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The Many Selves of an Actor: Perceptibility of Second-order Characters in the *Naṭāṅkuśa* and Non-dualist Theories of Cognition

ABSTRACT: This article explores artistic innovations in Kūṭiyāṭṭam theater through the lens of critique developed in the *Naṭāṅkuśa*—a polemical treatise composed, perhaps, in the 15th century Kerala. The focus is on the *Naṭāṅkuśa*'s fierce disapproval of the performance of multiple roles by an actor dressed as one and the same character—for example, switching from the role of Hanumān to that of Rāma, while still in Hanumān's costume and make-up. The author of the *Naṭāṅkuśa* utilizes epistemological arguments to demonstrate the impossibility of accommodating more than one character in a single actor's mind. Nor can a spectator have a stable cognition of the second-order characters. The fact that the author attributes to the opponent—a Kūṭiyāṭṭam performer—a non-dualist theory of cognition, suggests that the theory of Kūṭiyāṭṭam was inspired by Advaita Vedāntin and the non-dualist Śaiva epistemological presuppositions.

KEYWORDS: Kūṭiyāṭṭam, *Naṭāṅkuśa*, Advaita Vedānta, Kashmiri Śaivism, *pakarnnāṭṭam*, Dharmarāja, Somānanda, *Vedāntaparibhāṣa*, *Śivadṛṣṭi*, *sarvasarvātmakatvavāda*

The topic of this philosophical inquiry is a unique acting technique known as *pakarnnāṭṭam* employed in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam Sanskrit theater

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of Kerala. *Pakarnnāṭṭam* refers to the performance of roles of various characters by an actor dressed as one and the same character—for example switching from the role of Hanumān to that of Rāma, while still in Hanumān's costume and make-up. The actor steps out of his or her main role, assumes the roles of other characters imagined by the main protagonist, and works out the scene according to his or her skill and imagination (Gopalakrishnan 2018).[1]

The question of the appropriateness of this custom has been raised in the *Naṭāṅkuśa*, a polemical treatise composed, perhaps, in the 15th-century Kerala (Paulose 1993: xxviii). This text is the only, except for stage manuals, theoretical work in Sanskrit on Kūṭiyāṭṭam and includes valuable information—even if fiercely critical—on the theory and practice of Kūṭiyāṭṭam during its formative years. Among Kūṭiyāṭṭam's artistic innovations which the text's anonymous author regarded as highly objectionable, *pakarnnāṭṭam* is an object of a lengthy argument. The author criticizes it as deviating from the procedures permissible in the classical dramaturgical theory of the *nāṭyaśāstra*, as well as confusing to the spectator and precluding the emergence of an aesthetic feeling. In addition to these normative considerations, the *Naṭāṅkuśa* (henceforth NA) questions the capacity of an actor's mind to give rise to cognition of a second-order character, as well as the capacity of a spectator to recognize the same from the actor's performance. In other words, the author considers *pakarnnāṭṭam* to be fraught with epistemological complications, which he sets to work out.

In this essay, I will examine how epistemological debates between the metaphysical realists and the non-dualists find their way into a critical text on dramaturgy. I argue that author's own realist commitment and the non-dualism he ascribes to his opponent are not incidental; rather

[1] The idea of a main character immersing herself or himself in an imaginative enactment of another character was rather trendy in the early modern South India and can be found elsewhere in poetry and prose of this period. See, for example, the description of the king Acyuta Rāya's contemplation of the beauty of Varadāmbikā, with whom he has just fallen in love, in the *Varadāmbikāpariṇayacampū* by Tirumalāmbā from the 16th century (pp. 110–114).

they speak for two fundamental approaches to dramatic representation. While the present study analyzes the Kashmiri Śaiva and Vedānta non-dualist positions echoed in the text vis-à-vis the Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realist commitments of the NA, I do not aim at exploring the divergences of opinion within these traditions, such as the differences between Somānanda's and Abhinavagupta's non-dualism. Instead, I focus on the different ways that these positions, driven by the rhetorical objectives of the text, are played out in the NA.

First-order and Second-order Characters

The author of the NA defines first-order characters and second-order characters as follows. The first-order character (*anukārya*—"to be acted") is the character whom the playwright explicitly directs to enter the stage. The second-order character (*parāmṛśya*—"to be referred to") is not prescribed to enter the stage, and as the Sanskrit word *parāmṛśya* indicates, the same is merely remembered or referred to by a first-order character. The characters may change their order status according to the circumstances. A first-order character may become a second-order character in a different scene and vice versa. Thus, in the *Aṅgulīyāṅka*—the sixth act of Śaktibhadra's *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*[2] (8th–10th century)—Hanumān is a first-order character and Rāma is a second-order character; in other acts, they switch places (NA 38,7–12). The author defines the personification of the first-order character as "transforming one's own nature into the state of Hanumān or of the other characters" (*svabhāvo hanūmadāditvāpattiḥ anukaraṇam*, NA 38,13–14).[3] When an actor dressed as Hanumān enters the stage, a spectator immediately recognizes that "this is Hanumān."

Reference to a second-order character, on the other hand, is merely an indication of an awareness of this character, without an actual

[2] As enacted in Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition.

[3] The translations from Sanskrit in the present study are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

enactment as a role to be played. Sometimes, second-order characters are directly perceived by the first-order character and are found in his vicinity, including the non-sentient elements, such as plants and buds in the garden seen by Hanumān. Others are present only in the mind of the first-order character, who contemplates them, narrates their adventures, or recollects some past incidents involving them. Thus, even when Hanumān is the first-order character, his recollection of his own deeds in the past has as its object an (earlier form of) Hanumān presented as a second-order character. Such second-order characters should not be personified by an actor while in the role of a first-order character, but merely communicated through speech and gestures (NA 38,15–39,1).

The initial topic of the preceding discussion that leads to an argument against *pakarnnāṭṭam* in the *Naṭāṅkuśa* is the inconsistent switching in Kūṭiyāṭṭam between the first-person speech of the personified character, such as Hanumān, and a third-person description of his actions by the same actor, which the author considers inappropriate, unless when explicitly required by the playwright. The attempt of the opponent—presumably voicing the perspective of a Kūṭiyāṭṭam actor from a Cākyār family[4]—to justify the move in some cases by the change of the agent of action sets in motion a massive attack on the practice of *pakarnnāṭṭam*:

> This being the case, having entered the role of Hanumān and while staying in his costume, assuming the role of Rāma and other characters do not stand to reason.[5]

The rationale for rejecting this practice is the dissonance between the visible form of one character and the behavior of another:

[4] A caste of non-Brahmin temple servants in Kerala. Through most of the history of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Cākyār male actors used to perform male and female roles (Casassas 2012: 1–2).

[5] *evaṃ sati veṣeṇa hanūmadbhāvam avalambya avasthitau rāmādibhāvāṅgīkaraṇaṃ na upapadyate* (NA 32, 19–20).

> Accepting the division of the connection between (the character) associated with a costume and (the one expressed by) gestures and other (expressive means) is seizing appropriateness by the throat![6]

Moreover, the inappropriateness of such a dissonance would make it impossible for *rasa*—the aesthetic sentiment—to arise. In this respect, the author quotes the verse, "There is no cause for dissolving *rasa*, other than impropriety,"[7] and ridicules *pakarnnāṭṭam* as follows:

> (76) Having taken a form of a monkey distinguished by a hairy tail, (and then) turning into Sītā, (the actor performs) the amorous dance – well done!
> (77) One (role) is performed by means of a costume, another, however, by means of gestures and other (expressive means).
> Who taught you that? And where (from does such an idea come) —from an ordinary experience or from tradition?[8]

Cognitive Dissonance in the Spectator's Mind

In addition to the author's criticism of *pakarnnāṭṭam* on normative grounds, he weaves together epistemological and aesthetic considerations for rejecting the practice. When the Cākyār opponent suggests that to communicate Rāma's pain of separation from his beloved wife, the actor, in his role as Hanumān, needs to enact Rāma's mental state, the *siddhāntin* responds:

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[6] *āhāryasya ca āṅgikādeś ca saṃbandhabhedaparigraho 'yam aucityasya galārdhacandraḥ/* (NA 32, 22–23).

[7] *anaucityād ṛte nānyad rasabhaṅgasya kāraṇam* (NA 33, 1). The verse appears in Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, *vṛtti* ad. 3.14, as well as in Kuntaka's *Vakroktijīvita* 3.53 and elsewhere (I would like to thank both reviewers for these references).

[8] *kapirūpam upādāya lāṅgūlādiviśeṣitam/*
sītābhūtvā vilāsādinaṭanaṃ sādhu sādhv idam//
eko 'nukāryo veṣeṇa tathā anyas tv āṅgikādinā
iti kenopadiṣṭaṃ vā kva vā laukika āgame// (NA 33, 2–5).

> One does not recognize such mental states like the pain of separation as belonging to Rāma. For how can they be recognized as such? When seeing a trembling tail looking like a crow (?) in front of (the spectators), there is no cognition "this is Rāma," but rather a cognition "this is a monkey." But then it would seem that this [monkey] is acting in a way that is improper to its own self.[9]

Here the author claims that the costume of Hanumān prevents the arising of Rāma's cognition in the spectators' minds. Even if the spectator somehow understands that this is Rāma, she or he will be subject to two conflicting cognitions—of Hanumān and of Rāma—which would cause an unsteadiness of the mind, thus interfering with the spectator's ability to enjoy the performance.

This is, perhaps, the main point of the NA's argument against *pakarnnāṭṭam*—the mind, burdened by conflicting cognitions which are not resolved, may not produce aesthetic pleasure. It should be pointed out here that although the word "cognition" (*pratīti*) has a strong epistemic connotation from philosophical debates on *pramāṇa*s and the philosophy of mind, it also carries a distinct aesthetic sense in the context of the *rasa* theory. The *aesthetic* position of the NA is that the two incompatible cognitions interfere with the effect of each, just like sweet and salty foods taken together would.[10] On the other hand, in *epistemic* terms, the indecisive nature of cognition produces doubt

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[9] *te virahavedanādayo vitanyamānāḥ bhāvāḥ rāmasya ete iti na pratīyante/ katham iva tathā pratīyantāṃ nāma/ purataḥ parisphurat kākalekhālāṅgūlādidarśane rāmo 'yam iti pratītyabhāvāt vānaraḥ iti pratītibhāvāt ca/ tadānīṃ punaḥ ayam ātmānucitaṃ yatkiṃcit ceṣṭate ity eva pratibhāti/* (NA 33, 16–20).

[10] See Māgha's verse (*Śiśupālavadha* 14.50—I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for this reference) quoted in the NA:

> *svādayan rasam anekasaṃskṛtaprākṛtair akṛtapātrasaṅkaraiḥ/*
> *bhāvaśuddhivihitair mudaṃ jano nāṭakair iva babhāra bhojanaiḥ//* (NA 36, 18–19).
> "People obtain pleasure by tasting from different foods prepared in their pure state, without mixing the plates, just like they enjoy receiving *rasa* from various acts performed in their pure state, without mixing the actors and by keeping Sanskrit separate from Prakrit."

(Is this Hanumān? Is this Rāma?), thereby doing away with the possibility of recognition altogether. According to such philosophical traditions as Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā, the epistemically valid cognitive state must be determinate (*niścita*).[11]

The author of the NA claims, based on the authority of the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, that when there is discordance between the costume of one character and the acting as another, what happens is that the state of the first-order character is lost, whereas the state of a second-order character does not appear due to the absence of the proper costume. This is a paradoxical situation, where the visible signifier lacks its intended signified content, whereas another signified content lacks a signifier. The *siddhāntin* is not inclined to accept another possibility—that the first signifier may assume a new function as a signifier of a second signified content.

Not only a distinction between the characters is at stake here, but also the distinct nature of the two different kinds of cognition. An opportunity should be provided for a spectator to clearly distinguish between the direct perception of the first-order characters and the indirect cognition of second-order characters as these are merely remembered or imagined. The insistence of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam actors to convey these qualitatively distinguished cognitions in the same way conflates distinct cognitive states and constitutes an epistemic fallacy.

What can be said in response? Danielle Chen Kleinman demonstrates in her exploration of the concept of *camatkāra*, that for Abhinavagupta the cognitive dissonance between the conflicting aspects of the spectator's experience, such as between the reality of her own

[11] The author of the NA exhibits a strong Mīmāṃsā influence throughout the text both in his epistemological realistic commitments (also shared with Nyāya) and in his general hermeneutic approach to textual authority. Just like the Vedic text cannot be freely manipulated by a commentator or by a priest, the stage director's and the actors' interpretation of the play must be subordinated to the text (the author discusses this point in the fourth section on the *Aṅgulīyāṅka*). Paulose acknowledges the author's inclination towards Mīmāṃsā, along with his broad familiarity with Nyāya, Vyākaraṇa and Vedānta, and speculates that he was a member of the Payyūr family, whose main scholarly area of specialization was Mīmāṃsā (Paulose 1993: xxviii).

condition and the illusion of the dramatic world, between conflicting poetic elements, and between the *rasa*s of contradictory nature—all give rise to aesthetic wonder, which is essentially blissful. In this theory, we find that it is precisely the discordance between the opposing cognitions, such as Hanumān's appearance and Rāma's acting that gives the spectator the taste of fullness, of the unity of different elements (Chen Kleinman 2019: 2). As we will see, the *pūrvapakṣin*, representing the Cākyār, would defend the practice of *pakarnnāṭṭam* on the basis of a Kashmiri Śaiva theory of cognition. As Abhinavagupta is probably the most famous proponent of this non-dualist school, his theory of *camatkāra* seems quite appropriate for defending cognitive dissonance experienced by a spectator of Kūṭiyāṭṭam as aesthetically valuable.

An Actor's Mind and the Split of Identity

While communicating a second-order character, says the *siddhāntin*, the actor should not give up on his identification with the first-order character, such as Hanumān, and should not assume a new identity with the second-order character, such as Rāma. Hanumān's relation with Rāma is not a *samavāya*—a Vaiśeṣika term for the necessary connection between a substance and its properties—because Rāma's inherent properties belong only to Rāma, not to Hanumān. Nor is it a *samyoga*—accidental conjunction between separately existing entities because the present Hanumān may not have this kind of a connection with Rāma, who is not present, but only remembered. It is rather the relation between the remembering subject and the remembered object (*smartṛ-smartavya-bhāva*). If the second-order element is within the presence of the first-order character, as in the case of the plants in the garden, etc., it is the relation between the apprehending subject and the apprehended object (*grāhya-grāhaka-bhāva*) (NA 41, 6–9).

By further framing the relationship between the first- and the second-order characters in terms of a cognizing subject (*boddhṛ*) and the object of cognition (*boddhavya*), the author of the NA continues to explore the epistemic implications of the two kinds of characters. Just

like a person having a cognition "this is a pot" does not turn into a pot, in the same way, Hanumān having cognition of Rāma does not turn into Rāma (NA 44, 17–21). Therefore, an actor performing Hanumān's role should not identify himself with Rāma, just because Rāma is the content of Hanumān's memory or of some other cognitive state.

At this stage, the Cākyār raises the following explanation of the relation between the first- and the secondary-order characters:

> It has been stated by the great souls: "Devadatta has become a pot."
> "He knows the pot; he shines through the self of the pot."[12]

I could not identify the source of the first quote, but the second quote clearly refers to a passage from the *Śivadṛṣṭi*—a text from the 10th century composed by a non-dualist Śaiva[13] Somānanda.[14] The phrase *ghaṭātmanā*

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[12] *nanu mahātmabhiḥ uktaṃ, devadatto ghaṭībhūto,* ***ghaṭaṃ vetti ghaṭātmanā prakāśate****/* (NA 45, 1–2).

[13] The system of non-dualist Śaivism, or Śaiva non-dualism, has often been called "Kashmir Śaivism" in secondary literature. For the reasons to reject the latter designation see Ratié 2017: 437. In the present study, I will follow the least objectionable term, the "non-dualist Śaivism."

[14] *sarve sarvātmabhāvena sarvajñā vā vyavasthitāḥ/ sarve bhāvāḥ svamātmānaṃ jānantaḥ sarvataḥ sthitāḥ//* ***madātmanā ghaṭo vetti vedmy ahaṃ vā ghaṭātmanā****// sadāśivātmanā vedmi sa vā vetti madātmanā/ śivātmanā yajñadatto yajñadattātmanā śivaḥ// sadāśivātmanā vetti ghaṭaḥ sa ca ghaṭātmanā/ sarve sarvātmakā bhāvāḥ sarvasarvasvarūpataḥ// sarvasya sarvam astīha nānābhāvātmarūpakaiḥ/ madrūpatvaṃ ghaṭasyāsti mamāsti ghaṭarūpatā// nānābhāvaiḥ svamātmānaṃ jānannāste svayaṃ śivaḥ/cid vyaktirūpakaṃ nānābhedabhinnam anantakam* (*Śivadṛṣṭi* 5, 104–109). "As we can ordinarily speak about each (thing), or because the knowledge of all things takes place, everything knows everything or exists through being the self of everything. All entities, knowing themselves (as everything), are found everywhere—**a pot knows (itself) by means of my own self, or I know (the pot) by means of the pot's self.** I know by means of Sadāśiva's self, or Sadāśiva knows by means of my own self. Yajñadatta (knows) by means of Śiva's self, Śiva (knows) by means of Yajñadatta's self. A pot knows by means of Sadāśiva's self, and He—by means of a pot. All entities consist of everything, because everything has the nature of everything. Here, for everything there is everything, because the self takes the forms of many entities. A pot is in my form and I am in the form of a pot. Śiva abides in himself and knows himself by means of

prakāśo also appears in Abhinavagupta's *Mālinīślokavārttika*.[15] In non-dualist Śaivism, to which these two philosophers belong, all things in the world are said to be of the nature of Śiva's consciousness. It is a school of non-duality, but as opposed to Advaita Vedānta, here the transformation of consciousness into a multiplicity is not illusory, but real. The Cākyār appeals to a theory of cognition in this school, according to which *prakāśa*, the illuminating power of consciousness, manifests both the subject and the object of cognition as identical.[16]

The metaphysical position that Somānanda represents here is known as *sarvasarvātmakatvavāda*, a "doctrine of everything consisting of everything." Patañjali formulated it in his *Mahābhāṣya* (2nd century BCE), and Sāṃkhya philosophers developed it further (Wezler 1987 and 1992). The idea that every phenomenon contains in itself at least one representative of each and every species of individual things is an attempt to solve the problem of knowledge. As Somānanda understands this problem, if the cognizing consciousness and the objects of its cognition have distinct natures, the phenomenon of cognition would not be possible as no interaction could take place between ontologically separate entities. Somānanda suggests that consciousness is

many entities; (as) consciousness (he) takes individual forms, infinitely dividing itself into many parts." On Somānanda's pantheism and the differences between his views and those of other non-dualist Śaiva philosophers, see Nemec 2013.

[15] *ghaṭaprakāśe vastrasya prakāśo yadi saṃbhavet*
nāsau ghaṭaprakāśaḥ syād dviprakāśo hy asau bhavet // 1.77 //
so 'pi cāstv eva, no nāsti tad idaṃ tvatpracoditam
ghaṭātmanā prakāśo *'sya mā bhūd ity avatiṣṭhate //* 1.78 // (*Mālinīślokavārttika* 70).
This is an objection to Abhinavagupta's own thesis that all things are "illuminated" (i.e., known) by the same light of Śiva's consciousness: "If the light of a cloth would exist in the light of a pot, it would cease to be the light of a pot, for it would be a double light. [The objection] that the light of the [garment] in the form of a pot is not possible remains" (Hanneder 1998: 71). The expression "*ghaṭātmanā prakāśo*" here appears as a deliberate distortion of Somānanda's doctrine of "everything consisting of everything" (see further) by the *siddhāntin*.

[16] The state of art interpretation of this tradition can be found in Isabelle Ratié's cutting edge work. See e.g., her "Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta on the Freedom of Consciousness" (2017).

precisely the principle which, underlying all phenomena, allows for relations among various things, as well as for their knowability by consciousness. Everything is in everything with various configurations of forms. I have the nature of the pot and the pot has my nature. I know the jar, as the jar knows me, and consciousness—in its ultimate form as the god Śiva—knows itself in every form (Torella 2002: xv–xvi).[17]

The Cākyār invokes this epistemological-metaphysical theory in order to ward off the *siddhāntin*'s realistic separation between the subject and the object of cognition, and to justify the transformation of Hanumān into Rāma, an object of his cognitive act. In response, the *siddhāntin* proclaims:

> This is not so. Here this philosophical system (of non-dualism) is not useful because one cannot carry on performance, based on dualism, in accordance with the reasoning of non-dualism. Appealing to the view of non-duality of everything is proper for the state of motionlessness. On the other hand, a dramatic plot, characterized by action and based upon difference and division, should be narrated (somehow).[18]

The *siddhāntin* equivocates, in fact, on the meaning of non-duality, because he refers to non-duality of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, where ultimate reality is indeed motionless, whereas the Cākyār appeals to the non-dualist Śaivism, where the change is real. Thereby, he misleads and manipulates the readers. I will return later to the question of whether metaphysical non-duality of any of these schools is proper as a theoretical grounding of Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

The *siddhāntin* continues to attack the *purvapakṣin*'s recourse to non-duality. He argues that cognition is not possible for a subject

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[17] I would like to thank John Nemec for referring me to the primary and secondary sources on the theory of *sarvasarvātmakatvavāda*.

[18] *maivam/ atra ayaṃ nayo na upayujyate, advaitayuktyā dvaitanirvāhasya kartum aśakyatvāt/ sarvābhedadarśanaparigrahe nirīhatopapattau bhedaprabhedālambanasya kriyāsvalakṣaṇasya nāṭyasya kathāpi kathāyeta/* (NA 45, 3–5).

becoming non-different from the object of his or her cognition. If Devadatta is non-distinct from the pot, then how can he know the pot? The act of apprehension consists in the distinction between the apprehending subject and the apprehended object; if there is no difference between the two, apprehension is not possible (NA 45, 6–7). It should be noticed that here the *siddhāntin* targets not merely the application of non-duality to *pakarnnāṭṭam*, but rather the viability of non-dualist account of cognition *per se*.

We do not know how the Cākyār would respond to this point, but it has been addressed in different ways in non-dualist accounts of perception. Thus, Dharmarāja, a 17th-century philosopher, in his *Vedāntaparibhāṣa* (henceforth VP)—an Advaita Vedānta treatise—explains that the identity between a perceiving subject and the perceived object should not be understood as a complete unity of the two, but rather as "the absence of reality independent from the reality of a cognizer."[19] Dharmarāja continues:

> Accordingly, the reality of a pot is only the reality of the consciousness as an object insofar as a pot etc. is superimposed upon the consciousness conditioned by itself; because we do not agree that there is reality of the superimposed as distinct from the reality of the substratum.[20]

In other words, the substratum in which the cognizing mind and the cognized object appear is the same, although this does not bear upon the conceptual distinction between the mind and its object. In the case of Hanumān becoming Rāma, the identity between the subject and the object is even more plausible, because we deal here with an identity between sentient beings, towards whom one may easily

[19] *pramātṛabhedo nāma na tāvad aikyam, kintu pramātṛsattātiriktasattākatvā bhāvaḥ* (VP 202, 38–39).

[20] *tathā ca ghaṭādeḥ svāvacchinnacaitanyādhyastatayā viṣayacaitanyasattaiva ghaṭādisattā; adhiṣṭhānasattātiriktāyā āropitasattāyā anaṅgīkārāt* (VP 202, 39–203, 1).

develop empathy. When Hanumān reflects upon Rāma's pain of separation, Rāma's mental state is not merely an apprehended object like a pot, but rather a mental reenactment of being another person, of *what it is like* to be Rāma.

If the response to NA's critique should be made from the non-dualist Śaiva standpoint, here a distinction is drawn between the level of duality and the level of non-duality—both of which are real. Abhinavagupta points out that in the act of perception, there is a manifestation of duality between the cognizing subject and the cognized object, whereas the underlying light of consciousness is the same (*Mālinīślokavārttika* vs. 128).[21] Thus, the distinction between the cognizing mind and a cognized object on the level of manifested duality is not violated.

The author of the NA continues to attack the non-dualist theory of cognition. He asks: when Devadatta turns into a pot, what happens to Devadatta? Does Devadatta stay along with the pot or does he go somewhere else? If he stays, this will constitute the impossibility of coexistence (*sahānavasthāna*), because two incompatible universal properties of humanness and potness, cannot coexist in the same locus.

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[21] *nanv ittham ekaghanabhāvavimarśasāre*
saṃvedane yad aham eṣa karomi citraḥ/
jānāmi vā tad apare 'pi na maitracaitra-
*prāyā vidadhyur athavāpi kathaṃ na vidyuḥ//*127*//*
aho māyāgranthir nibiḍatama eṣo 'tra bhavatām
idaṃ hi prabrūmaḥ svaparam iha nāsty ekam abhidam/
ahaṃ vedmīty eṣā ghaṭatanuviśeṣaprakaṭatā
*prathāś citrākārāḥ paramahasi bhāntīti kathitam//*128*//* (*Mālinīślokavārttika* 78, vs. 127–128)
("[Opp:] If sentience (*saṃvedana*) exists in the way [described] as the essence of a homogeneous awareness of being (*bhāva*), then how [do you explain] that what I, who am manifold (*citraḥ*), do or know, is not also done or even known more or less by all the others. [A:] Tight indeed is the knot of illusion on this point (*atra*) in you! For we teach this: in our system (*iha*) 'own' and 'other' do not exist; the only [reality] is undivided (?*abhida*). The fact that I perceive means that the characteristics that form a pot are manifest. As has been said [before,] various manifestations appear in the highest light" (Hanneder 1998: 79).

"Horseness"—says the *siddhāntin*—is not to be found in the elephant. On the other hand, if Devadatta is replaced by the pot and goes somewhere else, where would he go? If into the pot, then Devadatta who turned into a pot is the pot which is turned into Devadatta, and we are back where we have started. If Devadatta goes into some other substrate, the previous form of this other substrate should also go somewhere else, and thus as in a domino effect, all designations would be transferred to some other objects, with the last form having no substrate left, leaving us with the impossible state of property having no substance (NA 45, 7–15). Playing the Kūṭiyāṭṭam advocate, however, it should be enough to point out that the *siddhāntin* should apply the same logic against the identity assumed by an actor with the first-order character, such as Hanumān. If the actor's own identity cannot co-exist with, or alternatively be given up for the sake of, his identity with Hanumān, then we should do away with the very possibility of theatrical performance.

Another alternative is that Devadatta is destroyed when he becomes a pot. However—says the author of the NA—if he has been destroyed, he cannot arise again, and upon looking at the piece of cloth he would neither be Devadatta, nor a pot, but a piece of cloth (NA 45, 15–17).[22] The author of the NA adopts a relational approach to cognition, characteristic of such realistic systems as Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā, where the arising of cognitive events supervenes on separate entities standing in a relation of subject and object, each preserving its ontological independence. Non-dualistic systems, on the other hand, tend to replace relations with identities. Relations imply distinctions, and distinctions are unreal—at least in Advaita Vedānta, which is the primary target of the *siddhāntin*'s critique. During cognitive events, there is the realization of identity between seemingly separate phenomenal units, resting in the same consciousness. However, as the *siddhāntin* points out, distinctions are necessarily lost in identities and Hanumān becoming Rāma loses his distinct identity. Hanumān may not remain Hanumān when he

[22] Here NA resonates the above quoted objection from *Māliniślokavārttika* 1.77–78 (see fn. 15 of the present study).

becomes Rāma, and he must carry the impossible burden of becoming each and every object of his cognition.

Advaita, however, is not easily intimidated by the prospects of making the mind cognitively overburdened or alternatively losing any permanent identity in the schizophrenic whirlpool of cognitive reincarnations. Thus, Dharmarāja holds that a cognition "there is a fire on the mountain," inferred from the observation of smoke, has elements of immediate perception in the form of the mountain and of indirect cognition in the form of the fire. Although immediacy and mediacy are cognitions of different kinds—the Nayāyikas would even say that they are contradictory—they can still be present within a single cognitive event. Dharmarāja denies the existence of contradictory universal properties, which presumably may not reside in the same locus. Although the immediate perception of the mountain and the indirect cognition of the fire are represented by different *vṛtti*s or mental modifications, the fact that they appear in the same consciousness, conditioned by the mind, makes them a single cognitive event (VP 191, 1–11).

Similarly, an Advaita-inclined Cākyār could respond to the author of the NA that the actor's mind can uphold several identities. Imagination and memory are mental faculties, responsible for the possibility of safely assuming a new identity, residing in it, and returning to a previous one. An actor may imagine himself to be Hanumān, and as Hanumān he can imagine himself to be Rāma. Theoretically, an actor may forget her or his previous identity and return to it by recollecting "Oh, I am not Rāma—I am Hanumān; I am not Hanumān—I am an actor." It is also possible that the actor carries his or her own identity, as well as her identity as Hanumān and as Rāma at the same time on different levels of awareness. What is important is that identity between the characters is established not because Hanumān and Rāma are indistinguishable or the same, but on the basis of the same mind, which imagines what it is like to be Hanumān or Rāma. And if what the Advaita-Vedāntins and Lacanians say about the function of the ego is true, then the actor's so-called identity with herself is no less imaginary than her identity with the *Rāmāyaṇa* heroes.

Conclusion

In his illuminating article on the poetics of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, David Shulman argues that despite the Kashmiri aesthetical terminology used among the performers and scholars of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, almost nothing links the aesthetic system of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta with the complex, heavily localized, and largely untheorized world of Kūṭiyāṭṭam (Shulman 2016: 221).[23] On the other hand, Shulman suggests strong Advaita Vedānta intuitions materialized in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Among these can be found the erasure of the subject-object distinction and the interplay between the reality and the illusion, such that the spectator constantly wonders: "What is real? Is it or is it not real?" (Shulman 2016: 234).

These Advaitin elements are undeniable and the fact that the author of the NA explicitly targets the Advaita theory of cognition while criticizing *pakarnnāṭṭam* is additional evidence for the connection between the philosophical school of non-duality and the Sanskrit theater in Kerala. On the other hand, the fact that the defender of Kūṭiyāṭṭam in the text relies on the non-dualist Śaiva theory of *prakāśa* and *sarvasarvātmakatvavāda*, points perhaps to theoretical links with this school as well. I would like to suggest that Kūṭiyāṭṭam thrives on the tension between the two non-dualisms. Śaṅkara's Advaita, with its metaphysical "desert of the real"—to use Baudrillard's coinage for a different cultural phenomenon (Kellner 2020)—suits well the minimalistic settings of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. It also lurks behind the spectator's critical distance from the dramatic "illusion," a distance caused by the gap between the costume of the character and his acting, as well as by multiple interruptions to the plot, preventing a full absorption into the illusory world. On the other hand, the dynamic world of the non-dualist Śaivism, where the divine consciousness unfolds in the infinite procession of forms and where everything illuminates everything, also serves well the free

[23] In a recent study, James D. Reich convincingly argues that Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was in fact a non-dual Vedāntin, which further points to the significant influence of Advaita theory on Indian aesthetics (Reich 2018).

transformation of characters and the imaginative creation of the world within the actors' and the spectators' minds.[24]

A few words should be said about the epistemological discussion in the NA. Vācaspati Miśra, a *sarva-tantra-sva-tantra* from the 10th century, wrote that "thinking about two similar things […] does provide helpful insight into understanding the one (or the other), like, for example, the study of one science may prove useful in understanding some aspects of a comparable science" (Larson 2018: 247).[25] NA's utilization of epistemological arguments and terminology against *pakarnnāṭṭam* is an example of the common practice among the Brahmanical scholars to freely transport methods and ideas across *śāstric* disciplinary boundaries.[26] The role that the *śāstri*s as interdisciplinary cultural agents played in the formation of the South Indian expressive ecosystem of early modernity surely deserves some attention.

[24] It is interesting to note that such practices of Kūṭiyāṭṭam as *pakarnnāṭṭam* and techniques of "disillusionment"—both resonating with the non-dualist metaphysical theories—have much in common with Bertold Brecht's epic theater, with its emphasis on "estrangement" and constant disruption of the theatrical illusion. Both theatrical traditions aim at exposing the mechanisms of illusion responsible for the spectator's forgetfulness of the reality and of oneself. However, whereas the metaphysics of Kūṭiyāṭṭam implies essential non-duality of consciousness, Brecht's epic theater draws attention to the social reality interpreted in the spirit of Marxism.

[25] *sadṛśārhānucintanaṃ tu sadṛśāntarasākṣātkāropayogitām anubhavati ekaśāstrābhyāsa iva tatsadṛśārthaśāstrāntarajñānopayogitām/* (TV 88, 15–18).

[26] On the relationship between literary theory and other *śāstra*s, see for e.g., Gerrow 1971: 48–50 and McCrea 2011.

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