CHAPTER III

ACTORS, AUDIENCE AND CRITICS
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1. DRAMATIC TROUPE

The group of performers who participate in a dramatic performance is called Nātya-vrnda or dramatic troupe. The Nātya-vrnda comprehends among others the actors, dancers, singers and the musicians, who, in Sanskrit terminology, are commonly called Nātas, Nartakas, Gāyakas and Vādakas respectively. There are also generic terms by which a member of the dramatic troupe is known, the commonest of them being Bharata, Śailūsa and Kuśilava. Different opinions regarding the origin and significance of these terms have been expressed by different authorities, but unfortunately, these views are so divergent that any reconciliation between them is virtually impossible.

The term 'bharata' has gained wider currency than 'śailūsa' and 'kuśilava'. Śāradātanaya holds that the word 'bharata' is derived from the root 'bhr' (to bear or assume), because an actor assumes the appearance, age, actions, deeds and so forth of a particular character, availing himself of speech, costume, make-up, personal props and other aids. The author has made a valiant effort to explain all the synonyms for an actor in such a way as to bring forward the different aspects of his skill, but it is very doubtful if his explanations have anything to do with the actual origin of the words. Bharata is the name of the divine authority on drama who codified and translated into audio-visual form the Nāṭya-veda conceived by Brahma and eventually became the mythical author of the Nāṭyaśāstra, the most authoritative and exhaustive work on Sanskrit dramaturgy. It is very probable that those who practised Bharata's art on earth came to be known as Bharatas even as the word 'thespian' which is synonymous with 'actor' was derived from Thespis, the semi-legendary originator of the Greek theatrical art. The terms 'śailūsa' and 'kuśilava' are certainly older than 'bharata' and their origin more obscure. There is a view that the actors are the descendants of an ancient teacher of acting called Śailūsa, hence the name Śailūsa for actor. According to

1. Bh.Pr., p. 298. 3 ft
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 288. 3 ft.
Saradatanaya, the word is derived from 'slla' (disposition) inasmuch as an actor assuming different roles depicts the emotions of the people of diverse dispositions.

Explanations of the origin of 'kusilava' are still more fanciful. Abhinava holds that the word 'kusilava' primarily means 'one who is capable of cutting (ụḍu' to cut) even a plough-share ('kuśi') made of iron' and that it connotes actor in its secondary use based on its accepted and popular usage. This interpretation is clearly far-fetched and no explanation is given as to how the word came to mean an actor. Equally unconvincing is Sāradātanaya's interpretation that the word is derived from 'kusāla' (skill) signifying the actor's skill in delineating characters with remarkable faithfulness, by assuming this or that role through the media of speech and action.

Some attempt to trace the etymology from 'kusāla' (of bad morals) on the score that the actors had from the very early times earned a reputation for leading immoral lives. All these interpretations seem to be rather clever inventions calculated to explain these curious terms in a felicitous manner than genuine essays to bring out their original meanings. Keith's suggestion that the word may have been derived from Kuśa and Lava, the two sons of Rāma, seems more plausible than the above views. The word in the strange compound form of 'kusilava' in dual is already met with in the Rāmāyana.

There are at least two other terms which should not be passed unnoticed. We learn from Pāṇini that the dramatic science had been severally codified in aphoristic style by two different authorities on drama, Śīlālin and Kṛṣāsva, long before the compilation of Bharata's treatise. The actors who belonged to these two schools came to be known as Śīlālina and Kṛṣāsvins respectively, which later became generic terms for actors in the same manner as the term 'bharata' came to assume its secondary meaning. The two terms lost their currency at quite an early date, but there are no sufficient grounds to claim that 'śailūsa' and 'kusilava' are their corrupt forms that superceded them on their falling into disuse.

5. I. iv. 4, 5 & 17.
6. Pāṇini, IV. iii. 110. 1.
Actors are as old as the dramatic art itself, for there could be no drama without actors. The Natyasastra narrates a very interesting account of how the dramatic art came down to earth. The story goes that the hundred sons of Sage Bharata were fond of enacting farces through which they parodied the denizens of heaven. Once it so happened that they staged a burlesque of the type known as Silpaka, in which they ridiculed the behaviour of the divine sages. This aroused the indignation of the sages who cursed the high-born actors with degradation to the despicable condition of Sudras and expulsion from society with contempt; their future generations were to choose no other profession than the stage. This imprecation however did not bear fruit until heaven got a new king of gods, a former king on earth, Nahusa by name, who attained that coveted position by virtue of his expediency, intelligence and valour. King Nahusa was so fascinated by their wonderful performances in heaven that he wished that the dramatic art be established on earth as well. The request was granted but the gods would not send their heavenly nymphs down to earth to play parts with the mortals. So Bharata's sons were asked to descend to earth to teach the art to men and women and perform before kings and Brahmins.

It is true that we cannot treat this fairy-tale-like account with seriousness, but it cannot at the same time be summarily dismissed as having no historical value, for that is exactly the way the ancients recorded historical facts. One important point in this narrative we must take note of is that these primeval actors of divine origin were, it is said, Brahmins by caste. Saradatanaya, too, records, that the first actors who ever performed on earth were Brahmins who performed before kings in various countries. Later on, the actors degraded themselves through their own faults. The story narrated by Bharata may, therefore, be regarded as a sincere effort to account for the pitiable condition in which the actor-class found itself during the early centuries of the Christian era.

For the ancient Indians, drama could not be conceived without women participating in it. The importance attached

2. Ibid., xxxvii. 1-24.
3. Cf. ibid., xxxvi. 38.
all through the Natyāṣāstra to the participation of women in drama is too obvious. This presupposes a liberal society in which women enjoyed great freedom unparalleled in any contemporary society. In ancient Greece, women were not allowed to appear in plays on moral grounds, the female roles being played by men, and so the profession of acting was in good repute. The strong aversion on the part of the people as well as of the governing authorities to women's taking up to the stage had far-reaching effects on the Chinese and Japanese theatres, which date from not earlier than the seventh century A.D. Even after women were replaced by boys at one stage, the Japanese theatre continued to threaten the moral life of the public and began to cause grave concern to the administration. In England, it was not until after the Restoration of Charles II that women began to perform on the English stage, female roles being played by boys previously. But in ancient India never has there been any move to banish women from the stage or even to discourage them, and this favourable attitude on the part of the State and of the general public towards women's participation engendered a healthy climate for the growth of the theatre.

But the actors suffered in the long run. Their too-liberal mode of life naturally led to their moral degradation. The licentious conduct of the actors attached a permanent social stigma to the profession, and the actor-class became socially ostracised. They lost the purity of their blood and slowly found themselves amidst a class of mixed caste whose boundaries were not to be transgressed. There are many references in the law books to the mixed blood of actors and others of kindred professions. Kusilavas, Māgadhas (wandering bards) and Sūtas (story-tellers) were all regarded as belonging to the mixed castes. The law book of Manu looks down upon the wives of actors with contempt and abhorrence stigmatizing them as practising prostitution with the knowledge and approval of their husbands who, the work says, even procured customers for them.

4. AS. III. vii; Manu, x. 11; Baudh. Dh.Śi.I.xi.6; Vīmaśmrti, xv.4-13.
5. viii. 362; cf. Rāmāyaṇa, II. xxvii. 25.
It is quite evident that from the very ancient times, the acting profession ('rājgopajīvana') and prostitution ('rūpajīvana') went hand in hand, and, very often, members of the two professions were treated on the same level in the social scale\(^1\). The son of a prostitute seems to have had no other choice than to join the theatrical profession, but they were, of course, given a good training in drama and theatrical technique under expert teachers\(^2\). This demoralization of the actors assumed such alarming proportions that, at one stage, the prostitute came to be identified with the actress, hence the term 'rāgāvatāra' for the former\(^3\). This social evil became so rampant and difficult to be checked that having illicit relations with wives of actors and with prostitutes became no more punishable by death since it was classed under minor offences, and, according to another authority quoted by the commentator Govindasvāmin, it was not considered as amounting to adultery at all\(^4\). Thus the Baudhāyana-dharma-sāstra classes actors with the Śudras, even if they be Brahmins by birth\(^5\). The Brhaspati-smṛti calls them Brāhmaṇa-candālas or outcasts among Brahmins\(^6\). Food offered by an actor was not to be accepted by a Brahmin lest he should be a party to a major sin\(^7\). Nor were the actors offered food by other people\(^8\). In the eye of the law, they were not citizens, for their witness was not to be accepted in a court of law\(^9\). Earning one's livelihood by giving stage performances and leading the life of a dramatic troupe leader (Nātyācārya) have been enumerated among minor sins\(^10\). The Āpastamba-dharma-sāstra (6-2 century B.C.) forbids a student of the Vedas to enter a Sabha or Saṃjaya and exhorts him not to witness any dancing\(^11\). It must be for the same reason that the Buddha forbade the monks to witness Pekkha and that a couple of centuries later Aśoka extended the ban to the general public\(^12\).

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2. AŚ. ibid., 29.
4. Ibid.
5. I. v. 80.
7. vii. 4-6; Manu, iv. 214 f.; Vīṣṇusmrīti. ii. 7; YS. i. 161.
9. YS. ii. 70 f.; Manu. viii. 65.
10. Baudh. Dvś. II. ii. 44; Vīṣṇusmrīti, xxxvii. 28-34.
11. I. i. iii. 11 f.; see also Manu, ii. 178; Gaunt. S. i. ii. 19.
This Bohemian way of life adopted by the actors and others who followed similar callings, needless to mention, was not at all in the interest of the peaceful civil life of the State, and measures had to be taken to protect society from such elements. Kautilya cautions the rulers of possible dangers to the society from such persons and maintains that the latter should strictly avoid giving too much indulgence or causing loss ('atipāta') to anyone. To cause inconvenience to the public in this manner was an offence punishable with an amercement of twelve Panas. Any disturbance to the work of the villagers was not to be tolerated. Actors were, of course, free to hold their performances to their liking, but this was to be done within the limits of the State's laws, customs and traditions. There may have been also cases of theft and other offences perpetrated by those who passed by the name of artistes, which caused public nuisance and oppression.

However, it does not follow from the above findings that the actor was always made the scapegoat for any moral aberrations of the society and was treated with public contempt and completely neglected by the State. He was duly respected and looked after, but was kept in his place, just as was done in ancient Greece. Kautilya has suggested measures to safeguard the interests and ensure the welfare of the actors in his ideal State. Actors, musicians, barda, story-tellers etc. were to receive fixed wages from the State. The annual income of a Kuṣīlava (the connotation of the word in this context is not clear) has been fixed at 250 Panas. The teachers of dancing and music were also held to be endowed with maintenance from the State, and actresses, prostitutes and their children were entrusted to them to be trained in dancing, music, acting and other allied arts. The position of Kuṣīlavas was to be well protected and no calumnies regarding their profession were to be tolerated. It may be conjectured that this was an attempt at restoring the lost social status of the actor-class. There were also special laws formulated with a view to protecting personal property of artisans, artists and ascetics, and

1. Aś. II. i. 34; IV. i. 58 ff.
4. Ibid., V. iii. 15.
5. Ibid., II. xxvii. 29.
6. Ibid., III. xviii. 7 ff.
Since the actors were provided with maintenance and afforded protection by the State, it was expected of them to contribute their share to the State whenever it was felt necessary. Actors, dancers, singers and musicians and others who followed similar trades (including prostitution) were bound by Kautilya's law to supply information to the Superintendent of Prostitutes as to the amount of their daily earnings and their likely future incomes (ayati). This information was necessary, because, in the event of a serious financial crisis in the State, the king had the power to collect revenue by demand from the people of various callings. In such times, the actors and prostitutes had to pay half their wages, a tax quite high by present-day standards.

We need no means bound to believe that such were the exact conditions prevailing in India during Kautilya's time. But his ideal State pictured in his comprehensive code may not be an absolutely fantastic utopia he had conceived in his imagination. We may, therefore, conclude with a certain amount of reliance that, at least as early as the third century A.D., there were professional actors who received government assistance in some form or other and that their licentious conduct was sometimes a nuisance to the general public who were also not altogether innocent.

It may now be deduced from the foregoing evidence that acting was practised as a profession from the very early times. The term 'nata' and its synonyms (though the meanings of some of them show occasional inconsistency) denote a class of people who seem not to have followed any other vocation but their own. Most of them seem to have been driven by circumstances to make the theatre their profession, particularly in the face of the disrepute it had earned in the course of time. The Vijnasūrti restricts the theatrical profession to the mixed caste called Áyogava, a member of which is an offspring of a Śūdra father and a Vaiśya mother. According to some, Kuśila is the name for a member of another mixed caste. The accuracy

1. AS. IV. x. 6.
2. Ibid., II. xxvii. 24 f.
4. xv. 4. 8.
5. AS. III. vii. 32.
of these definitions given in the law books is questionable, but they at least show that the stagecraft had by that time come to stay as a profession to be practised only by people of degraded caste in conformity with the tenets of the caste-institution which strictly determined and regulated all professions and occupations in ancient India.

Whatever may be the bright prospects the actors in Kautilya's State had, nowhere do we find any evidence to show that the actor's was a lucrative profession. Their poor pecuniary conditions may have been responsible to some extent for their loose ways of life. There are also casual references in the Prologues or some of the existing plays to their humble living conditions. In the Adhutadarpana, the Vidusaka grumbles at the reduced circumstances in which those who earned their living by stage had to exist. They found it difficult to find a Brahmin willing to accept alms at their houses, partly due to their low social status and partly due to their poor living conditions. The theatre in those days was not at all a money-minting profession and there is nothing to show that fees were levied from the public who attended dramatic shows. The king and other persons of large means had shown organised and patronized dramatic companies. As far as the existing evidence goes, performances were held only at long intervals, and patrons could not always maintain throughout the year large actor-companies that brought them no income at all. Disallowed by the dictates of social institution to pursue any other vocation, the actors may have often been compelled under pressing circumstances to 'wander hither and thither in search of better fortunes'.

We hear of the existence of itinerant dramatic troupes even at such an early period as the time of the Buddha. Talaputra mentioned in the Sabyuttanikaya, who gave up his profession to become a disciple of the Buddha, was the leader of such a dramatic troupe. We also hear of another troupe that came to Rajgrha all the way from the Deccan and enthralled the masses by their magnificent performances. The Kasasutra, as we have seen earlier, informs us that there were actors permanently attached to the Arts Theatre (Sarasvati-bhavana) in the city as attendants in the service

3. See above, pp. 10 f.; 13 f.
of the god ('pujopacarakas'). Their duty was to give regular performances monthly or fortnightly at the theatre to which they belonged, for which service they were paid fixed salaries. On certain auspicious days, actors from outside were invited to the city to give performances in this theatre. The day after the performance, the visiting artistes were paid remunerations (which had been fixed earlier) for their services; the funds for this were raised most probably by popular subscription. When there were no remunerations fixed beforehand, they were presented with gifts in the form of useful articles like clothes—by way of honorariums, which they received from the citizens on the stage itself. If they desired to witness a repeated performance, the citizens might request the artistes to stay, or else dismiss them gracefully. In case of emergency, the regular artistes and the visitors were expected to act in mutual co-operation. If an actor belonging to one troupe was unable to attend, on account of illness or bereavement for instance, a member from the other troupe would substitute for him so that the show could be run uninterrupted. It was a social obligation on the part of the hosts to attend to the needs of the visitors, both actors and spectators, during their stay in the city.\footnote{1. Op. cit., I. iv. 27-33. 2. IV. i. 58.} The Arthasastra requires the strolling actors to keep themselves confined to one place during the rainy season.\footnote{1. Op. cit., I. iv. 27-33. 2. IV. i. 58.}

As can be deduced from certain snippets of information found in some of the later dramas, rivalries and jealousies between different companies of strolling actors were also not uncommon. The Sūtradhāra (stage-manager) in the Anargarāghava, an inhabitant of Madhyadesa, himself an actor and a disciple ('antevasin') of a teacher of the dramatic art, Bahurūpa by name, severely criticises another actor named Kalahakandala from an unknown land, for having offended the public by presenting plays permeated with the sentiments of fury, horror and terror. He resolves upon vanquishing the miscreant who has robbed the theatre-lovers of their joy, which he fervently promises to restore. Since the play was presented in all probability, in Bengal, the Sūtradhāra being an outsider, evidently had some hesitation in introducing it to an alien audience. The director in the play Prasannarāghava narrates how his elder brother, Guparāma, who rightly deserves the appellation 'King of Actors', was once robbed of his title of
'Rāgā-Vidyādhara' bestowed on him by a king for his superb direction of a play, by an imposter from the Deccan. Guptaraṇa then went to the Deccan, joined forces with a famous musician and openly challenged the imposter in the courts of the king and won back the lost repute.

The Dākṣinātya or Deccan was known for strolling actors particularly towards the decadence of the Sanskrit drama. In the course of their wanderings, they traversed the length and breadth of India and sometimes even posed a threat to the local dramatic companies in the North. It is very probable that the Sanskrit drama as a practised art survived in South India for some centuries following its decline in the North, and it is a fact that the bulk of the post-classical dramas, so to speak, farces and monologue plays in particular, were written and produced in the South. And it was in the South that the classical Indian theatre which had fallen into abeyance for quite a long time, was resuscitated a couple of centuries ago in the form of the Bhāgavata Nāṭa, Kuochipudi and other forms of neo-classical dance-drama.

A remarkable feature in the Sanskrit theatre is, as had been observed earlier, the absence of even a trace of antagonism from any quarters to the participation of women. According to the mythical history of the drama on earth, women actors were there from the very beginning. Generally the female roles were played by women and not infrequently did an actress represented as the Sūtrādhāra's wife assist the latter in conducting the Prologue. There are, of course, provisions made in the Nāṭyaśāstra for men to impersonate females and vice versa. Though women are allowed to play male roles, we have no evidence of such cases save the story of the mythical performance given in heaven by Urvāṣī, Rambha and other nymphs and the enactment of Act I of the Ratnāvali described in the Kuṭṭamājata. Impersonation of a particular role by a member of the same sex was, however, generally favoured and was, in effect, the regular practice. Only in Bhavabhūti's plays do we hear of female impersonators. The Sūtrādhāra and the Pārīpārīvāka in his Mālatimāchāra play the two female roles of Kāmandakī and Avalokītā respectively, and it is significant that no Nāṭi appears in the Prologue of his

1. See also the Prologue to the Bāḷarāmāyana.
2. NS. xxvi. 13 ff.
plays but a Nāṭa. This cannot be considered at any rate to be in keeping with the true spirit of the Sanskrit stage which was extremely liberal in its outlook, and certainly was not the regular practice. We have no grounds to believe that Bhavabhūti belonged to an age when women were not favoured on the stage. Playing women's roles by men was, however, a very old practice, for we learn from the Mahābhāṣya that the word 'bhṛukūmaśa' was specially used to denote a man disguised as a female. But these must be regarded as exceptions to the general rule. Sāradātāmāya states that in his days there were two kinds of dramatic troupe, one consisting of both men and women and the other of women alone. The promiscuous troupe is described as 'exterior' and the female one 'interior'.

Children, too, though not so frequently, did appear on the Sanskrit stage. It has been clearly laid down by Bhaveṇa that children's roles should not be played by grown-ups or vice versa, evidently because even in the appropriate costume and make-up, a child who is immature and inexperienced in every sense could never do justice to a man's role even as a man could not do to a child's. We have no room to suspect that this injunction was ever violated. To obtain child actors may not have been a problem since the acting profession was a pursuit followed by traditional actor-families. Parent actors must have been too happy to give their children a chance to appear on the stage for it would have served as a good training for them.

Merely because one belonged to an actors' family one could not become an actor in the true sense. To deserve the name actor, one had to qualify for it, undergoing for long years rigorous training in a vast variety of subjects with particular emphasis on histrionic art, dance and music. We have already seen that children were recruited for training in the dramatic art under experienced teachers. To get initiated into the art was itself no easy matter. An aspirant for stage training was required to satisfy six primary conditions, which advantages were intrinsic rather than extrinsic. They are intelligence, a good memory, ability to appreciate merits, freedom from passions, a spirit of competition and diligence.

When Brāhmaṇa asked Indra to see that the theory and practice

2. NS. xxvi. 16.
3. Ibid., 37.
of dramatic art were imparted to the gods, he advised him to select only those who were possessed of skill, sharpness of mind, good physique and who had overcome stage-fright. Indra however requested to be excused on the plea that the gods were not good at either grasping, retaining, understanding or displaying of so deep an art like drama and pointed out that the divine sages were the most qualified to pursue the art. Accordingly, the sage Bharata was picked out for the job, who in turn taught the art to his hundred sons.

For a person to become a full-fledged actor, he must acquire complete mastery of the arts of dance and gesticulation with a thorough knowledge of dramatic conventions, proficiency in portraying different temperaments and above all a subtle sense of identification of his self with the character he impersonates. He must be able to handle the four kinds of musical instrument. In those olden days there were no playback singers or musicians, and the actor himself had to sing or play an instrument as required by a particular scene; hence the necessity of his having a training in music. He must be familiar with arts and crafts in general and possess a good skill in the art of make-up (for often the making-up was done by the actor himself). The actors should be handsome and smart persons able to carry put well the tasks entrusted to them. Unflinching loyalty and unreserved obedience to the director who was also their leader, teacher, instructor and trainer, were other qualities which every actor was expected to possess. It was also necessary for an actor to have a good command of Sanskrit and of Prakrit dialects, mainly those forms widely used in plays.

Stage-functionaries.

Sūtradhāra.

The entire responsibility of producing and directing a play rested on the broad shoulders of the stage-manager, technically called Sūtradhāra, who was assisted in the execution of his duties by a small stage staff. The earliest term by which he was known is 'nāṭagāmaṇi' or chief of the troupe or village of actors, but 'sūtradhāra' is the design-

1. Ibid., i. 20-23.
2. For the four kinds of musical instrument, see below, Chapter VI.
3. See NS. xxvi. 22.
5. See above, p. 10.
ation by which he is known in all dramatic works. How the word 'sūtradhāra' came to mean the stage-manager or director of the play is a question to which no satisfactory answer has been found. The view that the designation originally belonged to the Manager of the puppet play, who is so styled from his being 'the holder of strings' has to be rejected in the absence of any early evidence for the existence in ancient India of a puppet theatre as such with the exception of the allusion to a puppet play in the Mahābhārata twice. Even if there was an early puppet theatre, it would, as Professor Hillebrandt rightly observed, only suggest the antecedence of the human theatre. Therefore, there is more probability of the marionette theatre borrowing the term from the live theatre than the other way round. It is also not altogether improbable that the two theatres, the live and the marionette, gave rise to the same term quite independently, just as there is another homonym meaning a quite different thing, though some scholars essay to link it with the Sūtradhāra in drama.

Thus Lévi and Keith contend that the Sūtradhāra is so called because he was also 'the architect of the theatre, the man who secured the erection of the temporary stage'. Bharata informs us, it is true, that the construction of the theatre (which was by no means a temporary structure as presumed by Lévi and Keith) was done under his supervision, but we have no legitimate reasons to believe that he was also the chief architect. It is very significant that Bharata has studiously avoided the term 'sūtradhāra' in Chapters II and III of the Nāṭyaśāstra, in which detailed accounts of the construction and consecration of the theatre are given and where the word could not have been more appropriately used. In these two chapters, Bharata has used every possible appellation for the stage-manager such as 'ācārya', 'nāṭyaśārya', 'prayoktṛ', 'kārtṛ' and 'prayojaka' but not 'sūtradhāra', apparently to avoid any confusion on the part of the reader of the two, the architect and the Nāṭyaśārya. Here we should not allow ourselves to be misled by Bāṇa's use of the word 'sūtradhāra' to mean both the

1. V. xxxix. 1; XII. xxix. 45.
4. See below, Chapter IV.
architect and the stage-manager, for his sole aim has been no more than to employ a striking double entendre in the verse. It is also noteworthy that Bharata uses this very word quite freely in Chapter V.

Another point which weighs against the above view is that it does not receive support from any theorists or any commentators on Sanskrit plays. Many of them attribute the designation of 'sūtradhāra' to his being the first dramatic person to indicate the thread ('sūtra') of the dramatic plot or to string together the virtues of the hero, the plot and the poet. This explanation is clearly far too sophisticated to be treated as genuine. Another view which appears worthy of some consideration has been expressed by Pūrṇasarasvāti in his commentary on the MālatiMādhava. According to this authority, the stage-manager is called Sūtradhāra because he possesses ('dharayati') the book ('sūtra') of Bharata, which treats of the science of dramaturgy. In those days when there was no printing-press it would not have been possible for everyone to possess a volume of that valuable work. Even the copy owned by the director may not have been the complete work but most probably an abridged version of it containing the essential rules of drama put in aphoristic formulae, thus rightly deserving to be called a 'sūtra'. It may not be impertinent to mention in this connexion that a Sūtradhāra-like character who introduces characters and provides clues to important situations, appears in the very primitive Sinhalese dance-drama of Indian origin. He is called Poteguru which means 'the master of the book' or 'the one who has mastered the book'. Here by 'book' ('pota') is of course meant the scenario of the play the Poteguru holds in his hands while he intones his verses of introduction. We cannot refuse to see that there is some common link between the Sūtradhāra of the Sanskrit stage and this Poteguru of the Sinhalese dance-drama. Although the word 'poteguru' is of recent coinage, the association of the Sūtradhāra with some sort of a book - be it the text of Bharata or the script of the play - doubtless harks back to a very old practice that must have been in vogue in ancient India.

5. See also E.R. Saratāchandra: The Sinhalese Folk Play and the Modern Stage, Colombo (1953), pp. 92-97.
Since the Sūtradhāra taught the actors the histrionic art and allied subjects and trained them in their respective roles, he was known as Nāṭyācārya. He directed the play, and the entire production was a creation of his genius, and, therefore, he was sometimes known as Prayoktṛ or 'Presenter' and sometimes as simply Nāyaka or 'Leader'. He had to be highly accomplished and versatile, and among the numerous desiderata of a stage-director were a profound knowledge of dramatic theory and practice, different languages and dialects, works on prosody, rhetorics, industrial arts, astronomy, geography, history and genealogies of royal families, proficiency in music and experience in management. He was required to possess a good memory, be honest, intelligent, dignified and noble. The minimum qualifications of a Sūtradhāra were six in number, namely, proficiency in dance, vocal music, instrumental music, various time-beats, different types of gait and ability to produce *worthy* pupils. Without these bare requirements, he even did not deserve the name 'teacher'.

The Sūtradhāra's role in the performance consisted of two parts. He conducted the entire programme of dramatic preliminaries (Pūrvarāṅga) and then introduced the play in an impressive a manner as possible. In the early period when the Pūrvarāṅga was an elaborate process, the Sūtradhāra's burden seems to have been shared by his deputy known as the Sthāpaka who conducted the Prologue and so introduced the play, the Sūtradhāra being tired after participating in the long-drawn Pūrvarāṅga. But most of the items in the Pūrvarāṅga were gradually dropped, thus rendering the service of two functionaries redundant. Accordingly, the carrying out of both functions fell on the Sūtradhāra who also came to be known as Sthāpaka because he was also the person who introduced the play (I'sṭhā to establish). Although theory continued to recognize both functionaries as two separate persons, we have firm grounds to believe that it was not the case in actual practice. Abhinava is quite explicit when he says that the Sūtradhāra retired after performing the Pūrvarāṅga and again entered the stage in the capacity of the Sthāpaka to introduce the play.

1. NS. iii. 99 f.
3. NS. xxvi. 35; ibid., xxxiii. 111; cf. N.M. Prologue.
5. See below, Chapter V.
6. NS. v. 162; DR. iii. 2; ND. p. 136.
Śadhaka's commentary on the Śākuntala also identifies the Sūtradhāra who conducted the Prologue with the Sthāpaka, allowing at the same time a different Sūtradhāra to conduct the Pūrvāṅga in certain cases. Rāgahavabhāṣṭa, too, asserts that the Sūtradhāra was the same actor who was also known as Sthāpaka and makes an attempt to reconcile the opposite views given in some dramaturgic treatises like the Daśārūpa. In the Rāgān, both terms are used indifferently to denote one and the same functionary who conducted the Prologue. This Sūtradhāra of the Prologue as distinguished from the Master of the Ceremonies in the Pūrvāṅga was sometimes called by the specific designation of Sthāpaka-sūtradhāra.

Although the pre-play functions were primarily intended for the gratification of an amazing number of deities, it also served the secondary purpose of entertaining the early arrivals, and so music and dance played an important part in it. Not infrequently did the Sūtradhāra act as the chef d'orchestre in the Pūrvāṅga. In the Kṛchakatika the Sūtradhāra complains of the strain he has suffered after conducting the music for a long time. The more important task of setting the music and dance movements which were an integral part of the play was also his prerogative and responsibility, and it is for this reason that he was required to possess a sound knowledge of music and dance. Sometimes the Sūtradhāra had the additional task of composing a Prologue if the play had no Prologue written by the dramatist. It appears that Bhāsa left it to the Sūtradhāra to compose Prologues to his plays. When there was no Nāṇḍī composed by the poet, the composing of a suitable one also fell to his lot. The Sūtradhāra intoned the Nāṇḍī himself with the assistance of the two Pāripārīvikas, and thus he was the chief of the Nāṇḍipāṭhakas. After this he did the scattering of flowers on the stage standing in a specific posture. The play proper, however, did not undergo any major modifications at the hands of the Sūtradhāra, but he had the prerogative to add Dhruvas and other incidental songs at which the playwright normally did not try his hand.

1. Śāk., Mithilā Institute, Darbhanga (1957), p. 158.
4. See also MR. & Nāg.
5. ABh. ibid., pp. 249 ff.
6. ND. p. 172.
7. Ibid. 8. See below, p. 212; cf. Venī., Śr.S.Bh. & Śr.T.Bh.
9. See below, pp. 144 ff.
10. ABh. ibid.; ND. ibid.
The Sūtradhāra played also an important role in the play proper. In the Ratnavali he plays the role of Vatsa himself, in the Viddhasālabhāṣṣajīka that of Haradāsa, in the Nālatimādhava that of Kāmandaki. In the Karpūramaṇjari and the Tāpasaśvatarāja the heroes and the heroines are played by the Sūtradhāra and the Naṭi respectively. Often a close relative of the Sūtradhāra plays the leading role. In the Karpūracarīta his younger brother plays the hero, in the Śrāgāratilaka his nephew and in the Śrāgārasarvasva his brother-in-law.

As the director of the play the Sūtradhāra had also to see about the costumes and make-up of the actors. At the end of the Prologue, therefore, he usually retired to the tiring-room. When his presence was no longer needed there, he preferred to sit with the audience and witness his production. There also seem to have been female directors though we do not hear of any one as having directed a play.

Naṭi.

Among the seniormost members of the dramatic troupe is an actress technically known as simply Naṭi, who sometimes appears in the Prologue at the behest of the Sūtradhāra to help him in conducting the same. She is represented as his wife who is worried about the future of her only daughter or the health of her near relatives or as attending to her household duties such as preparing for an alms-giving ceremony to secure happiness and welfare for her husband in a future birth. As any other female character in a Sanskrit play, she speaks Prakrit while the Sūtradhāra, except in some rare cases, resorts to Sanskrit. Sometimes she is requested by the Sūtradhāra to sing a song for the delectation of the audience. But it is not always that this request is complied with by the Naṭi who sometimes gives some excuse the discussion on which eventually leads to the opening of the play.

It is not only in the Prologue that she assists the director; she also attends to the costumes and make-up presumably of the actresses, and plays an important female role.

1. See also Priya.
3. Tapātisamvarana, Prologu.
4. Mrocha.
5. Rat., Vināvāsavaddatta.
6. Pr.Y.
7. Ex., Mrocha., Ārnodatta; see also MR, Nāg., Priya.
8. Sāk., i. 4.
9. Pr.Y.
in the play. She is addressed by the Sūtradhāra as ‘Lady’ (‘ārye’) while she addresses him as ‘Sir’ (‘ārya’).

Pāripārvika.

The Nāti often yields her place to her male counter-part, the Pāripārvika, a senior actor who, like the former, assists the Sūtradhāra in the Prologue. The Pāripārvika enters the stage after the entry of the Sūtradhāra who, by way of a usually short conversation with him, announces the play, the playwright, the occasion of the performance and other relevant information for the benefit of the audience. He is addressed by the Sūtradhāra as ‘Mārṣa’ or ‘Fellow’ while the Sūtradhāra is addressed by him as ‘Bhāva’ or ‘Your Honour’. He helps the Sūtradhāra in many ways, by occasionally conducting the music, by sending the actors on to the stage and also by playing the role of an important character in the play, sometimes even the leading role.

He is, in all probability, one of the two Pāripārvikas who participate with the Sūtradhāra in the Pūrvarāṅga. He may have derived the designation from his participation in the pre-dramatic preliminaries in the course of which he, together with the Vidūṣaka, waited upon the Sūtradhāra on his side (‘pārāva’).

Vidūṣaka.

The Vidūṣaka was the other actor who assisted the Master of the Ceremonies during the pre-play functions. In the Prologue, however, he appears much less often than the Nāti or the Pāripārvika. This functionary who took part in the Pūrvarāṅga and rarely in the Prologue is to be distinguished from his namesake who, as we shall see later, occupies the key role of comic figure in most of the Sāskrit plays. But this assistant is known as Vidūṣaka from his resemblance to the character Vidūṣaka in appearance, speech and action. We have observed earlier that providing entertainment for the early arrivals was one of the chief objects of the Pūrvarāṅga. The presentation of a Vidūṣaka-like figure was mainly aimed at introducing comic

1. Rat.
2. See Venl.
3. Sṛ.Ś. Bh.
4. Kaumudi.
5. Sṛ.Ś. Bh., Sṛ.Ś. Bh.
6. See below, pp. 113 ff.
relief and titillating the audience's interest in the performance. Like the Vidūṣaka in the play, he wears a comical dress, speaks Prakrit and carries the Jarjara pole to represent Indra's flag-staff with which the demons were beaten off at the second performance given by Bharata's troupe. Since he waits upon the Sūtradhāra during the Pūrvarūga, the designation 'pāripārēvika' is equally applicable to him.

Very seldom did the same actor who participated in the Prologue reappeared in the play as Vidūṣaka the character. This is the case in the Abhutadārpaṇa where the Vidūṣaka, who participates in the Prologue, appears later as Mahodara, the boon-companion of Rāvaṇa, the villain.

Lesser Functionaries.

Besides the aforementioned, the Sūtradhāra needed the assistance of a number of helping hands in the presentation of his production. He needed a good orchestra consisting of drummers, instrumentalists and singers whose service was indispensable in a theatre where speech and action were inseparably blended with music and dance. (A full discussion on the orchestra will be given in Chapter VI). Then there were the assistants in the tiring-room, who dressed up the actors and actresses, of course, under the strict supervision of the director. In view of the promiscuity of the cast, sometimes a lady was put in charge of the tiring-room. Eunuchs were also employed presumably in the ladies' apartment which was, in all likelihood, out of bounds for all males whether actors or attendants.

Bards ('vāḍas' or 'vaitālikas') were also considered as independent of the dramatis personae evidently because they did not appear on the stage, but sang behind the scenes. A place close to the singers may have been allotted to them. A number of other functionaries such as Nāḍī, Nāṭyakara and Nāyaka is mentioned in the Nāṭyaśāstra but the definitions given there are too hazy to give us any idea about their

1. See below, pp. 125f. H.B: The demons reacted by paralysing the actors' speech and movement, even before the Prologue was over. This shows that they had seen a previous performance of the play and that they did not wish to see it re-enacted. See A.Bh. Vol. I, p. 281.
2. See Fratima, i, 4.
4. xxxv. 21 ff.
respective functions. Of the first-mentioned, we know nothing except that he delivered Sanskrit and Prakrit dialogues through which medium particular emotions and sentiments were evoked. The Nāṭyakara is described as one who, in accordance with the instructions of the Sūtradhāra, brought forward the emotions and sentiments by means of diverse roles in the play. The two assets of the Nāyaka were a knowledge of the entire Nāṭyaveda and of the musical arrangements. We have seen that the Sūtradhāra himself is occasionally referred to as Nāyaka. From the inconsistent and incoherent details given in the Nāṭyaśāstra it appears that there are some lacunae in the chapter in question to which scribal errors also seem to have crept in.

The costumer, the maker of masks and head-gears, jewellery-maker and garland-maker were among other persons who assisted the production behind the stage. The troupe obtained the service of a special artisan (‘kāraka’) who fashioned the necessary stage accessories out of lac, metal or wood. No less important was the job of the make-up artist, for make-up meant a great deal in a theatre devoid of elaborate scenic equipment. A washer-man was employed for cleaning the soiled costumes.

2. NS. xxxv. 33 ff.
2. AUDIENCE

The term 'audience' when used in connexion with the theatre denotes a group of spectators assembled to witness a theatrical performance. An important characteristic of the theatre audience is that, once carried away by the performance, it would, though behaving as a group of different individuals, begin to react as one single unit. When a person becomes part of an audience, to put it more clearly, he almost inadvertently begins to play a dual role simultaneously; he forgets his self partially and joins others instinctively to give outward expression to the emotions and mental states stirred up by the acting of the performers, but at the same time does not allow himself to be unconscious of the fact that he is an individual all the same. In the theatre, says Allardyce Nicoll, we certainly want to be caught up in the imaginary world presented by the performers, but our ambivalent attitude prompts us simultaneously to be gripped by the make-believe and to stand apart from it. Of this paradoxical duality it is the collective reaction and not the individual behaviour that weighs heavily upon the performance. The tempo of the actors' performance and, therefore, the atmosphere of the whole play may largely vary according as an audience is quick or slow, warm or cold. This psychology of the theatre audience was well understood by Bharata who believed that the success ('siddhi') of a dramatic performance largely depended upon its audience.

Drama is one of the very few arts that demand an audience - an audience seated immediately before its executants. For dramatic art is not achieved by an author writing his play in a corner, nor by a group of trained actors giving it life on the stage; it requires also an audience to receive it. It is author, actors, audience. We cannot eliminate any one of these three elements; they are integrally bound together.

Observes Somerset Maugham:

'A play is the result of a collaboration between the author, the actors, the audience, and, I suppose we must add

3. N.S. xxvii. 2 ff.
now, the director. The emotion of the audience, its interest, its laughter, are part of the action of the play. The audience is not the least important actor in the play, and if it will not do its allotted share the play falls to pieces. Sāradātmanāya meant the same thing when he said that there should be mutual enjoyment among all the participants in a play, namely, the President (or Chief Guest), the members of the assembly, the singers, instrumentalists and the actors and actresses. Mutual understanding and a healthy rapport between the performers and the audience is, therefore, of vital importance. It will be difficult and perhaps even impossible to achieve this object if the spectators are untutored and uncultured. Bharata suggests that the audience should encourage the performers by verbal appreciation of the performance as a means of establishing this actor-audience intimacy upon which largely depends the success of the play. The audience, says P.D. Arnott, must realize that they are an integral part of the drama and should go half way to meet the dramatist. The greater the spectator's contribution, and the more the play entails, remarks J.L. Styan, the greater its worth is likely to be. This active participation on the part of the audience as a collective whole, which is essential to the success of a theatrical presentation, should be made manifest by them by overtly indicating their being infected by the emotions evoked by the clever acting of the performers, enjoying the same at the same time and also by praising the latter for their commendable performances; it is called in Sanskrit theatrical jargon 'manuṣaśiccl' or success resting on human factors. This is a very important part the audience has to play.

Bharata instructs the audience of a play in the following manner as to how they should receive the performance of the actors. Whenever the actors delineate the sentiment of disciplined humour, the spectators should not fail to reciprocate it with a smile that would be the outward manifestation of their appreciation of the same. Laughable actions and words spoken by comic characters like the Vidūṣaka should be received with laughter of commensurate degree. Bravura pieces

2. Bh.Pr., p. 194. 11-151 cf. ibid., p. 313. 4 f.
5. NS. xxvii. 15.
of acting and actions arousing excessive joy or amazement should be duly applauded by the audience by whirling their shawls around their heads or by waving their hands (lit., fingers) and by uttering words of praise like 'Well done' and 'Bravo'. In the case of poignantly pathetic scenes, the spectators should show that they share the feelings of the characters concerned, by uttering pathetic exclamations such as 'Ah', 'Woe' and 'Alas'. Contemptuous words should be met with disapproval by the audience by making their hair stand on end. During exciting scenes depicting actions involving cutting and piercing, battles and combats and other calamitous incidents, the spectators are expected to make manifest their grief, thrill or excitement by means of tearful eyes or by shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders or by rising from their seats. But when acting is surcharged with emotion, they are to behave differently by remaining silent, calm and unruffled, absorbed in the performance. Anyone who has seen how spontaneous a Calcutta audience reacts to a musician's commendable performance at a classical music conference of today will be able to understand Bharata better.

Another important factor which might seriously affect the moods of the performers is the attendance of the audience. A show given in a capacity house would prove almost always to be more successful than a poorly attended one, because the performers of the latter would naturally become disheartened at the thought that with all the strenuous training and practice they had undergone, only a handful of people had turned up to appreciate their efforts. This prerequisite of a serried audience has been regarded by Bharata as one of the predestined or divine factors contributing to the success of a performance.

We have earlier observed that an audience when carried away by a live theatrical performance behaves as a collective body. The collective term 'audience' is, therefore, much more appropriate than the plural 'spectators'. The Indians had realized this long ago and in the Sanskrit theatre the audience always takes precedence of the individual spectator. Hence, the former is called in Sanskrit 'parṣad' or 'samāja' and the latter 'parṣada' or 'sāmājika'. The terms 'prekṣā-samāja', 'sāmājika-samāja' and 'sāmājika-gaṇa' are also used for the audience but they are of comparatively later coinage.

The Natyaśāstra lays down the primary qualifications of a spectator of a drama as keen sensitivity to emotions and ability and readiness to identify himself with the characters of the play he witnesses, by making their feelings and emotions for the time being his own. He should be able to feel happy on seeing a person happy, sad on seeing him in sorrow, angry on seeing him in rage and frightened on seeing him affright. He should be able to imagine as his own the calling, the dress and the actions of a character. The criterion of an ideal spectator included besides these basic requirements, possession of sensory organs not yielding to distractions, honesty, experience in weighing up pros and cons and readiness to overlook faults and appreciate merits. If a spectator is endowed with all these qualities, well and good. But we cannot expect every spectator to be perfect because of the infinitude of the things that are to be known and the complex composition of the audience. This is only a description of an ideal spectator as conceived by Bharata, and one may strive to attain as many of these qualities as possible if one is desirous of appreciating a Sanskrit play to one's maximum.

The drama's laws the drama's patrons give', said Johnson. The same idea had been expressed by Bharata in different terms when he said that 'the people are of different dispositions and it is dispositions that determine the nature of the drama'. Thus theoretically a play should cater to the different tastes and interests of the motley crowd that constitute the audience. All people are not of the same intellectual level, nor are they of equal intelligence. Some are of the average standard, some above and the others below. When the audience is taken as a whole, to quote Somerset Maugham, its mental capacity is therefore understandably less than that of its most intellectual members. Another important point to remember is that an audience consists of persons of different age groups belonging to both sexes. Young folk usually take delight in witnessing amorous scenes while the old are interested in Puranic legends and stories fervent with ethical ideals like righteousness. Scholarly persons are fond of themes dealing with doctrinaire and philosophical matters whereas adventurous people derive entertainment from battle.
and combat scenes exciting fury and valour. Those who hanker after wealth and those who have detached themselves from worldly pleasures delight in themes dealing with emancipation. It is also not possible for a person of low mettle to appreciate the actions performed by men of excellent calibre. Children, uncultured people and women are amused by comic scenes and attractive costumes, but the well-informed members of an audience are capable of judging and appreciating the intrinsic qualities of everything presented in a theatrical performance. The Bhāvaprakāśa seems to demand too much from a spectator. One cannot but believe that Saradānaya enumerated the qualifications of a spectator he had rather a connoisseur of drama in mind. According to this authority, the ideal spectator should have an insatiable yearning for virtue and wealth, be calm, honest and clever, free from prejudice and not severely critical, proficient in the histrionic art, able to play the four kinds of instrument, a possessor of a sound knowledge of the four kinds of Abhinaya and able to discriminate sentiments and emotional states. He should be a person who has heard tales of noble men, who knows about different dialects, countries and dresses, who is an adept in arts and crafts, well-versed in grammar and prosody and who knows all facts in their true nature.

Audience at a Court Performance.

The première of a play written by a dramatist who was a protégé of a king or a king himself was ceremoniously staged at the royal court. The permanent theatre-hall or the music-hall or a building specially constructed for the purpose was used for this grand ceremony. The audience comprised the king, his officials and courtiers, inmates of the harem, members of the royal entourage plus a select gathering of scholars and connoisseurs who were the cause of the dramatist's main concern and worry. They were actually his challenge. This group of learned men who were noted for their critical fastidiousness, just like the press-reviewers of today, could make or mar the career of a young dramatist. His entire future seemed to hang by the slender thread of their favourable criticism. The success or failure of one of his pieces was a matter of vital concern to him. It is therefore not surprising

1. Ibid., 58 f. 2. Ibid., 60 f. 3. P. 226. 10-15.
should the dramatist resort to flattery in order to elicit favourable comments from his audience. He always addressed the audience in highly eulogytic terms. In his Sākuntala Kālidāsa praises them to the skies. We can imagine how nervous he must have felt on the occasion of the first performance of his masterpiece. This feeling is ably mouthed by his Sūtrādhāra:

"This assembly is for the most part composed of learned men.... I do not consider my knowledge of representation sound until it causes satisfaction of the learned. The mind of even the highly instructed persons is void of confidence in itself."

But in the Mālāvikāgnumitra, perhaps his earliest play, Kālidāsa displays an unusual courage when the play is presented before such an experienced audience as those who have witnessed the plays of such celebrities of the past as Bhaṣa, Saumilla and Kaviputra. He attacks the "Rip-van-Winkies" by declaring, that everything is not good simply because it is old, nor should a dramatic composition be condemned simply because it is new. He is therefore confident that the production will excel those of the old masters and win applause from the learned audience. In a very shrewd manner he cautions the audience against being carried away by the judgement passed by others, thus indirectly appealing to them not to let him down just because he is a young writer.

The Sāṅgītaratnakāra gives a vivid description of the seating arrangement made for the audience at a court performance. Here the king is the guest of honour who is called Sabhāpāti or President. There is a splendid Lion-seat reserved for him. The queens are on his left and his courtiers on the right. Behind the courtiers are the Chief of the Treasury and other officers and close to them the learned men versed in all branches of knowledge including connoisseurs of drama, poets, those who are proficient in all the Vṛtis, people worthy of honour, astrologers and physicians. The seats right behind the latter are reserved for the ministerial circle and the generals of the army. Around the king are gallants (Vilāsina) and in his front the courtesans and inmates of the harem. Standing behind the king are the chowrie-bearers full of youth and beauty and captivating the people's hearts by the sweet sound of their bracelets. The seats in front towards the left are allotted to the singers, story-tellers, bards and learned men.

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1. i. 2. 2. Op. cit., i. 2. 3. See below, Chapter XII.
and around them are seated the entourage of the king. The star-bearers are to take their stand at an assigned place while the king's body-guards armed with weapons are scattered everywhere in the auditorium.

3. CONTESTS AND DISPUTES

To earn a name as an exponent of his art is the dream of every ambitious artist since it is on his reputation that his success or failure depends to a large extent. For an artist the road to success is often a rugged one beset with untold obstacles, and his rivals in the field cause him perhaps the greatest concern. This constant fear of being surpassed by others forces him to keep himself busy with an incessant competition with his confrères. Competition is a human instinct after all and a useful one too. If there is no competition, life would be dull and weary and we may soon grow jaded with our occupations. Bharata realized the usefulness of this natural instinct as one of the basic requirements for those who would aspire to become actors.

We have reasons to believe that frequently enough controversies cropped up and competitions ensued between actors in ancient India. A discussion on the subject could not therefore be avoided by Bharata. Bharata gives a short account of how controversies between actors should be settled and how dramatic contests should be conducted. We may conjecture that the inclusion of this account in the Nāṭyāśāstra must have been necessitated by the conditions that prevailed in the theatre during Bharata's time. However, it is unfortunate that no historical evidence of any such controversies or contests between actors or actor-companies is to be found. It has been shown earlier that the Prologue to the Amārgārāghava has been utilized by the Sūtradhāra to make a ruthless attack on another actor, perhaps the leader of a troupe, who is alleged to have staged plays with unwholesome themes before the public. The Sūtradhāra in the Prasannārāghava recounts how his elder brother won back his title which had been illegitimately assumed by an imposter, after defeating the latter in the royal courts of the Deccan.

These may not be actual facts but tales invented by the

2. N. xxvi. 37-41. 3. See above, p. 27.
4. See above, pp. 27 f.
dramatist to render the Prologue more appealing to his audience. Still less related to historical facts is the dispute between the two dancing teachers in the Malavikāgnimitra. But it is very likely that by inventing this humorous episode the playwright wanted to lay bare a common weakness found in artists of his day. There is actually no valid reason for the two teachers to become so furious, but the evergrowing jealousy of one another, burning within themselves, is used to advantage by the shrewd Vidūṣaka. The slightest insinuating remark would suffice to inflame each other’s feelings. Since both are employed in the palace, they approach the king for a fair deal. A contest seems to be the only way out and the two teachers readily acquiesce to make their respective pupils face a contest in order to prove their superiority in the matter of imparting the art.

There is a Buddhist Jātaka tale about a bitter competition between two musicians, the Bodhisattva Guttīla and his own disciple Mūsila, in which God Indra had to come down to the rescue of the broken-hearted old maestro. Guttīla was the court musician of King Bṛhaṃsātta of Kāśī. On the teacher’s recommendation the king agreed to take the pupil also into his service and a salary as half as his teacher’s was fixed for him. The rivalry between the teacher and the pupil arose when the latter demanded equal pay for equal service. This made the teacher extremely miserable for he thought that his pupil was treating him with contumely in his old age when he could no longer perform as he did before. He appealed to the king not to yield to the ungrateful pupil’s demands. This put the king in a dilemma because it was not his wish to displease either, and a contest to decide whose stand was justifiable became inevitable. Obviously the king’s sympathies were with the promising young musician.

Disputes and contests assumed different forms. Sometimes controversies arose over certain technical details or theatricalities pertaining to drama. In such cases the decision was to be based on the authority of the accepted works on the subject. In all other cases a panel of judges was to be called upon to pronounce the judgement. Patrons sometimes instigated their protégés to participate in contests. Perhaps they experienced a sense of superiority when the excellence of their

protegés was proved in contests or derived pure entertainment by witnessing contests in which the rivals displayed their true talents. Occasionally, if not quite often, contests were also held for money.

We learn from the Harivamsa and the Viṣṇupurāṇa that judges were invited to referee the wrestling match of Gāṇuṣa and Muṣṭika against Kṛṣṇa and his brother. The main conditions were to be announced by the judges before the match began. The panel of judges of dramatic competitions was a composite one. It consisted of nine members each from a different trade. But we do not know how they were chosen, whether by lot or by selection or by a combination of both as was done in ancient Greece. It seems that an odd number was favoured lest there should be any difficulty in arriving at a decision in case of divided opinion. The panel consisted of an expert in sacrifice, a dancer, a prosodist, a grammarian, an expert in weaponry, a painter, a courtezan, a musician and a royal officer. The composite nature of the board ensured the contestants of a fair judgement. Each member had his own well-demarcated sphere to judge. Anything to do with the ritual and sacrifices was to be judged by the expert in sacrifice and the representational aspect in general (Abhinaya) was the field of the dancer. The prosodist judged the employment of metres, the grammarian the grammatical structure, particularly of lengthy declamations, the expert in weaponry the different postures of the body, the artist the costume and make-up and also stage sets if there were any. The courtezan was the judge in the representation of love-matters, the musician in the scoring of the music and the royal officer in the matter of showing civilities. These nine judges covered all important aspects of Sanskrit dramatic representation and even the script must have been strictly followed by the prosodist and the grammarian. The decision of each judge was final as far as his field was concerned and those competitors who were possessed of more merits and less blemishes than the others were adjudged victors.

One recension of the Natyadāstra says that judges should be familiar with arts and crafts in general with a proficiency in the arts of music, dance and drama in particular, possessed of a general knowledge of various branches of learning and with

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1. Ibid., 71a. 2. II. xxx. 12-16. 3. V. xx. 25, 30. 4. See H.C. Baldry: Greek Literature for the Modern Reader, Cambridge (1951), p. 136. 5. NS. xxvii. 64 f. 6. Ibid., 64-67. 7. Ibid., 76.
During the contest the judges must be seated at ease, with clear intentions and undivided attention. The conditions on which the competition was held were to be laid before-hand. The seats for the judges were arranged at a distance of twelve hands from the stage so that they might not be too far from or too close to the performers. They were assisted in their work by scribes and reckoners. The presence of reckoners suggests that there was some system of allotting marks under the several topics. They would note the good points as well as weak points that revealed themselves during the performance. The judges were to be careful not to record any blemishes that were either accidental or caused by the intervention of enemies. But those defects strictly relating to the performance and the weak points of the actors would be recorded.

In the absence of historical evidence, we cannot say with certainty whether these contests were held among individual actors or dramatic companies. Even if competitions were held between troupes, we are unable to say whether they enacted the same drama or different ones. Nor does Bharata shed any light on this point.

After informing the king of the results, the winner was awarded a banner (Pataka) and sometimes along with a purse (Arthapataka) as was done in Greece. In Greece, however, the award was not a banner but a crown of ivy. It seems that this banner was flying over the site during the competition, after which it was carried away by the victor. In case of a tie, the banner might be given to any one of the contestants at the discretion of the king, but if the king wishes to remain impartial, it might be shared by them both.

1. NŚ.KM. xxvii. 47-50.
2. NŚ. xxvii. 71-74. It may be noted here that in the Greek theatre the judges were allotted seats in the front row of the auditorium. See H.C. Baldry: Op. cit., ibid.
3. NŚ. ibid., 73a. 4. Ibid., 74b-76.
5. Ibid., 77. 6. Ibid., 71a.
7. See H.C. Baldry: op. cit., p. 141.
9. NŚ. ibid., 77 f.