerala writers were contributing mathematical, ritual and philosophical works to the Sanskrit canon. The most famous Sanskrit writer from Kerala was certainly Sri Śaṅkara. Born in central Kerala of a poor family probably in the eighth century, he travelled all over India expounding the philosophy of advaita 'non-dualism,' attempting to unite the many disparate creeds of Āryan religious thought. Interestingly, the Brāhmins of Kerala, steeped as they were in mīmāṃsā, or ritual performance of the Vedic sacrifice as the means of attaining spiritual and secular goals, were little influenced by Śaṅkara's teachings.

Classical Tamil was used by the Cēra kings and Sanskrit by the Nambūtiri Brāhmins; Malayāḷam, as the language of the common people of Kerala was called, was slow to develop a literary form. Early Malayāḷam seems to have been very close to the Dravidian language that originally existed as the spoken language of the South. It was long thought that Centamil was the oldest Dravidian language, but grammatically, Malayāḷam retains features that seem to connect it to an older, proto-Dravidian which is no longer extant.¹⁵⁴

The oldest extant, non-Sanskrit literature of Kerala employed a mixture of the Āryan and Dravidian languages. It was called Maṅṅipravāḷam 'pearl-coral,' the pearl being Malayāḷam and the coral Sanskrit. The word maṅṅipravāḷa was first used to describe a beautiful woman, and in fact a sizable portion of the literature written in this language involved women of the Devadāsi tradition as heroines. "It is probable that the Maṅṅipravāḷa movement owed its very origin to the Devadāsis."¹⁵⁵ Āttaparakāras and Kramadīpikas, the prose works written to describe the staging of Sanskrit plays in Kūṭiyāṭṭam were also written in this lan-

guage for the most part and were composed between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Līlātilakam, an important fourteenth century treatise on poetics written in Sanskrit defines Maṇipravāḷam and lays down the following two conditions for it:

- 1) The Malayāḷam words used should have the widest currency, even among illiterates.
- 2) Sanskrit words should be familiar and simple.

It mentions three varieties of Maṇipravāḷam, the "high" in which Malayalam vocabulary dominates, "low" in which the Sanskrit dominates, and "middle" where there is an equal proportion of both. The high is preferred because the rasa, or emotional content, can more fully emerge, while in the low the formality of the language tends to stifle rasa.¹⁵⁶

Parameswaran Nair in his History of Malayalam Literature has described the general nature of this literature well:

It may well be that a comprehensive view of life embracing all sections of the community and its ideals, its aspiration and questionings, its joys and miseries was not deemed as falling within the pale of poetry. To enchant the senses was all that the poets expected of their muse, and this they achieved with unsurpassing ability.

The poets explored the erotic sentiment in all its details with "delight and confidence."

The one nightmare they dread in their lives is separation from their beloved, but they seem to be well aware that the bliss that reunion brings transcends even the choicest in heaven. The best of circumstances that Nature and man can provide is there as a backdrop to their longings--the cool moonlit nights of the fragrant spring, gorgeous mansions set amid blooming gardens, all kinds of fineries and every imaginable luxury, attending maids to carry messages and confidantes in whom to repose the secrets of love.¹⁵⁷

Thus the literature was primarily secular in nature, but often the secular and the sacred mixed in surprising ways:

In the homage to Śiva, the deity of the Kandyōr temple, in the fourteenth century Champu, Unniyat-Caritam there is the pleasant speculation the Śiva got his three eyes because he needed them to drink in, at one glance, the beauty of the two swelling breasts and the visage of Pārvatī.¹⁵⁸

The half-man, half-woman form of Śiva met with in the first reference to a Cākyār in Cilappadikāram is treated in a Maṇipravāḷam work quoted in Līlātilakam in a way that suggests that paying a courtesan for her favors is an automatic reflex:

Is it because you lacked the gold to obtain her gold-decked, swelling breasts that you had to give her half your body itself?¹⁵⁹

The earliest surviving work in Maṇipravāḷam is probably the Vaiśīkatantram composed in the eleventh century, a treatise on the art of the courtesan, inspired most likely by the Kuṭṭanīmata of Damodara Gupta dated late eighth century which it follows closely in form and content. This fact is significant, for in the Kuṭṭanīmata we have the only northern reference, brief though it is, to the style of acting in this period, and the description there in some respects parallels the staging of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

The handball game, which was a favorite pastime of young women in Kerala and is commonly pantomined by the hero in Kūṭiyāṭṭam in order to describe the heroine, appears in the Cheriyachi Varnanam as a metaphor to describe the rising moon.

Raising her play-ball, the rising moon,
striking with palms, the heaving sea-waves,
her hair, the darkness of the night, swirling,
and stars, her droplets of sweat, budding,
eventide takes on Cheriyachi's guise
(rapt, as she is, in the hand-ball game).¹⁶⁰

A Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance of the drama Tapatīsamvaranam of Kulaśēkhara is mentioned in a Maṅḍipravālam work of the fourteenth century, Unnūnilisandeśa. The hero, in a message to his wife, recalls an earlier incident in their lives:

We had been witnessing a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance in the Taliyil temple when the Nañṅyār acting the role of Tapatī who is indignant on account of Samvaraṇa's love for somebody else recited her lines in Prākṛit casting her eyes on me. And you ran away in a fit of anger never to be seen for a while.¹⁶¹

The instructional manuals used by the Cākyārs for their performances of Kūṭiyāṭṭam quote many works in Maṅḍipravālam. In the Matrāṅkam, the third act of Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇam, one of Bhāsa plays, the clown Vidūṣaka is given special prominence, and he takes material from many works popular in the fifteenth century. Thirty-seven stanzas from Vaiśikatantra, the earliest Maṅḍipravālam work, are quoted.¹⁶² One work is recited in full. Though no title is given, as it deals with the adventures of the heroine Cerumī, it might be called Cerumīcaritam 'stories of Cerumī.' It is typical of the kind of satire that the Vidūṣaka is prone to use in Kūṭiyāṭṭam:

Cerumī belongs to the lowest rung of the social ladder. She is just a working girl, doing odd household jobs, like cleaning house and husking paddy. But that does not mean that she is one who can easily be brushed aside. She is, in her own way, attractive . . . But there is an undercurrent of mild satire running throughout the work and that is the reason for comparing Cerumī to objects that bear no relation to feminine charms. One such object of comparison is a knife. The sharpness of the blade, the brilliant glitter, the metallic ring round the handle, and the rash and incisive way in which it goes about its work in the hands of one who holds it are the points of comparison. Cerumī too is sharp, sharp in intellect and sharp in tongue. She too has a metallic glitter around her limbs; in her hands there are bangles resembling the ring in the knife's handle; her behaviour while accosted by a lover is not meek or gentle, but rash and incisive . . . Cerumī is no novice in the art of love. She had enough worldly wisdom to understand that the poet who occupies an honoured position in society cannot make love to her in public. So the rendezvous is

fixed at some obscure place, in a bush near a temple, or sometimes in the husking room itself. There is of course not that element of grace or beauty in this love; often it borders on the vulgar and the voluptuous.¹⁶³

In the later phase of Maṇipravāḷam literature poets copied from the Āryan purāṇas, or mythological tales of deities. These works were called Campūs. Chaitanya describes a scene in the Rāmāyana Campū of Punam, the most famous of Campū authors, in which Rāvaṇa tries to persuade Sītā to forget Rāma and choose him:

Rāma is thoroughly unsuitable for Sītā. In his boyhood he was sent as a bearer with a phoney ascetic . . . and poor Sītā had to get tied up with him just because he broke some old bow which was moth-eaten and crumbling anyway. Then, just when Rāma thought he was going to become king, his stepmother threw him out on his ear and to this day the fellow is going round with a displaced knee-cap as a result.¹⁶⁴

This sort of humor is often resorted to by the Viḍūṣaka in Kūttu and Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

The Campūs constitute a huge body of literature in Maṇipravāḷam, yet the output of poets writing in Sanskrit during the same period is even larger. There is a legend that in the court of the fifteenth century Zamorin of Calicut there were eighteen-and-a-half poets, the half poet being the Punam quoted above, the other being writers in Sanskrit.¹⁶⁵ The Malayāḷam Campūs paralleled the Prabandhas that were being compiled (from many Sanskrit classical works) and composed (by Melputtur and others) during the same period. These Prabandhas were used by the Cākyārs in the performance of Kūttu and in the nirvahaṇa of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The Malayāḷam Campūs were not used directly by the Cākyārs, but they were used in the performance of Pāṭhakam, a kind of solo performance in Malayāḷam, very like the Prabandham Kūttu of the Cākyārs.¹⁶⁶

The last poem of note in Maṅḍipravāḷam is the Candrotsavam 'Festival of the Moon,' a kāvya in five cantos, a brilliant, ironic work of about 1500 ridiculing the elite Brāhmins, rulers, and poets who come to a great festival at which all the famous courtesans of previous literature have gathered. The poet takes the opportunity to mock all such goings-on, and his work marks the demise of the courtesan in the poetic literature of Kerala.

In 1600 Ezhuttachan wrote in pure Malayāḷam, and with his devotional verse he began a new era in Malayāḷam literature. Nevertheless the popular Kūṭiyāṭṭam continued to use Sanskrit and Malayāḷam and Maṅḍipravāḷam in its performances, and as a result Sanskrit vocabulary is still a major component of the Malayāḷam language.

Kūṭiyāṭṭam

Kūṭiyāṭṭam is a general term which refers to performances by the Cākyārs, Nambyārs, and Nañnyārs in the Kerala temple theatre. The word Kūṭiyāṭṭam itself means 'combined acting' and is applied properly to the performance of the Sanskrit drama where more than one character is on stage at one time. The Cākyār also frequently performs alone in the temple theatre, kūttambalam, with only the musical support of the Nambyār and the Nañnyār. These solo performances are not taken from Sanskrit plays but are improvisations based on the Sanskrit Prabandhas mentioned in the previous section. After a brief introductory dance the Cākyār in the make-up and costume of the Viḍūṣaka recites a verse, acts it and expounds it, adding analogies from historical and current social, religious, and political events. Such performances are called Prabandham Kūttu, or just Kūttu. Even in the performance of a Sanskrit

drama, when a single actor is alone on the stage, his performance will often be referred to as a Kūttu. There is also a solo performance by the Naññyār called Naññyār Kūttu which is an enactment of Kṛṣṇa Līlā, a series of interpretations based on the interlude at the beginning of Act II of Kulaśēkhara's play Subhadrādhaññajaya,¹⁶⁷ but it is rarely performed today.

We have seen above that the earliest mention of any form of Cākyār Kūttu in literature was in the Cilappatikāram. In the early seventh century two delightful farces appeared, Mattavilāsa and Bhagavadajjuka. These plays are closely associated with the Cākyār tradition. Both were at one time in the repertoire of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Even now the first verse of the former play is the basic text for a three day performance annually given by Mañi Madhva Cākyār at the Koṭṭiyūr temple.

The Mattavilāsa was composed by the Pallava king Mahendravidikrama I, who reigned at Kāñcīpuram. He was a contemporary of the Northern playwright Harṣa, a small part of whose play Nagānanda is also currently in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam repertoire. Mahendravidikrama had many talents of which he must have been eager to have later generations know, for he proclaimed them in many inscriptions. He was a "soldier, poet, musician, architect, and religious reformer."¹⁶⁸ In the prologue to most of the classical plays, the author is mentioned by the Stage-Manager. Usually authors are humble, but Mahendravidikrama chooses to make the most of his opportunity and puts these words into the mouth of his Stage-Manager:

His [the author's] name is Mahendravidikrama-varman, son of Simhaviṣṇu-varman; he is the central peak in the mountain range of the Paḷlava dynasty, he is the architect of policy so perfect that it baffles our neighbouring princes, in affluence he is the equal of the chief god Indra, and in the magnificence of his charitable dispensations, so excellently corresponding to his boundless pros-

perity, he had put the god of wealth Kubera to shame. Let me put it this way:

Learning and charity,
 Mercy and dignity,
 Beauty and artistry,
 Excellent simplicity,
 Truth and bravery,
 Surpassing courtesy--
 Such is the quality
 of this great king.¹⁶⁹

Historically the play is interesting in several respects. It is the earliest drama from the South and the earliest extant prahasana, or one-act farce. The earliest northern prahasana whose date can be ascertained has been assigned to the first half of the twelfth century.¹⁷⁰ The prologue and certain aspects of the dialogue contain characteristics which are met with in other southern dramas as well as the manuscripts of Bhāsa that have come from Kerala.¹⁷¹ Apparently there was a well-developed tradition of dramatic performance of Sanskrit plays at the court of kings in the South by the seventh century.

Mattavilāsa follows the rules of the Nāṭyaśāstra regarding a pure (śuddha) prahasana:

The Prahasana is known as pure when it contains comic disputations by Śaiva gurus (bhagavat), ascetics, Bhikṣus, Śrotriya Brahmins, and others, and abounds in jocular remarks by persons of low class; and all this gives uniformly to the Plot a realistic picture of the language and conduct of all these in passages describing their Special Psychological States.¹⁷²

The play centers on the lively battle between Satyasoma, a drunken Śaivite mendicant who has lost the skull with which he begs for food, and a degenerate Buddhist monk whom he thinks has it. The subject of the play gives evidence that many different religions were well established in the South by this time and were ripe for ridicule. Particularly colorful is the poet-king's description of a wine shop as a metaphor for

for the sacrificial ground of the Vedic Brāhmans:

Look at that wine shop there. Isn't it as glorious as a sacrificial yard? The name post's the sacrificial pole to which the victim is tied; the wine's the soma juice drunk at the ritual; the guzzlers are the priests, the cups, the bowls of soma. More! the roasted meats are the holy fire-offerings, the babble of the drunkards is the words of the Vedas, their drinking songs are the sacred psalms, the drawing bowls are the sacrificial ladles, their thirst is the holy fire, and the owner of the wine shop is the sponsor of the sacrifice.¹⁷³

There is no lack of physical humor, and even in the midst of fighting the author can poke fun at the Buddhist penchant for enduring pain and at the protection Brāhmans expect from others as their birthright:

Satyasoma: I'll bash your head in and make your skull my skull-bowl!

(He rises, and there is a free-for-all.)

Buddhist Monk: Oh, the suffering! The suffering! The suffering!

Satysoma: Oh, Śiva, Śiva! Look at the swine! First he steals my skull-bowl, then he steals my girl, then he starts squealing. Well, if it's a question of squealing, I can squeal too! Hoi! Hoi! Brahmins! Insulted! Hoi! Brahmins! Insulted! Hoi!¹⁷⁴

The argument is resolved when a madman appears and "babbles and acts with a consequent inconsequence that reminds the reader of Lewis Carroll."¹⁷⁵ The madman has the Śaivite's bowl which he has taken from a dog.

Mattavilāsa's companion piece Bhagavadajjuka 'The Hermit and the Harlot' of Baudhāyana also makes Brāhmanism the brunt of humor.¹⁷⁶ A disciple of the hermit of the title enters at the start of the play with these words:

So for a start, I was born properly. My family thrived on what the jackals left, our tongues shriveled from holding them, our Brahmin's threads were glued to our necks, and weren't we utterly

satisfied for being Brahmins! So there was nothing to eat in our house. I was starved. I ran away to become a Buddhist, so I could have breakfast. So I had breakfast, but these bastards only eat once a day. So I starved. I flung away the ochre robe, broke my begging bowl to smithereens, and walked out with this loin-cloth on and only an umbrella up. And finally I wind up the beast of burden of this evil guru.¹⁷⁷

This play has been used as evidence that Buddhism was on the decline during the period it was written and that the Hindu devotional and ascetic religions were on the rise, or that Buddhism was on the rise and Hinduism on the decline!¹⁷⁸ In any case both plays show that there was lively interest in religion in the South. This interest would support the rise to power of the Cēra saint-kings in the next century in Kerala. Both plays provide examples of a kind of irreverent humor typical of the Viḍūṣaka in Kūṭiyāṭṭam.¹⁷⁹

Although there is doubt as to its exact date, the next drama from the South is probably the Āścaryacūdāmaṇi of Śaktibhadra. Nothing is positively known of the author other than his name, though tradition has him come from Chengannur in central Kerala and be a disciple of Sri Śaṅkara.¹⁸⁰ This tradition would place Śaktibhadra in the middle of the eighth century. K. Kunjuni Raja has him later, at the end of the ninth century.¹⁸¹ The author in the prologue to his play, seems to imply that a southern drama is a rarity:

Stage-director: Lady, this is the command of the venerable gentlemen assembled here--"We desire the play called The Wonderful Crest-Jewel, which comes from the South, to be rendered doubly fascinating by being put on the boards."

Actress: Sir, it is quite surprising. The sky puts forth a flower, and the sands give rise to oil, if, from the South, a dramatic composition has come forth.

Director: Lady, no, don't say so. Appreciate the virtue, set aside provincial patriotism. See--
Merits are the determining factor, and not provenance.

Indeed as an example for that, there is on your breasts the sandal as well as the necklace, white like the moon.¹⁸²

But the actress proceeds: ". . . who then is that poet who is desirous of sending to a foreign land the work of his genius under the guise of a dramatic composition." It would seem from her words that Āścaryacūdāmaṇi was the first drama from the South to be performed in the North, or at least the first to be performed in the city in the North where this prologue was used.

The plot of this seven-act play follows the story of the Rāmāyaṇa beginning with the attempt by Śūrpaṅakhā to seduce Rāma and her subsequent mutilation, continuing with the kidnapping of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, the attempt by Rāvaṇa to seduce Sītā, and the visit of Hanūmān, and ending with the return of Sītā to Rāma. As in the Abhiṣekanāṭakam, the lengthy battle on Sri Laṅkā is described briefly in an interlude, this time between a semi-divine Vidyādhara and his beloved. The second act of this play, called "Śūrpaṅakhāṅka, and the sixth act," Aṅgulīyaṅka, are currently in the repertoire of Kutiyattam.

The next plays from the South are those of the Cēra king Kulaśēkhara Varman: Subhadrādhanañjaya and Tapatīsamvarāṇa. The possible identity of this author and his dates have been discussed above in the previous section. Both plays draw on the epic Mahābhārata for their stories. Dhanañjaya recounts in five acts the abduction of Subhadrā, the sister of Kṛṣṇa, by Dhanañjaya (Arjuna), one of the five Pāṇḍavas, who are the heroes of the epic. Samvarāṇa describes the love of Tapatī, a celestial nymph and daughter of the Sun God and Samvarāṇa, the king of Hastināpura. The play has six acts and its story comes from the same book of the Mahābhārata as Dhanañjaya. Kulaśēkhara Varman is re-

puted to have written a third drama and a prose work for which no manuscripts have been found, and perhaps he composed a short devotional lyric, Mukundamālā, 'Garland of Visnu' which is still very popular. The first act of Dhanañjaya is perhaps the most commonly staged work in Kūṭiyāṭṭam today. It is regularly given a complete, eleven-day performance by Madhva Cākyār at the Vaṭakkunāthan temple in Trichur. The first half of the first act of Samvarana is also in the repertoire today, though it is rarely performed.

Kulaśēkhara's works are especially interesting because an extensive commentary accompanies the dramas. These commentaries are known as Samvaranadhvani and Dhanañjayadhvani. As we have seen above, dhvani means suggestion, and refers to the underlying emotional line of the drama, what is called today its subtext in Western acting theory. These commentaries specify ways of enacting the dramas in order to bring out their subtext. The commentaries together are known as Vyaṅgyavyākhyā. They were written by a Brāhman who was apparently a contemporary of the author of the plays. Unfortunately the commentaries have not been published, but N.P. Unni has translated their introduction from the unpublished manuscript. In it the anonymous author narrates how the commentaries came to be written. It pictures a king who was an actor as well as a dramatist. I will quote it here in full:

Getting up early in the morning I performed the morning rites in the river Cūrṇikā and visited the temple at Parameśvaramaṅalam, dedicated to Viṣṇu. Returning to my house I washed my hands and legs and warmed myself before a blazing fire. I was meditating and praying, when a Brahmin messenger sent by the king wished to meet me. Then I travelled in his company towards Mahodayapuram by the Cūrṇikā river in a canoe provided with cot, bed, and other comforts.

There I met the king seated on a throne. His natural lustre seems to have increased owing to the radiance of the rich stones

adorning his crown. An elevated forehead, a prominent nose, lofty shoulders, long eyes and lengthy shanks contributed much to adorn his person. Surely, the red painted forearms and feet betrayed the signs of a king since they possessed auspicious marks of a wheel, conch-shell etc. His face-lotus glittered in the brilliance of the rich stones on his earrings. His neck surpassed the conch-shell in sound and shape. His breast was anointed with saffron, camphor and sandal pastes. The blue silken garment worn by him attracted the attention of the onlookers. He was engaged in conversation the topic being Viṣṇu--the Supreme Spirit. The lotus held in his left hand was being closed by the other. He was loved and admired by one and all. With modesty I entered the assembly room. The king received me with sweet words. Hardly had I stood there for a moment when the king sought the permission of the assembly with a smiling look and retired to his private chamber along with me. Conversing humourously we entered the council chamber inaccessible to others. Once I was seated comfortably, the king spoke to me in a pleasing manner.

"I have brought you here, O Scholar, since you are a post-master in the art of histrionics. I have decided to assign a certain work to you. I have composed two dramas: Samvarana and Dhanañjaya. Both these dramas were written using suggestive words. Suggestive poetry has found acceptance at the hands of scholars. Hence in composing both these dramas suggestive words were often used. You are proficient in the art of histrionics. Go through them, judge their merit, and tell me whether they are good or not. If they are any good, be a spectator; I shall myself present before you each character in the proper way. Then I shall have them staged by professional actors." Thus I was instructed by him and was shown the mode of enactment of his dramas.¹⁸⁴

Unni, following other scholars, identifies the king Kulaśēkhara as the patron of the famous poet Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva in poems to his patron king paints him as a ruler whose army is especially powerful ("It clove its way, like a good ship through the river-like armies of his enemies."), who was fair in his dealings with others (He "was as steady in punishing the wicked, as ready in succoring the righteous.") and who ruled over a productive land ("The fat soil of [his] dominions yielded coveted harvests while the trees provided the amplest shade."). According to tradition it was Kulaśēkhara Varman who was responsible for reforming the Sanskrit stage in Kerala and creating Kūṭiyāṭṭam. His innovations are said to be:

- a) the introduction of the local language by the Viḍūṣaka to explain the Sanskrit and Prākṛit passages,
- b) the addition of the humourous element by introducing extraneous matter such as the parody of the four Puruṣārthas 'goals of life,'
- c) the confining of the staging of Sanskrit plays as a temple-art to be performed exclusively by the Cākṃyār and the Nambyār community,
- d) pointing out in detail the procedure for acting many of the popular plays of the time.¹⁸⁵

A Kerala writer on Kūṭiyāṭṭam details innovations in the acting procedures (point "d" above) which are attributed to the dramatist-king:

- 1) Every act must be supplemented with an introductory portion covering the story up to the beginning of the act;
- 2) The hero and other important characters should recite their stanzas clearly and expound them in the order of construction. The meaning should be conveyed through the medium of imitative and symbolic gestures; . . .
- [3] Not only word meanings, but also suggested ideas and the detailed explanation of the ideas may be represented through hand poses and various other gestures . . . mountains, rivers, cities, palaces, gardens, etc., should be brought before the audience through gesticulations.¹⁸⁶

A Brāhman scholar, popularly known as Tolan, is said to have helped the king in his reformation of the theatre. Tolan is supposed to be the author of all the Kramadīpikās and Āṭṭaparakāras, the manuals which describe procedures for acting the plays. However it seems very unlikely that one person could be responsible for all the existing manuals. Since the commentaries to Kulaśēkhara's plays do not mention the use of the vernacular in productions, it is unlikely that he could be responsible for this important innovation. Probably the new emphasis on the use of gesture can be attributed to the king and Tolan while the use of the local language by the Viḍūṣaka and some of the more elaborate extension of the text had a more gradual development. Unni sug-

gests that the gestural innovations have "their deep roots in the canons of Bharata,"¹⁸⁷ but it is important to realize that nowhere in the Nāṭyaśāstra does Bharata imply that the text should be extended by gesture in the elaborate style of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

It may be that the "transformation" of the Sanskrit stage in Kerala had precedents in other places in India. The Kuṭṭanīmata of the Kaśmirian poet Dāmodaragupta of the ninth century describes the staging of the first act of Ratnāvalī of Harṣa, a contemporary of Mahendravarman I. The staging described is certainly not very similar to that of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, though this has been suggested,¹⁸⁸ but it is a fascinating account of an elaborate production in court in which the performers take many liberties with the text.¹⁸⁹ As mentioned in the previous section, this work was a model for the Vaiśikatantram, the earliest surviving Maṇipravāḷam poem, so it was certainly known in Kerala.

In Kūṭiyāṭṭam never more than one act of a play is performed at a time. The following acts are still performed:

- 1) Subhadrādhanañjaya (Kulaśēkhara Varman), Act I
- 2) Tapatīsamvarana (Kulaśēkhara Varman), Half of Act I
- 3) Āścaryacūdāmani (Śaktibhadra),
Act II--"Śūrpaṇakhāṅka"
Act V--"Aśokavanikāṅka"
Act VI--"Aṅgulīyaṅka"
- 4) Mattavilāsa (Mahendravarman I). Introductory verse only
- 5) Abhiṣekanāṭakam (Bhāsa),
Act I--"Bālivadha"
Act III--"Torāṇayuddha"
- 6) Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa (Bhāsa), Act III--"Mantrāṅka"

- 7) Pratimānātaka (Bhāsa), Act VII--"Abhiṣekāñka"
- 8) Bālacarita (Bhāsa), Introductory verse
- 9) Nāgānanda (Harṣa), Act II

Maṇimadhva Cākyār performed a small part of Bhāsa's Svapnavāsavadattā in New Delhi in the Sixties but Rāman Cākyār was not teaching this to his students. Traditionally the Cākyār knew 72 acts from 24 plays including all thirteen plays attributed to Bhāsa and the Śakuntalā of Kālidāsa.¹⁹⁰

The text of the plays provides a foundation upon which the performance is built, but the time required for speaking the lines of the text is only a small part of the total performance time. The extensions and elaborations of the text are the most characteristic features of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. These extrapolations have several different functions, among them:

- 1) to allow the play to be understood by those not knowing Sanskrit and so familiarize people with the language,
- 2) to have the motivations of the characters, the meaning of every verse, and indeed the meaning and significance of almost every word of the text understood and experienced fully,
- 3) to provide comic relief,
- 4) to censure vice and excess with social satire,
- 5) to allow the actor to reach his highest potential as a performer, and
- 6) to make the entire performance an act of devotion.

Thus one act of a play, which would take at most twenty minutes of performance time in a straightforward production, will last from three to

six hours each night for a minimum of five days to a maximum of forty-one days. In some cases, though a minimum of five days is required for a complete performance of an act ("Bālivadhā" is an example), the majority of the act is played out in one evening after the required preliminaries are completed and the appropriate groundwork has been laid on the previous nights. In the past there have been performances in which preliminaries and interpolations have been shortened so that the entire act could be presented in one evening, though such performances are not sanctioned by tradition.¹⁹¹

The Āṭṭaparakāras and Kramadīpikās are the instructional manuals for the actors. The Āṭṭaparakāras explain in detail how to interpret and enact the verses and prose sentences in the play, give the gesture texts for the extrapolations, and outline the verbal interpolations of the Viḍūṣaka. The Kramadīpikās give instructions on make-up, costuming, and the various melodies that are to be used for the verses of the plays. Except in one important instance this material is not separately available and is intermingled with the text of the Āṭṭaparakāras.¹⁹² The following are the most important of the existing texts:

- 1) Rāmāyana Kramadīpikā--This is the only pure Kramadīpikā. It describes how the whole story of the Rāmāyana is to be taken from the twenty-one acts of Āścaryacūdāmani, Pratimānāṭaka, and Abhiṣekanāṭaka. Included are directions for make-up and costume material and construction, modes of walking and sitting, glances, expressions of moods and sentiments, ways of speaking, as well as a discussion of the rights and privileges of and remuneration for actors.
- 2) Aṅgulīyaṅkam Āṭṭaparakāra--Aṅgulīyaṅkam is performed as a solo, the Cākyaṛ taking the role of the monkey Hanūmān. Though Sītā is a character in the act, her verses are sung from the side by the Naṅgyār. In the original text Hanūmān is shown crossing the ocean, searching for Sītā and giving her the ankle bracelet, aṅgulī. But in the course of its presentation many other incidents are enacted in gesture and the Āṭṭaparakāra gives the text for these additions. In-

cluded is a retelling of the events of the first five acts of the play. Hanūmān in gesture also relates the events of his own birth, Rāvaṇa's conquest of heaven, the descent of the Ganges, and the dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu. The performance may last from twelve to forty-one days. For the Kūṭiyāṭṭam student it is the most important piece for learning emotional expression through gesture.

- 3) Aśokavanikam Āṭṭaparakāra--This Āṭṭaparakāra for the fifth act of Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi is also important for gesture. Its performance requires sixteen days.
- 4) Matrāṅkam Āṭṭaparakāra--The third act of Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa is important for the prominence it gives the Viḍūṣaka. Learning it trains the student in story-telling and comedy. In the course of this act the Cākyār recounts the whole of the Rāmāyaṇa, the marriages of Subhadrā and Draupadī, and many folk tales.
- 5) Bhagavadajjuka Āṭṭaparakāra--Baudāyaṇa's one-act farce is no longer performed by the Cākyārs, but this Āṭṭaparakāra, more than half of which is in Sanskrit, is significant for in it all the Indian systems of philosophy from Vedānta, the most "spiritual" to Carvaka, the most "material," are described in detail. The Viḍūṣaka is also to expound all the Hindu saṃskāra rites and various Hindu rituals as well as the daily practices of the Buddhists.

These texts, along with the texts of the plays themselves, are lovingly preserved and guarded by the Cākyārs. The manuscripts are written on leaves of the talipot palm, dried, smoothed, sized, and cut into strips. A number of leaves are tied together and bound in wooden covers, often laquered and painted. The Cākyārs are very protective of these manuscripts, and rarely do they let others examine them, even today. Indicative of the secrecy with which they are kept is the fact that the thirteen plays of "Bhāsa," for which the Cākyārs have always had manuscripts, were only "discovered" by Gaṇapati Śāstrī in 1912.

Another important text related to Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the Naṭāṅkuṣa, an anonymous work in Sanskrit from perhaps the sixteenth century which criticizes many aspects of the staging of Sanskrit plays by the Cākyārs

primarily because they do not conform to the rules of dramaturgy in the Nāṭyaśāstra and because the extrapolations do not further the action of the play. Kunjunni Raja has given an account of this unpublished text.¹⁹³

The score of a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance includes: 1) the preliminaries, 2) puRappāṭu 'entrance' of the hero and sometimes the puRappāṭu of one or two other major characters including Viḍūṣaka if there is one, 3) nirvahana 'accomplishment' or 'background' of each of the characters who has done puRappāṭu, 4) kūṭiyāṭṭam, or 'combined acting' proper, and 5) mutiyakkitta 'final invocation.' (i.e., one act of a Sanskrit drama)

A typical "play," will last five to fifteen days. After the preliminaries are completed, one or more major characters will perform puRappāṭu and nirvahana. For example in "Bālivadhā," Act One of Abhiṣekanāṭakam, both Rāma, the hero, and Sugrīva, the monkey king whom Rāma is coming to aid in his bid for power, have puRappāṭus and nirvahanas. These take the first four days of performance. On the fifth day Kūṭiyāṭṭam proper begins, the other characters in the scene appear on the stage, and the act is finished on that day. The entire performance is complete in five days. Other plays without Viḍūṣaka follow similar patterns, although nirvahana may be extended to many days and of course the act itself may take more than one day to perform because of elaboration on the text itself.

If the Viḍūṣaka is one of the characters in the act, then the performance is automatically extended by four days while he, alone on the stage, expounds humorous material that is the same irrespective of the play being presented. All the elements of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance

will be examined in detail in the later chapters. Here it will be useful to describe the general layout of a frequently performed typical play with a Viḍūṣaka--Act One of Subhadrādhanañjaya.¹⁹⁴

As the play begins Dhanañjaya (Arjuna) finds himself in a hermitage after just completing a year-long journey to visit holy places. On the first day's performance, after the preliminaries which introduce the musicians, plot, and characters of the play, Arjuna appears from behind the curtain holding his bow and arrow showing his stāyibhāva 'emotional state'--rati 'love' indicative of the 'erotic sentiment' (śṛṅgāra). With subtle movements of the face and body he displays his inner emotion--he has been smitten by the arrows of Kāma, the God of Love. In his puRappātu he speaks and signs the first verse of the play in which he explains that he has missed his four brothers and Draupadī, the wife they all share, but that he is now enamored with Subhadrā, the sister of Kṛṣṇa. On the second day Dhanañjaya in his nirvahaṇa recounts past deeds and his meeting of Subhadrā. The third day's performance is an elaborate presentation of the second verse of the play, śikhini śalabho, in which the hermitage is described:

The fire-fly, falling into the fire, is not affected by its flames;
a young deer is fearlessly sucking milk from the udder of a tigress;
a young elephant is touching the lion's fangs mistaking them for a
a lotus stalk;
and the baby serpent licks the mongoose putting him to sleep.¹⁹⁵

To prepare for the presentation of this verse, the Cākyār playing Dhanañjaya describes the banyan tree under which he is sitting waiting for his friend, Kaundinya the Viḍūṣaka. He uses only his eyes and face; his arms are crossed over his chest. With gesture language he describes the tree, its branches, and the significance of the direction in which they

lie. Then the verse śikhini śalabho is presented with only eyes and face. This feat tests to the utmost the emotional expressivity of the actor. It is a very popular verse and one for which the Cākyārs are justly famous. Throughout the display the orchestra, especially the leading mizhāvu, follows the subtle movements of the face rhythmically, accentuating the throwing of the eyes from side to side and the fluttering of the eyebrows, cheeks, and eyeballs. The Cākyār shows the moth's approach to the flame. He acts the affection of the deer for the tiger, the frustration of the young elephant as he tries to catch the fangs of the lion, etc. The actor takes the role of each of these animals, and then for each event expresses with eyes and face Arjuna's reaction of wonder. More than an hour may be taken for the presentation of this verse alone; the length will vary with the ability of the actor and the attention of the audience. For this time the play is completely forgotten as we watch with fascination the magical skill of the actor and allow our thoughts to wander over the stunning connotations that are suggested by his movements as they are accompanied by the driving rhythm of the drums.

Then Dhanañjaya again describes the banyan tree, and we return to the play. He speaks for the first time:

Ah, my lazy friend Kaundinya still lingers on the path. So now I shall await his arrival in the shade of this banyan tree near the penance grove.¹⁹⁶

The Viḍūṣaka is heard calling from off stage, "O ye sages, give alms! Give alms!" And Dhanañjaya responds: "Oh, this voice begging for alms seems to be that of Kaundinya." Kaundinya enters with a banana leaf held to accept food, but it is empty. He is tired and hungry, and he does some stobhas 'buffooneries' on his entrance. The Viḍūṣaka comes

downstage and pretends to beg at a row of cottages along the front of the stage. He completes the third day's action with a kind of simple dance called tattu, from tattuka 'to skip, hop as a frog, etc.' The text of the play continues:

Kauṇḍinya: O ye sages, give alms! Give alms! (looking around)
 Ah, all the cottage courtyards are vacant. (heaving a sigh)
 Oh, my bad-luck belly which has the power to make this penance grove, which is always full of hermits, empty. It's my own fault, for I wander around following this Sannyāsi who is fond of pilgrimages. I used to be in the company of the 8,000 Brāhmins in Yudhiṣṭhira's household and enjoy four kinds of food made delicious by the touch of the lotus hand of Yajñaseni (Draupadī) and be served in golden plates.¹⁹⁷

The actors will refer to the situation that the text suggests, but they will not take up the words of the text itself again until the ninth day.

The fourth day is devoted to the nirvahaṇa of the Viḍūṣaka. He will elaborate on the text just quoted, his first line in the play. Unlike those of the main characters, Viḍūṣaka Nirvahaṇa is entirely spoken. He is free to develop his own blocking and to improvise around the outline that is given in the Āṅṅaparakāras. Alone on the stage, the Viḍūṣaka begins the scene exactly as he finished it the day before, holding his banana leaf and calling "Bhikham dedha! Bhikham dedha!" He realizes that the huts are empty and complains that it is his own fault, the result of his past karma. This statement is the basis of his argument on the fourth day. He quotes a Sanskrit verse on the fruits of karma, and as an example of bad karma he tells a story about a man who had to marry three times in order to have a son born to him, only to have the son die when he was five by falling into a well. He tells how he was called on by fate to follow Arjuna on his pilgrimage. Then he begins to explain how he came to be in his present miserable

condition. He describes his happy times riding horses in his village and his election by the village to be their representative to serve the king. He went to the palace where the five brothers, the heroes of the epic Mahābhārata, reigned and enjoyed the delicious meals served by Draupadī their wife. And he ended up following Arjuna on the pilgrimage. He tries to evoke pity in the spectators for his miserable state, but of course succeeds only in making them laugh at his complaints. On this note the fourth day, the Viḍūṣaka's nirvahaṇa proper, ends.

The next four days are taken up with material that is basically the same for every play containing a Viḍūṣaka. It is the story of his youth in Anadhītamaṅgalam 'Village of Illiterates,' and his appointment to the service of a king who invariably turns out to be the hero of the play. To begin, on the fifth day the Viḍūṣaka presents a śloka describing a quarrel between Śiva and Pārvatī. He then describes the solution of several other quarrels and in the process manages to make fun of poets who are excessively ornate or use improper rhythmic patterns. He recalls a quarrel that arose in the Village of Illiterates between two temple trustees as a result of which the temple ceased functioning. All the members of the temple community were called together to discuss the future running of the temple. The Viḍūṣaka describes and mimics each of the various groups that serve the temple--the priests, the musicians, cooks, etc.--and acts their deliberations and bickerings. Finally they decide that their common goal should be to obtain puruṣārtha, the four aims of life. The traditional aims of life, the puruṣārthas popular in Hindu philosophy, are dharma, following one's obligations, artha, acquiring wealth and other material benefits,

kāma, the seeking of pleasure and emotional fulfillment, and mokṣa, liberation from the binding influence of material existence, the final goal of life sought particularly by the yogis and spiritual ascetics.

But the Viḍūṣaka has his own ideas about life's proper ends and his puruṣārthas are those that are appropriate for "modern" man. His kāma is vinoda, the enjoyment of sexual pleasure, his mokṣa is vañcana, deceiving the women whom he has indulged sexually, his dharma is asana, eating, and his artha is rājasevā making money by serving the king. He insists they must be attained in this order. So on the sixth day the Viḍūṣaka, lays out this groundwork and begins to discuss vinoda with the assembled Brāhmans. In many aspects his discussion satirizes the kind of erotic literature that was popular in Kerala in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He describes ten kinds of veśyas 'courtesans' one should avoid in one's search for vinoda with a story to illustrate each. Finally the ideal prostitute is named. She greets everyone with a smile and says farewell with a tear. She seems to love only the man she is with. The Brāhmans eagerly make for the house of this ideal woman and proceed to enjoy her. On the way out one of them manages to steal a small vessel from her house, and thus not only vinoda has been achieved, but also vañcana, for the courtesan has been deceived and the thief has gained his mokṣa, his freedom from the wiles of women, by enjoying her and then stealing from her.

On the seventh day the discussion of asana 'eating' is taken up. The Viḍūṣaka spends almost two hours relating a mythical episode in which the God of Wealth, Kubera, invites the two sons of Śiva, Subrahmaṇya and Gaṇapati, for breakfast. The great power of Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed god who is worshipped at the start of any enterprise as

the remover of obstacles, is cleverly emphasized, for he is shown to have insatiable hunger. After eating everything in the palace he tries to eat up Kubera. Kubera flees to Śiva, who feeds Gaṇapati fried rice, making him vomit. Then the various types of hosts are discussed. There are four categories of host: tasty-tasteless, tasteless-tasty, tasteless-tasteless, and tasty-tasty. Stories are told about each group. The Viḍūṣaka naturally concludes that the best type is tasty-tasty, who offers food to guests anytime they arrive.¹⁹⁸ Moreover the ideal occasion for achieving the puruṣārtha of asana is to attend the banquet traditionally served by a rich Nambūtiri Brāhman a year after the death of his mother or father (called pantraṅṅām māsam). After some inquiry the Viḍūṣaka discovers that such a ceremony, honoring Nḍiṅin Naikkar Appan, is soon to be held at a nearby house, and so the Brāhman prepare to attend. After mistakingly entering the houses of a barber and a washerman (both low-caste members of the community who would live in huts), the procession reaches the great house of the landlord. They enter and after bathing and watching the preparation of food, they sit down to eat. The Viḍūṣaka acts the part of one Brāhman who is so eager to attain asana that he swoons in ecstasy as soon as rice is put on his plate. He recites a kariśloka ('curry'-verse) in Maṅipravālam describing each of the dishes that is served. The Viḍūṣaka elaborately mimes the eating of the meal, and the evening ends with a benediction praying for a similar feast next year (thus implying that someone else in the family should die soon). The description of asana puruṣārtha may take up to eight hours, and so the performance, usually beginning at about 9 p.m., will not be over until almost 5 a.m.

The eighth day is taken for portraying rājasevā, the service of

kings. In the course of his account, the Viḍūṣaka gradually works back toward the events of the play itself by describing how he came to serve, in this case, Arjuna. As the Viḍūṣaka always serves as the court-jester and confidant to a king in the Sanskrit drama, his narration can always be adjusted to the play being presented. He begins with a śloka meaning: "For men rājasevā is the most difficult and most dangerous thing. It is like inserting a dagger into one's throat and kissing the mouth of a leopard."¹⁹⁹ There are two main obstacles to attaining rājasevā puruṣārtha. First the one who seeks the king's friendship may not deserve it, and second the king may not be willing to treat his companion with the respect he should. The fool must be capable and the king generous for rājasevā to be enjoyable. As he pictures the various rulers, the Viḍūṣaka "has ample opportunity . . . to criticize the administration and point out the defects of corruption."²⁰⁰ Then the Viḍūṣaka recounts how the villagers select him as their representative to the king, how he chooses to go into the service of Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍava brothers because with him the Viḍūṣaka will most likely attain his puruṣārtha, and how he is able to impress the king with his wit and is taken into his service. In Yudhiṣṭhira's service he enjoys himself thoroughly, especially the meals served by Draupadī. Later he is asked to serve Bhīma, the great warrior brother, but when the Viḍūṣaka sees his huge body he is scared away. Finally he seeks out Arjuna, is pleased by his beauty and manners, and becomes his jester and confidant. Soon Arjuna, because of an accidental transgression, voluntarily goes into exile for one year, and the Viḍūṣaka foolishly agrees to accompany him. The rest of the day's performance is

spent describing the trials and tribulations of following Arjuna through the forests--having to bathe in freezing water, trying to keep up with such a fast walker, and worst of all, missing meals.

With this thorough description of his present state of mind, the Viḍūṣaka's long solo performance in Kūṭiyāṭṭam comes to an end. On the following day the performers will again return to the text of the play. However, the presence of the Viḍūṣaka on stage causes drastic changes in the presentation of the text. A few of these changes as they occur in Subhadrādhanañjaya will be discussed here in order to show how the score of the performance relates to the text of the play.

Only three days are left of the eleven-day performance and the majority of the text of the act remains to be performed. We left the hero under the big banyan tree waiting for his friend, and on the ninth day he returns to his seat, still waiting. But now the Viḍūṣaka is on stage, and he takes it upon himself to explain to the audience in Malayāḷam who this fellow sitting under the "tree" is and what he is doing there. It is the job of the Viḍūṣaka, when he is on stage with another character, to fill the audience in on what has happened before he arrived and to translate most of what is recited by the hero while he is there into Malayāḷam. The effect of the two figures on stage at the same time is striking in many respects. First their appearance is sharply contrasting. Though neither's dress could be called "realistic," the costume of the Viḍūṣaka is based on what a Brāhman would wear in a temple. (See Plate XVa.) His make-up is relatively simple and rather casually applied: white rice flour mixed with water in a lined pattern on the face, large red dots on the forehead, cheeks, nose, and

chin, and black collyrium applied rather racoon-like across the eyes. A huge painted mustache, one end up, the other down, completes the facial make-up. The chest and upper arms are smeared with white rice-paste as well, and lines are scored across them and red dots applied. He wears a headdress with kākapada, a tuft of hair hanging down, often over his face, and two ornaments called cevippu above his ears. On one ear he wears a garland of Tecci flowers and in the other earlobe he sticks a rolled betel leaf. He has gold bracelets (vala) on his wrists and an elaborate golden ornament hung around his hips. An uttariya, or upper cloth, is tied around his waist, and an amazing prṣṭa 'back' (See Plate XIVb), completes the costume. Arjuna on the other hand has a green face and a kind of beard originally constructed of layers of lime paste, but now made of shaped heavy paper attached with rice paste called cutti. He wears an elaborate costume and headdress. (See Plate XVb). The effect of the hero's make-up and costume is other-worldly and serious, while that of the Viḍūṣaka is realistic and comic. The contrast in speech is also striking, for the hero speaks only infrequently and when he does he speaks Sanskrit in a highly artificial style, simultaneously translating the meaning into gestures. The Viḍūṣaka jabbers Sanskrit, Prākṛit and Malayāḷam, and his speech is often colloquial and occasionally obscene. The codified, ritualized gestures of the hero place him in a world completely aloof from ordinary reality. When not speaking he stands as if a statue, not reacting to the quips and jibes of the Viḍūṣaka, moving and speaking only in heightened style. The clown on the other hand moves with complete freedom. He is loose and his gestures are casual, even gross. Painkulum Rāman Cākyār has a large stomach (very highly regarded, even in modern India, as a sign of

prosperity) which protrudes prominently from under the uttarīya tied around his waist. He acts always as if he has something in his mouth which he is chewing (betel); he plays with the sacred thread running across his chest; he takes off the uttarīya and pretends to wring the sweat out of it, or he uses it as a fan. While the hero remains impersonal and distant, the Viḍūṣaka speaks directly to the audience, asking questions of them, prodding them, even incorporating what is happening in the audience with what he is talking about. He often comments on someone who is coming in late or is choosing to leave, but he usually manages to make his remarks suit the action of the story he is just then telling. Important people (or foreigners!) in the audience will often become the brunt of a joke. Yet his wit prevents the joking from being cruel. Also the audience must never talk back to him, no matter how much he prods for a reply; by tradition if an audience member responds to the Viḍūṣaka at a performance of Kūṭiyāṭṭam or Kūttu, the performance must stop.

The Viḍūṣaka has always been free to make whatever "personal references, pointed allusions and innuendos" he has desired, "whether the victims were princes or nobles, patricians or plebians, when the good of the society necessitated an exposure of their conduct."²⁰¹ Today much of the Viḍūṣaka's caustic remarks have become set and much of his bite is gone, nevertheless Rāman Cākyār reads the paper every day to keep up on current events, and as Viḍūṣaka he will insert references to the current political situation into his improvisation. Chaitanya comments in his History of Malayalam Literature that "the high density and literacy and the mercurial temperament of the people make the social and political scene in Kerala one of continuous excitement." The Viḍū-

ṣaka is a product and a quintessential representative of these lively and astute people.

Once the Viḍūṣaka has provided the audience background on the hero, he again takes up his role in the play. The dialogue continues from where it was left eight days before:

Kauṇḍinya: . . . Here in this penance-grove there is no one to even talk of food. Let me find a pond to quench my thirst. (taking a few steps he looks ahead joyfully.) There is a lake as big as an ocean. I'll go to it and drink to my heart's content.

Dhanañjaya: Alas, this poor fool is being seduced by a mirage. I'd better stop him. Friend, O Kauṇḍinya! Don't waste your efforts. Come over here.

Dhanañjaya calls "Sakhe!" 'O Friend,' but Kauṇḍinya does not see him and hears only the "e", which he mistakes for the sound of water in the pond. The Viḍūṣaka reacts with the following remarks (not in the text):

Why I believe I hear water. I can't wait to reach the pond and have a cool drink. I must go. (He listens.)

"Sakhe! Sakhe!"

Aha, I know that sound, it's the lapping waves of the pond. "Ay, ay." I can hear the waters flowing. It must be the waves. If I can get there, then I can drink my fill. (He listens again.)

"Sakhe! Sakhe!"

What is that "khay" sound I hear? I know, it must be the sound of frogs. A pond full of water and frogs! A pond full of water and frogs everywhere! I knew there was water by god! And the sound of frogs proves it. Filled with frogs. "Khay, khay," that's the sound. One frog calling to another. Once they know I'm coming they are petrified. When I was a boy studying Vedas at Perutrikkoṣil Temple, do you know how many frogs eyes I pricked and broke? There was hardly a frog left that I hadn't gotten to. But now a female frog found herself a husband from another pond. She knows me and is trembling with fear as she sees me coming. She's in despair, thinking of her poor lover's eyes. So she called; "Sakhe, there comes that brute who pricks and breaks eyes. So go under the water immediately and hide."

"Sakhe Kauṇḍinya. Sakhe Kauṇḍinya"

Ah, now I know. I thought it was the sound of frogs in water, but now I realize that it's my master calling."²⁰²

Dhanañjaya, following the text, finally convinces Kauṇḍinya that the water is only a mirage, and the two of them go off in search of real water. Then Viḍūṣaka looks up and sees what he thinks is a dark cloud with "screaming lightning on its lap." Arjuna looks up and sees that it is in fact a smokey demon carrying away a beautiful girl by force. Angered he recites: "You wretched creature, stay where you are. I am going to kill you. You either flee away leaving that beautiful maiden, or you will be reduced to ashes by my arrows."²⁰³ The śloka is recited in vīratarka svāra, the style of delivery appropriate for heroic characters aroused to anger. The actor uses not only gesture, but also jumping and turning movements called ilakiyāṭṭam. The verse is repeated three times, first with voice and movement, next with gesture and movement only, accompanied by the orchestra, and finally again with voice, gestures, and movements. Arjuna aims his arrow at the demon, but before he can shoot, the demon drops the girl and flees. After she begins to fall, the Viḍūṣaka stops Arjuna from shooting, for, he argues, if you were to shoot, your arrow is so powerful that it might fly to the furthest reaches of heaven and injure even Brahmā, the creator who abides there. Arjuna puts away the arrow, and Kauṇḍinya indulges in some tricks to chase away the demon. With the girl still falling the ninth day ends.

On the tenth day the Viḍūṣaka spends some time recalling the events of the previous day while Arjuna stands motionless, his arms out, ready to catch the girl who is still falling. Finally the curtain is brought out and held in front of the stool behind them. Subhadrā,

the heroine, enters and stands behind the stool, and in a voice filled with fear and trembling calls "Save me, save me!" The curtain is removed, and she falls into Arjuna's arms. (For her appearance, see Plate XVIa.) Immediately he falls in love with this girl, not suspecting that she is the sister of Kṛṣṇa about whom he has heard so much and whom he is planning to marry. She also falls in love with him, not suspecting it is Arjuna to whom she is already engaged. Her whole body tingles causing even her hair to stand on end, beads of sweat to trickle down her face, and her breasts to heave. As Arjuna is soon to notice, these are physical signs of both terror and infatuation. Gently he places her beside him and acts one of the most famous ślokas in Kūṭiyāttam, "Calukuvalayadhāmnor," for which he takes almost two hours to explain in gestures the connotations and references that are suggested by the verse.²⁰⁴ Throughout the acting of this and the following verses the Viḍūṣaka remains silent to the side or off stage. He takes little part in the rest of this days activities. Toward the end of the performance the hero and the Viḍūṣaka have an exchange of text which takes them to another śloka, "Saundaryam" which is to be acted in full on the following day.

On the last day the rest of the act is completed, and the Viḍūṣaka has a chance to banter with Arjuna. He parodies the Sanskrit verses of Arjuna with Malayāḷam verses called pratiślokas. For example when Arjuna contends that Subhadrā's glances certainly show her love for him-- "What else could be suggested when the enchanting corners of her eyes dance like a tremulous lotus?"--Kaunḍinya retorts--"Yes, but the charming corners of the eyes of the servant-maid request, 'Will you give me a little pan and betel-nut? and 'Why don't you come into my room?'"²⁰⁵

Another verse when it is acted in detail by Arjuna (during the fourth repetition) is broken up by the comments of the Viḍūṣaka:

Dhanañjaya: There is . . .

Viḍūṣaka: Who my dear friend? Lord Kṛṣṇa?

Dh: . . . someone named Subhadrā . . .

Viḍ: Oh my friend! I know well. Alas! You are attracted by that aging Subhadrā.

Dh: . . . who is quite young

Viḍ: What, a young girl? Oh! You are in love with that lame, squint-eyed, teeth protruding ugly servant-maid?

Dh: . . . and very beautiful,

Viḍ: What! Very beautiful and young damsel. Let me think about it. Oh. I know. You are a prince of the lunar race and the friend of Kṛṣṇa, yet you fall in love with a servant-maid. Alas!

Dh: . . . the sister of Kṛṣṇa

Viḍ: The sister of Kṛṣṇa? (laughing) How pitiable for a learned man like you to love a woman married to somebody. By this time she must have three or four children!

Dh: . . . and a maiden.²⁰⁶

Thus the mood of the play as implied by the text is constantly broken by the interjections of the Viḍūṣaka, and his function as a jester and entertainer often dominates the scene. The very aloofness of the hero from all this tomfoolery give him a fascinating continuity. A feeling of strangeness and antiquity resides in his presence. The heroism and mythological integrity of the central figure is remarkably heightened by the presence of the clown. He functions like a chorus, providing a link between the hero and the audience by interpreting his language and his motivations to them, but he also more subtly links the audience and the hero by making both the brunt of his humor. He ridicules the actor

and the audience, and thus brings them into a unique sympathy with and understanding for each other.

The final day's performance ends with Mutiyakkitta, the final invocation which is sung by the Naññyār while the Cākyār who has played the hero dances.²⁰⁷ Then he washes his feet, lights a wick, extinguishes the lamp, and then lights one of its wicks again. This is the completion of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance.

We see that the text, though greatly revered by the Cākyārs, is merely a springboard for the development of an elaborate score which involves verbal, emotional, situational, and physical extensions. Only the Viḍūṣaka has the right to speak words other than the text, but the other characters develop their text through gesture and mime in traditional ways, and these additions, as we shall see in the next chapter, not only enrich the audience's experience but also provide a foundation for the complete training of the actor.