

Chettiarthodi Rajendran 
rajenc@gmail.com
(Retired Professor, University of Calicut, India)

Celebrating Violence Some Stage Practises in Kerala's Classical Theatre

ABSTRACT: This paper is an attempt to probe into depiction of violence and death in the classical Sanskrit drama, especially in its avatar as Kūṭiyāṭṭam, a living performative tradition related to the temple theatre of Kerala. Stage depictions of terrible scenes of violence, and death as the culmination of it, will be examined here in the context of semiotics by including in its ramifications costume, colour scheme, tonal features and acting. The paper will first review the attitude of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to presenting darker side of life on the stage and then turn to issues related to portrayal of violence and death in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. It will also take the opportunity to briefly touch upon other classical performative art forms, like Kathakali, which are based on epic and Purāṇic themes, and are noted for their prominent portrayal of violence on stage.

KEYWORDS: *Nāṭyaśāstra*, violence, performance, Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Kathakali, Kerala

The present paper argues that depiction of violence and death are very much a part and parcel of Sanskrit drama, and that they have been prominently projected in Kerala's classical theatre.¹ Bruce M. Sullivan (2007) has already examined the issues related to the depiction of dying on the stage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, maintaining that despite the stereotyped perception of the Sanskrit theatre tradition of India "as avoiding, even prohibiting, depiction of death on the stage, death was both threatened and enacted on the stage, and has always been integral to the Sanskrit theatre tradition, as seen to the present day in Kerala's *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* tradition" (*ibid.*: 422). Largely agreeing with these findings and in continuation with them, in the present paper, the manner of the representation of violence and death as its possible culmination is analysed from the point of view of its impact on the audience. The paper will first of all examine the attitudes of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the seminal text of Indian theatre, as well as its commentators to the representation of the darker sides of life like violence. Further, the paper will focus on the issues related to the portrayal of violence and death in actual performance in traditional theatre. The paper will specifically take up performances on the Kerala stage, which provide the only living specimens of the traditional Sanskrit theatre. The paper will also take an opportunity to briefly touch upon other classical performative art forms like Kathakali, which are based on epic and Purāṇic themes and which are noted for their prominent portrayal of violence on the stage.

Violence is defined by Merriam-Webster.com dictionary as "the use of physical force to cause harm to people, animals, or property, such as pain, injury, death, damage, or destruction." It goes without saying that Sanskrit drama is a far cry from Greek or Shakespearean tragedy which both show uninhibited violence and death on the stage, but neither is it always a meek and gentle dance-like spectacle fostering gentler emotions to the exclusion of harsh realities of life.

¹ Because of the close relation between *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* and Kathakali in themes as well as sophistication related to *abhinaya*, both are here regarded as "classical" arts despite some folk elements present in them.

The attitude of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to violence seems to be ambivalent. Of the ten *rūpakas* described in the treatise, it seems that perceptions about Sanskrit drama have been more inclined to the idealised world view characterised by the cessation of violence and conflicts. Apparently, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* seems to favour a censored and idealised version of life events on the stage even though there is a lot of ambiguity regarding the ancient Indian perception on this issue. A passage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* prohibits direct depiction of certain acts of violence and scenes of death in an act of the *nāṭaka*, the principal type of plays. The passage, as translated by Manmohan Ghosh, reads as follows:

Feats of anger, favour, grief, pronouncing a curse, running away, marriage, commencement of some miracle, and its actual appearance, should not be directly visible in an act. A battle, loss of kingdom, death and siege of a city, being not directly visible in an Act, should be presented by Introductory Scenes (*Praveśaka*). In an Act in an Introductory Scene of the *Nāṭaka* or the *Prakaraṇa* there should be no killing of a person who is known as the Hero. His flight, treaty or capture should always be indicated by means of special descriptions (lit. poetical passages) and the Introductory Scenes will refer to such incidents (lit. acts). (Ghosh 1950: 358)

There is undeniably an admixture of pleasant and unpleasant events in the list given, as items such as marriage, commencement of a miracle, etc. also figure here along with violent events, but the accent is evidently on disturbing things such as graphic presentation of death, battle and siege of a city. This reservation towards violence indicated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is in fact matched by actual practice in the case of the majority of playwrights who usually shy away from direct depiction of violent scenes in their plays.

However, it is intriguing that if, in fact, this passage clearly prohibited direct presentation of certain violent and unpleasant events on the stage in some types of plays, an opposite perception was equally widespread regarding this matter, for the very same passage of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* had a diametrically opposite and well established iteration, accepted by Abhinavagupta in his commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

In Abhinavagupta's version, the passage quoted above does not have any negative particle in the first sentence and accordingly, it would mean exactly the opposite:

krodhaprasādaśokāḥ śāpopasargo 'tha vidravodvāhau adbhutasambhavadarśanamanke pratyakṣajānisyuḥ | (Ramakrishnakavi 1934: 419; *Abhinavabhāratī*).

Feats of anger, favour, grief, pronouncing a curse, running away, marriage, commencement of some miracle, and its actual appearance, should be directly visible in an act.

Moreover, Abhinavagupta describes these items as 'entertaining' (*rañjaka*),² thus undoing the very concept behind the alleged prohibition of certain type of events on the stage.

Thus we are faced with two contradictory precepts which have the *Nāṭyaśāstra* backing. However, a closer perusal of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself would indicate that despite prohibition of direct depiction of acts of violence and scenes of death in an act of the *nāṭaka*, the treatise envisages an uninhibited portrayal of violence on the stage as the description of the very first performance, quoted in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself, would indicate. What presents itself to the actors entrusted with the task of enacting that first performance is not a serene play with lofty ideals of renunciation or a love play depicting contours of love in its varying phases as dramatized by playwrights like Kālidāsa. According to the treatise, the performance selected for the first presentation was

a re-enactment of the situation in which the demons (*daityas*) were defeated by the gods which represented (sometimes) altercation and tumult and [sometimes] mutual cutting off and piercing [of limbs or bodies]. (Ghosh 1950: 9)

² *iti etac cāpīrañjakasyopalakṣaṇam* (Ramakrishnakavi 1934: 419; *Abhinavabhāratī*).

From this, it would have been clear that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was aware of the intense dramatic effect of such a violence on the stage and the deep psychological involvement of the audience in the depiction of such scenes. Interestingly, we see this violence enacted on the stage spreading outside it as well, with the demons disrupting the show and Indra smashing their bodies with a flagstaff known as *jarjara*.

The readiness with which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* accommodates violence as an aspect of its vision of life is concomitant with its comprehensive aesthetics in which a wide spectrum of emotions, including fury and valour, figure as well. It is possible that even while prohibiting violence in the *nāṭaka*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* did not extend this restriction to other types of plays. The definition seen in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of the many types of plays like the *vyāyoga*, the *ḍima* and the *samavakāra* involving violent incidents reinforce this perspective. In the *vyāyoga*, there should be a battle, personal combat, challenge and angry conflict (*ibid.*: 370). The *ḍima* should contain items like an earthquake, fall of meteors, eclipse of the sun and the moon, battle, personal combat, challenge, and furious conflict (*ibid.*). Violent scenes are profuse in the *samavakāra* type of play as well, in which excitement (*vidrava*) caused by many factors including battle and siege of a city figure prominently. The description of the contours of *raudra rasa*, like its determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*) and concomitant states (*vyabhicāribhāva*), contains a lot of violent situations like “beating, breaking, crushing, cutting, piercing, taking up arms, hurling of missiles, fighting, drawing of blood, and the like” (*ibid.*: 113). A perusal of the first chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* shows that the plays enacted initially were of a violent nature and the delicate style of Kaiśikī was added later (*ibid.*: 367).

In this connection, the relation between the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the epic tradition of India needs to be closely looked into. It may be noted that both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are essentially war stories and the image of a great war figures prominently in them. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself time and again reiterates its intimate relation with the *itihāsa*. Thus, in the genesis story, according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Brahmā declares that he is going to make a fifth Veda of the *nāṭya*

with the *itihāsa* (Ramakrishnakavi 1956: 13). After the creation of the *nāṭya*, he reiterates that the *itihāsa* has been created by him. Though Manmohan Ghosh translates the *itihāsa* in a general way, as “semi-historical tales”, he concedes that as per tradition, it may refer specifically to the *Mahābhārata*. Actually, the *itihāsa* in Indian tradition refers to both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and both these epics were intimately connected with the dramatic tradition. Indeed, the plot of many plays is mainly taken from both these epics and this holds true in the case of many other types of plays, too. As is well known, both the epics are, among many other things, war tales and the wars fought in both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are perennial sources of stories for later dramatists. Importantly, there is a preponderance of violent scenes in them, when, for example, we compare them with plays based on Buddhist motifs which generally favour the serene mode of life.

Against this backdrop, a close analysis of the traditional repertoire of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre of Kerala plays will be extremely interesting. Plays with predominantly violent incidents figure prominently here in comparison with plays depicting the gentler aspects of life. An interesting case study in this regard is the text of Śaktibhadra’s *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* and its representation on the Kūṭiyāṭṭam stage. The second act of the play presents the demoness Śūrpaṅakhā disguised as a beautiful damsel determined to seduce Rāma, and if this does not work, at least Lakṣmaṇa. On being approached for the second time, Rāma, revealing that he is already married to Sītā, pleads his helplessness; she then decides to approach Lakṣmaṇa for the second time as suggested by Rāma and she also resolves to show her true form if she is again rejected. She is indeed rejected, and Rāma, taken by surprise by Śūrpaṅakhā’s dreadful appearance, asks Lakṣmaṇa:

Lakṣmaṇa, what is this?

With terrible canine teeth, red hair standing upright, with a body like a mountain and dark as a cloud’, this uncontrollable form strikes fear even in me who killed Tātakā. (Jones and Raghavan 1984: 38)

Śūrpaṅakhā decides to eat the flesh of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and to offer Sītā as a present to Rāvaṇa. She carries away Lakṣmaṇa up to the sky, much to the consternation of Rāma who feels helpless at the sudden turn of events. But suddenly, he feels something like an earthquake. On looking closely, he finds a thick flow of liquid resembling gushing rivulet, thick with minerals of the mountain and the red glow of the rising sun, seeping down from a thick cloud. Actually it is the blood of the terrible Śūrpaṅakhā whose ears and nose have been cut off by Lakṣmaṇa who emerges unscathed from her grip. She threatens both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with dire consequences for their misdeeds and decides to approach Khara and Dūṣaṇa to seek their help in implementing her revengeful scheme.

In the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance, this segment is known as *Śūrpaṅakhānka* and it takes about six hours to enact it. The three main scenes comprising it are: the entrance of Śūrpaṅakhā as a beautiful damsel named Lalitā; the fight between Lakṣmaṇa and Śūrpaṅakhā; and finally, the bloody scene called *niṇam* (blood) in which the wounded Śūrpaṅakhā comes onto the stage. An interesting feature of this act is that while the role of Śūrpaṅakhā in her beautiful appearance is assigned to an actress as is wont in the tradition, in her terrible form as a demoness, her role is taken up by a male actor probably to enhance the terrible nature of the change she undergoes. A close examination of the costume and makeup used for the act reveals that considerable measures are taken to highlight both the violent and the comic aspects of the character. The face and body are blackened. The five trident marks on the face, made of white pigments which stands out on the dark countenance, have a bizarre effect. The false breasts are made either of leather or the outer covering of the leaf of the areca nut tree. The ear ornaments are made of palm frond like that of the madman in *Pratijñāyugandharāyaṇa*. The hair is fashioned out of a type of grass called *ṅoṅṅaṅṅam*, and it is worn with a band called *vāsikam*. At the forehead a red cloth is tied and another head band decorated with peacock feather. A garland of twisted cloth suggesting a skull garland is donned in the place of a garland made of garlic worn by Śūrpaṅakhā in normal circumstances. The acting manual of the play insists that

both the drumming in the background and the acting on the scene are to be very vigorous (Jones and Raghavan 1984: 111–112). The character, its teeth protruding and eyes staring wildly, enters the stage at a run, jumping and spinning around, and shouting loudly. The character speaks a degenerate form of Malayalam caricaturing the dialect spoken by the underprivileged social groups of Kerala.

It is true that, in tune with the general practice in Sanskrit drama, the actual scene of combat is not described in the play or shown in the on-stage performance. However, the aftermath of the violence, featuring Śūrpaṅakhā roaring in anger and pain after Lakṣmaṇa had cut off her body parts, is actually shown on the stage which creates a haunting impression on the audience. The final scene featuring the entrance of Śūrpaṅakhā soaked in blood is indeed terrifying. The wounded Śūrpaṅakhā, whose ears, nose and breasts have been cut off and are hanging loosely; whose inner stomach and arteries are exposed and entangled into one big, gruesome mess; and from whose nose, mouth and chest blood is seen oozing, presents a horrifying picture.

In order to further heighten the overall effect, it is through the audience space that Śūrpaṅakhā enters the stage. This is in sharp contrast with the normal practice of a character entering from the space behind the stage. An awestruck audience finds her suddenly in their midst, wailing terribly, hooting, and cursing, falling down and standing up, kicking and hurling abuses, bathed in blood. Her entrance is accompanied by lighted torches, which are occasionally inflamed when some powder is thrown on them (*ibid.*: 71). Sudha Gopalakrishnan evokes the overall effect of the scene thus:

The slow approach of the red-spattered ogress wailing loudly with faltering steps, through the midst of the audience, to the accompaniment of torches and loud drumming, creates the impression of heavy bleeding and tortuous pain, evoking both awe and revulsion in the mind of the spectator. (Gopalakrishnan 2011: 84–85)

To depict the blood-stained Śūrpaṅakhā, a liquid called *niṅam* is specially made using a boiled solution made of rice powder, turmeric

powder and quicklime to which are added plantain and roasted rice (Chakyar 1996: 15). In the play, only the nose and the ears of Śūrpaṅkhā are mentioned as being cut off;³ but on the stage, even her breasts are shown as having been mutilated, magnifying violent nature of the scene. Interestingly, this innovation specific to the Kerala stage is severely criticised by the anonymous author of *Naṭāṅkuśa* who points out that Śūrpaṅkhā is displayed here with her breasts chopped off which is against the original text of the play and the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself.⁴ K. P. Narayana Pisharoti suggests that this innovation is based on the version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* found in the *Adhyātmārāmāyaṇa* and *Bhārata* of Tuñcatt Eḷuttachan. Needless to say, the entrance of Śūrpaṅkhā through the audience is designed to enhance the dramatic effect of the scene and to expand its impact.

It is significant that the performances were mostly enacted during the night, both in the case of Kathakaḷi and Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Nocturnal environment seems to have escalated the sense of dark mystery and in the case of violent scenes, the horror evoked by the presentation. In the days when electricity or other artificial lighting systems were unknown, the circular range of light emitted by lamps and torches focused on the face of the actor and obliterated the sight of the background and drummers (Narayanan 2022: 90). However, there is a conflagration in the atmosphere when the blood-dripping form of Śūrpaṅkhā enters the stage through the audience accompanied by several torch bearers whose lighted torches flare up when some powder is occasionally thrown on them. The scene acquires intense dramatic effect when the roaring Śūrpaṅkhā, standing in front of the audience, accosts the stunned Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and

³ *nyastam astram niśācaryāḥ kathañcit karṇanāsike* (Jones and Raghavan 1984: 194).

⁴ *api ca yatsūrpaṅkhāñke śūrpaṅkhā vai rūpyakṛtautasyāḥ stanadvayasamchedanam api āhāryeṇa vitanyate tasya kim nāma mūlam bhavet | na khalu nāṭakam tatra khalu*

nyastam astram niśācaryāḥ kathañcit karṇanāsike ity etāvad evoktam | āṛṣepi ity ukto lakṣmaṇas tasyāḥ krudhdho rāmasya paśyataḥ | uddhṛtya khadgam cicheda karṇamāsam mahātmanaḥ ity evāsti. tasmāt svayamkṛtam edevam. Paulose 1993: 48–49. Cf. Warder 1988: 10.

Sītā, all three startled by the sudden change of the form of the demoness. Professor K. T. Ramavarma, a noted connoisseur of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, recounts his experience as a child in Tripunithura when he witnessed the performance of Chachu Chakyar, a celebrated actor, donning the guise of Śūrpaṅakhā:

The entrance of Chachu Chakyar featuring the blood soaked Śūrpaṅakhā created a feeling of supernatural awe in me. I can remember only with a shudder the image of Śūrpaṅakhā with tender coconut pieces soaked in red liquid of *kuruti* hanging on all the parts of the body, the odious face, the staggering gait with pauses in the middle, the frequent falls, the pitiful cries coming from the face, and the delirious utterings. Frightened to the core, I cried aloud on seeing that entrance of Śūrpaṅakhā. (Ramavarma 1981: 36)

A puzzling aspect of the depiction of this violent scene is the comic touch inherent in the representation of Śūrpaṅakhā on the stage and which derives mainly from her speech. Narayana Pisharoti, who refers to this aspect for the first time, says that “Śūrpaṅakhā is presented on the stage in a manner which is slightly mixed with humour” (Narayana Pisharoti 2002: 69). She uses a degraded form of Malayalam and even when she narrates the death of her husband, the comic effect is not altogether absent. There is what Narayana Pisharoti describes as the *udghaṭṭana* type of recitation accompanied by rhythmic jumps and claps of hands. There is a comic touch even in the fatal fight between Bālin and Sugrīva, where actors imitate the behaviour of the monkeys. This type of comic relief probably enhances the bizarre effect of the scenes. Another interesting feature of the *Śūrpaṅakhāṅka* episode is the ritualistic aura it acquires when staged in the Vennimala temple of Kottayam district, Kerala, where Lakṣmaṇa is the principal deity. Here, there is no actor representing Lakṣmaṇa. The belief is that the deity himself assumes the role. Consequently, the scene depicting the cutting of the breasts and the nose of Śūrpaṅakhā is symbolically presented near the *sanctum sanctorum*, in the presence of the idol (Rajendran 1989: 10).

Violence and death are depicted uninhibitedly in many other scenes of *Āścaryacūdāmaṇi* and other plays as well. These include the fight between Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyu and the latter's death enacted in the scene of *Jaṭāyuvadha*; the fight between Bālin and Sugrīva and the former's death caused by the arrow of Rāma in *Bālivadhānka* of *Abhiṣeka*; and the death of Cāṇūra, Muṣṭika and Kaṃsa in *Bālacarita*. Probably one of the most poignant depictions of violence followed by death is the fratricidal battle between Bālin and Sugrīva in the enactment of *Abhiṣeka* ascribed to Bhāsa. Bālin in his fighting mood presents a terrible sight. Technically, his costume is called *cuvannatāṭi*. In the ensuing scene where Bālin, who is angry at the call for fight from Sugrīva, huge *kuttuvilakku* type of lamps are filled with lighted wicks on the left and right side of the stage (Narayana Pisharoti 2002: 42–43). Suddenly there is a loud thud in the green room, followed by a stern demand to know the whereabouts of Sugrīva. Meanwhile, in the midst of the inflamed lamps, there emerges a terribly furious figure removing the curtain. He revolves his wide eyes, has reddened face and trembling lips, and biting his curved teeth he roars aloud. He hits his thighs and shakes his bottom. The entrance is followed by a prolonged fight involving many types of jumps, flights, and combat postures. The fighting comes to a sudden end when the winning Bālin is shot by an arrow from Rāma hiding behind. The unexpected arrow clandestinely shot by Rāma brings to the forefront disturbing ethical questions which are voiced by Bālin himself in his dying moments. Bālin becomes a tragic hero in his dying moment, bequeathing his inherited necklace to a repentant Sugrīva and blessing him, while his wife Tārā looks on weeping inconsolably. The act of dying is presented with great realistic details, using methods of breath-control to uncanny effect. According to Ammanur Madhava Chakyar, a well-known Kūṭiyāṭṭam actor, this is one of the most demanding and challenging scenes, and a true measure of an actor's ability, since the representation of dying on the stage is difficult to portray. The actor had to master breathing techniques "to make the death-throes realistic." He once pointed out in a personal communication that among all the scenes in Kūṭiyāṭṭam plays, the scene depicting the death of Bālin "has the greatest popularity" (Sullivan 2007: 423).

The preparation for battle and the actual fight is technically known as *paṭappurappāṭu* in Malayalam. Even though it cannot be realistically enacted on the stage due to technical difficulties, it is enacted solo by the actor when recounting the battles. A typical description of *paṭappurappāṭu*, resembling that shown by the character Śaṅkukarṇa, consists of all the preparatory items of the four-fold ancient Indian army like the individual soldiers coming in line and tightening their body, wearing coat and protective shield, taking up arms after saluting them and the movement of elephants, and horses (Narayana Pisharoti 2002: 52). There are also graphic narrations of scenes like hunting whenever they occur in the plays.

The enactment of violence on stage assumes epic proportions in Kathakalī, which in a way is a continuation of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition. In Kathakalī, more than in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, epic stories derived from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and, more prominently, from the *Mahābhārata*, form the kernel of the stories dramatized. Medieval Kerala celebrated the exploits of great mythological figures through Kathakalī. The intimate connection between Kathakalī and ancient martial arts like Kaḷaripayarṛu is revealed by the dexterity with which violent battle scenes were presented on the stage. A cursory glance at the very titles of Kathakalī plays derived from the epics will reveal their predominantly violent nature. They typically end in the word *vadha* indicating the slaying of the concerned character. Such titles include *Duryodhanavadha*, *Bālivadha*, *Kīcakavadha*, *Narakāsuravadha*, *Nivātakavacakālakeyavadha* and so on. To take up an example, the killing of Duśśāsana in the play of *Duryodhanavadha* is one of the most violent scenes in Kathakalī, much sought after by the audience. Phillip Zarrilli remarks that the scene wherein the gruesome killing of Duśśāsana by Raudra Bhīma is enacted projects Bhīma in his most terrifying form. Here the actor ritualistically and realistically disembowels Duśśāsana when he has killed him. The actor representing Bhīma hides cloth resembling entrails and blood

until, at the climactic moment, as the drummers [are] creating a din of sound, he dips his hands into the victim's stomach and literally mimes eating his victim's entrails by dipping his head down to the victim's stomach.

At this moment, the performer brings out the cloth entrails and blood. The actor then raises his head from the victim displaying for the audience his bloodied hands, the entrails streaming from his mouth. (Zarrilli 1984: 45)

Zarrilli notes that “in the staging of the battle between the forces of good and evil we discover a long performance and literary heritage in Kerala which gives graphic life to gory and bloody spectacles” (*ibid.*: 43). He refers to the gory scenes in Kathakali like the disembowelment of evil characters such as Duśśāsana and Hiraṇyakaśipu and traces their origin to folk ritual and regional literary tradition of Kerala. His account of the disembowelment scene involving Raudra-Bhīma (Bhīma the Furious) and Narasiṃha reminds one of the gory scenes of Śūrpaṅkhā in *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* in their uninhibited portrayal of violence. Zarrilli refers to the account given by Iyer of the dark demoness “all black, streaming with blood, howling in pain and rage, emerging from the darkness of the night”, and maintains that it is the fulfilment of Artraud’s vision of the theatre of cruelty (*ibid.*: 6). From all this, we can surmise that in the presentation of classical drama, Kerala theatre was oblivious of any taboo attached to the depiction of violent scenes like fights and the brutal act of killing. Rather, they were celebrated with gusto and the audience seemed to have enjoyed such scenes.

References

Primary sources

- Chakyyar, M. M. 1996. *Natyakalpadrumam*. Second Edition. Cheruthuruthi: Kerala Kalamandalam.
- Ghosh, M. 1950. *The Natyasastra of Bharata Muni* [Bibliotheca Indica]. Calcutta: The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.
- Jones, C. R. and V. Raghavan. 1984. *The Wondrous Crest-Jewel in Performance: Text and Translation of the Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi of Saktibhadra with the Production Manual from the Tradition of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Sanskrit Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paulose, K. G. (ed.). 1993. *Naṭāṅkuśa: A Critique on Dramaturgy*. Tripunithura: Ravivarma Samskṛta Granthāvali: 26.

- Ramakrishnakavi, M. (ed.). 1934. *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni with the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya*. Vol. II. Baroda: Oriental Institute.
- . (ed.). 1956. *Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatamuni with the Commentary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavaguptācārya*. Vol. I. Baroda: Oriental Institute.

Secondary sources

- Gopalakrishnan, S. 2011. *Kūṭiyāṭṭam: The Heritage Theatre of India*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books.
- Narayana Pisharoti, K. P. 2002. *Kūttampalaññalil*. Trivandrum: Kerala Bhasha Institute.
- Narayanan, M. V. 2022. *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing: The Performance Culture of Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. Abington–New York: Routledge, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003172376>.
- Rajendran, C. 1989. *The Traditional Sanskrit Theatre of Kerala*. Calicut: University of Calicut.
- Ramavarma, K. T. 1981. *Ammannur Chachu Chakyar*. Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeetham.
- Sullivan, B. M. 2007. Dying on the Stage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*: Perspectives from the Sanskrit Theatre Tradition. In: *Asian Theatre Journal* 24(2): 422–439, <https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2007.0041>.
- Warder, A. K. 1988. *Indian Kāvya Literature. Vol. V*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Zarrilli, P. B. 1984. *The Kathakalī Complex: Actor, Performance & Structure*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publication.