

Resisting and justifying changes II

Testifying and legitimizing innovation in
Indian and Ancient Greek Culture

ed. by
ELISABETTA PODDIGHE and TIZIANA PONTILLO

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MARTA KARCZ
(PhD, Cagliari University)

MODERN SANSKRIT DRAMAS – BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to explore the dramatic output of modern Sanskrit writers in order to determine which traditional rules of Sanskrit drama have been obeyed by them, which have been refused, and what kind of innovations they introduced in their work. Although Sanskrit from many ages is no longer used as an everyday language, its literature, among which there is a significant number of dramas, is still being produced. However, even though contemporary Sanskrit writers are aware of the dramatic rules set by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and his continuators, they are also under the influence of Western culture and its own dramatic tradition, as well as they are influenced by relatively new visual arts such as movies and television. What is more, some recent writers have been more willing to raise more up-to-date subjects, such as social changes, political issues, or the impact of technology on the contemporary world, rather than conventional themes. Therefore, they have introduced changes in the genres, the structure of drama, and even the lexicon, which they used. On the other hand, they still have legitimized the place of their works in the realm of Sanskrit drama, by obeying certain traditional rules. Hence, the paper intends to examine what innovations are introduced in modern Sanskrit dramas, and what classical elements still can be traced in them. In order to explore this issue, several modern Sanskrit dramas are to be analysed.

1. *Introduction*

Though Sanskrit is not a native language for almost anyone in India, literature in this language continues to be produced. Among the contemporary Sanskrit literature are numerous dramas. Modern Sanskrit playwrights are aware of the traditional way of writing Sanskrit dramas and often follow the principles laid down by Bharata in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. However, in their work they also often take inspiration from and are influenced by contemporary culture, both Indian and Western. Therefore, they often enrich this tradition by introducing innovations drawn from contemporary sources such as film and Western theatre. For this reason, it could be beneficial for the study of contemporary Sanskrit literature to investigate what innovations are introduced in contemporary dramas

and what classical elements can still be found in them. Therefore, several examples of contemporary Sanskrit plays, dating from the first half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, are analysed in this paper.

2. *Anārkalī* by Venkataraman Raghavan

Dr. Venkataraman Raghavan (1908-1979), is known mostly as an Indologist, specializing primarily in Indian Aesthetics. He also has made a significant contribution to the development of research in the field of Sanskrit drama and theatre. Dr. Raghavan wrote on various features of Sanskrit theatre such as its technical side, performance, music, and dance employed in shows. With the association Samskrita Ranga created by him in 1958, he made another contribution to this field as a practitioner and a propagator of this art in contemporary India. He formed and trained a group of enthusiasts, with whom he staged numerous Sanskrit plays, on a stage as well as on radio. In total, the organization put on stage over fifty Sanskrit plays. Another aspiration of the Samskrita Ranga was to support research, release publications, organize lectures and exposition concerning the field of Sanskrit drama, and allied theatre forms in India and South East Asia (Ramani 2008: 148-150).

Dr. Raghavan was not only a scholar but also a creative writer. His input as a modern Sanskrit dramatist must not be neglected nor forgotten. The scholar wrote several plays in Sanskrit. Among them, the most notable are *Anārkalī*, *Vimukti*, *Pratāparudravijaya*, *Prekṣaṇakarayī*, and *Punarunmeṣaḥ*. He also translated into Sanskrit two plays written by Rabindranath Tagore. The scholar penned a great number of plays in Tamil as well. They have mostly historical or social themes, and some of them are written according to the rules of Sanskrit drama (Ramani 2014: 41-43).

The play *Anārkalī* seems to be the most popular drama of Dr. Raghavan. It has been staged several times by the Samskrita Ranga. It is based on the legendary story of a courtesan from Akbar's court. According to the version of the legend established at a certain time, *Anārkalī* was a concubine of Akbar or a woman belonging to his harem. Possibly the girl was a favourite of the emperor. One of numerous variants of the story says, that her real name was Sharif un-Nissa; though, she was also known as Nadira Begum. It is said that she was a beautiful courtesan from Lahore, who engaged in a forbidden affair with prince Salīm, who was the eldest son and heir of Akbar. They allegedly met in the palace in Lahore, which was frequently visited by Mughal emperors. When the emperor noticed signs of affection exchanged by the couple, he lost his temper and commanded that she be walled up alive in the wall of

the fort. When Salīm ascended the throne, he decided to commemorate his love for her by building a monumental tomb for Anārkalī. There are also versions of the story, which have more optimistic endings. They include the courtesan's mother, Jilli Bao. According to these tales, in the past Akbar granted Jilli Bao to fulfil one of her wishes. As a result, she took this advantage to save her daughter's life. Akbar decided to secretly let her free, but Salīm had to believe that she was dead (Désoulières 2007a: 76-78).

The play *Anārkalī* of Raghavan starts with a benediction – *nāndī*, that is devoted to Pārvaṭī. After it ends *prastāvanā*¹ begins. During this part of the play, the *sūtradhāra* puts emphasis on the significance of this drama, because it is the first Sanskrit play dedicated exclusively to Islamic culture in India. This synthesis of cultures seems to be the author's primary concern. This is probably why he decided that Akbar should be the main character of his drama. The emperor is renowned for his awareness and reverence for different cultures and efforts for creating a country united in its diversity. Thus, despite the premise given by the title of the play, he has the truly most important role in the play.

The first act of *Anārkalī* starts with a discussion between Akbar and the ministers of his court. The emperor is very disturbed by the hatred which is spread by radical Muslims against Hindus. He comes to the conclusion that the only way to prevent such religious conflicts is the education of people. He wants to find a way that would allow all his people of different religions to co-exist in peace. The next act is focused mainly on artistic and literary achievements made during Akbar's reign. The part of the second act depicts the obvious disappointment of the Muslim clergy with the emperor, because they accuse him of favouring the Hindu citizens. Then Akbar talks about translations from Sanskrit to Persian made at his court, paintings and music. The act ends with the arrival of Puṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala – a historical character, who was a 16th century musicologist from Karnataka. The scholar meets the emperor and explains to him the details of the diversity among a number of Indian musical traditions. Because Akbar wishes to have in his court a dancer educated in South Indian dance tradition, he asks Puṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala to train one of the maids from his court in terms of music and dance. They decide that young and beautiful maid Nadira would be perfect for this

¹ *prastāvanā* is a prologue performed at the beginning of the play by a stage manager (*sūtradhāra*) and usually a member of cast. They provide the audience with basic information about the play, its type and its author. The *prastāvanā* is therefore a connection between the reality and the show. It also sets the tune for the actual performance.

task. She soon gets the nickname Anārkalī, which means a pomegranate blossom, and from this moment the girl is known only by this name.

The following acts of the play describe how the feeling between Anārkalī and prince Salīm is born. They include rather conventional scenes of lovers meeting secretly surrounded by nature of beautiful gardens. In the fifth act, Rahim Khan, who pretends to be Salīm's friend, learns of their affection and begins plotting against them. He makes an ally with a noble lady Ismad Begum, who wants her daughter to marry the prince. Rahim Khan makes attempts to provoke his friend to revolt against his father and gain the throne and the girl he loves. They are both aware that the Emperor would under no circumstances allow this relationship to continue. Nonetheless, there is a political purpose behind Rahim Khan's actions. He opposes the Akbar's liberal policy towards Hindus. He also hopes to be able to easily manipulate Salīm when the prince comes to the throne, as the new emperor. However, the prince turns down his plans and heads to see a recital in which Anārkalī is to reveal the effects of the training provided by Puṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala. The eighth act presents the performance and includes not only elaborated descriptions of the show, dancers and musicians, but also a great number of information about traditional music styles. Rahim Khan takes the opportunity during the play to reveal to the emperor the secret about the affair between the prince and Anārkalī. Akbar quickly finds confirmation of his words, noting the affectionate glances exchanged between the lovers. The enraged ruler decides to imprison the girl and sentence her to death. In the final act, Puṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala brings news to despairing prince. The scholar tells him, that the Hindu consort of Salīm asked the emperor to free Anārkalī. She wanted to give the girl for her husband as a birthday gift from her. Moved by her request, Akbar agreed. He went to the prison by himself. There he stopped the girl, who was about to commit suicide and let her free. At the end of the play Salīm and Anārkalī are finally united, as the chief consort of the prince and the Emperor accepted their love.

Although Raghavan based his play on the themes of a popular legend, he significantly altered numerous elements in its plot. The major change introduced in the story can be seen in the ending – the author changed it completely. He decided not to follow the tragedy of the legend, but to end the play in a happy way. This alteration is addressed in the *prastāvanā* – the *sūtradhāra* ('stage manager') explains that the reason behind it is the absence of tragedy in Sanskrit drama. Nevertheless, there may also have been another motive for this change. Alain Désoulières (2007b: 126), while depicting the most famous version of the legend, noticed that:

“The tragic end of the slave Anārkalī walled alive by order of the “cruel” Mughal Emperor fitted well the Victorian and colonial ideology that needed to justify colonial exploitation by the promise of a civilized and peaceful rule, especially after the 1857–58 severe and cruel repression. However, the tale contradicted the well-known notion of Emperor Akbar’s clemency and sense of justice”.

Therefore, there is no wonder why Dr. Raghavan did not want to promote this version of the story, especially since it is inconsistent with the image of Akbar from this play.

As it is well known, Raghavan was not the only artist who chose to end his interpretation of the legend in a more joyful way. There are numerous films based on the take of Anārkalī. Most of them have a tragic ending, however, the most famous of them, *Mughal-e-Azam* from the year 1960, also includes an altered ending. Its director, K. Asif, decided to portray Akbar as a rigorous, but righteous and merciful ruler. In the past he promised the mother of Anārkalī to fulfil one wish of her. The woman asked the Emperor to save the life of her daughter. Therefore Akbar let Anārkalī and her mother escape through an underground tunnel. Nevertheless, the dancer had to promise to never reveal her true identity and never again try to meet with Salīm.

The changes in the plot of the Anārkalī were to some extent inspired by the *Mālavikāgnimitram* of Kālidāsa. In both plays, the dance of the heroine on the king’s court has a very important role. Moreover, their endings are similar – the chief consort of the hero helps him to marry the heroine. One more noteworthy change introduced by Dr. V. Raghavan in the plot of his play is the background of the heroine. The legend tells that Anārkalī was a courtesan. However in the version of Raghavan she is a palace maid educated in the art of dance. It is another resemblance between the *Anārkalī* and the *Mālavikāgnimitram*. As it is well known, in the play of Kālidāsa, the heroine, although a princess, is sent to the court of Agnimitra to serve to his chief consort. She as well is a talented dancer and she also gives a performance at the royal court (Warder 1990: 126-129). In both plays the dance of the heroine admired by the hero has an important role. Those parallels cannot be accidental, especially since the author of *Anārkalī* without a doubt knew the play of Kālidāsa. Hence, it is very probable that the *Mālavikāgnimitram* was one of the most important inspirations for Dr. Raghavan.

The play *Anārkalī* belongs to a classic genre of Sanskrit drama, which is *prakaraṇa*. The author stated it in the preface to the play; therefore, there is no doubt about it. What is more, the *Anārkalī* has a very classical Sanskrit play structure. It begins with *nāndī* – which is followed by

prastāvanā. Then there are ten acts, in which there are the five stages of development of the plot – *avasthā*², five elements – *arthaprakṛti*³, and five junctures – *sandhi*⁴.

In the play together with dialogues, there are stanzas. Nevertheless, one may notice, that the main love story is introduced rather late. The couple only meets for the first time in the fourth act. Thus this is the moment of beginning (*ārambha*) – the first *arthaprakṛti*. Therefore, the main thread of the plot begins relatively late. The reason for this was to devote much of the plot to Akbar, his religious politics and the development of art in Mughal India.

The author followed the rules of *Nāṭyaśāstra* about the incidents which should not be directly presented on stage⁵. For example, suicidal attempt of Anārkalī and her almost miraculous saving are not to be presented on the stage. The viewers should find out about these events from the speech of Puṇḍarika Viṭṭhala, who tells prince Salīm about them.

Anārkalī seems to be a textbook example of *prakaraṇa*, however, there is an important change introduced by Raghavan into the structure of the play. All the characters speak Sanskrit regardless of their gender and position. According to the theory of Sanskrit drama, there are certain characters, who should speak in Prakrit⁶. Nevertheless, no language other than Sanskrit appears in the play.

A reader or viewer of the *Anārkalī* may have a feeling that the love story of beautiful courtesan and prince Salīm is merely a pretext for presenting certain ideas. The play gives a lot of space to Akbar and his philosophical thoughts on different religions and art. The spirit of cultural integration and religious tolerance is evidently exposed through

² The first of *avasthās* is *ārambha* – beginning (i.e. when Salīm meets Anārkalī), it leads to the stage called *prayatna* – effort (Salīm undertakes effort to meet with the girl), ext comes *prāptiyāśā* – Salīm has hope of obtaining the goal after having overcome obstacles, *niyatāpti* – Salīm is certain that he would succeed after overcoming some obstacle and *phalāgama* – the moment of reunion of Salīm and Anārkalī. However, the main love story starts relatively late. The lovers do not know each other before the fourth act when they accidentally meet in a garden.

³ Among *arthaprakṛtis*, the first is *bīja* – a seed, whence springs the action, then is *bindu* – a drop – the course of drama, *patākā* – an episode, *prakarī* – an episodic incident, and finally *kārya* – a denouement.

⁴ *sandhis*: opening – *mukha*, progression – *pratimukha*, development – *garbha*, pause – *vimarśa* and conclusion – *nirvahana*. They are parallel to the *avasthās*.

⁵ Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra* XX.19: 'Feats of anger, favour, grief, pronouncing a curse, running away, marriage, commencement of some miracle and its actual appearance, should not be made directly visible in an Act.' (tr. Ghosh, 1951: 358).

⁶ Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra* XVIII.35: 'Similarly Prakrit should be assigned to children, persons possessed of spirits of lower order, women in feminine character, persons of low birth, lunatics and phallus-worshippers.' (tr. Ghosh, 1951: 359).

the whole play. It depicts Akbar and his ministers, who are focused predominantly on the integration and peace between members of different religions in India. Nevertheless, in the disputes between the Emperor and Puṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala on northern and southern styles of music, the emphasis is put on unity of North and South Indian culture. It is also clear, that although Anārkalī is the main heroine and the title character of the drama, she does not appear in the play until the third act. Previously, she is only briefly mentioned in the end of the second act. Thus, it can be said that the Emperor is the real protagonist of the play, and the love story is just an excuse to present the vision of a united country with many cultures coexisting in peace.

The *Anārkalī* is without any doubt a historical play, although, Dr. Raghavan also included a message that is relevant in today's India. In this drama the author presented a synthesis of two cultures on many levels. The idea of peace between different cultures can be seen repeatedly in the plot when Akbar talks about the harmonious coexistence of people of different faiths and especially in the passage where he is even accused of favouring Hindus over Muslims. It seems that Akbar's court is the perfect setting to present such an idea. The Mughal court was a place where many cultures collided. It attracted Muslim, Brahmin, and Jain intellectuals, as well as numerous artists from various parts of the world. During the reign of Akbar in India a complex, multilingual culture emerged and flourished at the Mughal court (Truschke 2016: 27-30). Akbar's real motives for his tolerance-based policy were probably driven by political and practical reasons. However, he has been recorded in popular consciousness as a ruler who respected his subjects regardless of their religion and background.

Dr. G. B. Palsule wrote a review of *Anārkalī* which was published in the *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*. He praised the theme of integration of cultures and the work on promotion of Sanskrit drama done by Dr. Raghavan and Samskrita Ranga. He appreciated as well the language and style, which he said was very classical. Nevertheless, he managed to find some examples of influence of modern languages in the text. He also noted that the *prastāvanā* was too long and the acts (after the third act) were too short.

Nevertheless, according to him, the main flaw of Raghavan's play is that it has two almost competing themes: a love story and cultural integration in Akbar's court. Dr. G. B. Palsule also pointed out that there are too many details provided in the dialogues which are irrelevant to the plot and redundant to the play as a whole. Detailed descriptions of places and meticulous analyses of various musical traditions are of course historically accurate and well done, but they distracted from the

main theme and diminished the dramatic effect of the play as a whole. In his review, Dr. Palsule also reflects on the consequences of changing the ending of the legend from the tragic death of the heroine to the happy reconciliation of the lovers. According to him, “the author has robbed the play of powerfulness, which would otherwise has been its”. (Palsule 1973: 301). However, it must be stressed that the final judgement of Dr. Palsule about the *Anārkaḷī* is very positive.

3. Sanskrit Radio plays written by Dr. Raghavan

Dr. Raghavan wrote also some Sanskrit plays to perform them in All-India Radio, Madras, such as *Prekṣaṇakatrayī* – tree plays about ancient Sanskrit poetesses, *Rāsalīlā*, *Lakṣmīsvayaṃvara*, *Kāmaśuddhi*.

Dr. V. Raghavan was the producer of Sanskrit Magazine on All-India Radio, and he wrote or adapted and produced several Sanskrit plays specifically for the programme. The scholar believed that Sanskrit drama was an art form perfectly suited for radio productions. Sanskrit playwrights had to pay much attention to the spoken word and less to the action. Since the aim of a Sanskrit play is to evoke *rasa* in the audience, usually an event was not to be shown on stage, but rather depicted by the play’s protagonist while showing his emotional reaction to it. Moreover, according to Bharata’s rule, any character entering the stage should be previously indicated and described by a character who is already on the stage. Sanskrit drama does not follow the principle of unity of place as in Greek theatre, the scenes can take place against any background and do not require any particular set design. Even if the scenes take place in the air, certain conventional movements and cues in the texts indicate this on stage. Therefore, they can be easily presented even on the radio (Raghavan 1993: 108-110).

The play *Rāsalīlā* consists of four scenes called *prekṣaṇakas*⁷. The plot of this play is woven around the theme of Kṛṣṇa and *gopīs* (milkmaids). This short drama does not have any kind of prologue. It begins and ends with a speech of *grānthika* ‘a narrator’. Narrator is not a typical character of Sanskrit plays, therefore it is a very peculiar feature of this drama. *grānthika* provides the description of setting of the scene at the opening of the play, and he summarizes the plot the end. In this way the author managed to avoid an extensive exposition and could quickly introduce the background of the story. Another peculiarity of

⁷ *prekṣaṇaka* stands for a spectacle, show. This term sometimes occurs in the treatises on dramaturgy (such as *Abhinavabhāratī*, *Śṅgāraprakāśa*, and *Nāṭyadarpaṇa*) among *uparūpakas* – minor types of drama.

the *Rāsalīlā* is the fact, that it contains not only stanzas composed by the author, but also some verses taken from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, selected in such a way as to best fit the storyline (Satyavrat 2008: 72-73).

The plot of the *Lakṣmīsvayaṃvara* is based on the myth of the churning of the ocean of milk (*samudramanthana*), or more precisely, on its version from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The play begins with a *nāndī*. After it is recited, on the stage appears *paurāṇika* that is a Brahmin well read in the Purāṇas, who introduces the storyline. His role is very similar to the role of *grānthika* in *Rāsalīlā*. He also describes the previous events, which are not part of the play's storyline, but are important to it (Satyavrat 2008: 73-74).

The *Prekṣaṇakatrayī* is a set of three short plays describing three partially forgotten Sanskrit poetesses from the past: Vijayāṅkā, Vikaṭānitambā and Avantisundarī. They have the form typical for Sanskrit plays. They combine dialogues in prose with versified stanzas. However, they are breaking rules set in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in numerous ways. They lack *prastāvanā*, *nāndī* and a final benediction. In these dramas there is no *sūtradhāra*, nor narrator of any kind. In those plays, Raghavan employed stanzas from various anthologies, which were ascribed to the poetesses. One of the peculiar features of the *Vijayāṅkā*, *Vikaṭānitambā* and *Avantisundarī* is the way most stanzas are introduced. Typically, verses in Sanskrit dramas are introduced spontaneously to a dialogue or monologue by a character, as if composing them on the spot. Majority of the verses in the three plays are presented as having been composed earlier by the poetesses and are recited or read by them or their friends. All three dramas consist of a single scene depicting a moment in the life of the Sanskrit poets, imagined by the author. The scenes revolve around the act of creating poetry. The characters discuss them and also touch upon many topics related to Sanskrit literary theory.

The plays discussed above have a lot of common features. They are short, they have only one act, which is also relatively brief. They do not have a *prastāvanā*, and all of their characters speak only Sanskrit. Their structure as well combines dialogues and stanzas, however, one may notice that statements of the characters are quite brief. Also, the plots of those plays are very simple. They all concentrate on a single event which is presented in a single scene. In the plays, *Rāsalīlā* and *Lakṣmīsvayaṃvara* appear peculiar figures: *grānthika* in the first drama, and *paurāṇika* in the second. Their role is very similar. They recite the first and the last stanza of the play, and they have the role of narrator. They describe the scene at the beginning of the play, and they sum it up at the end. In this way, the author avoided a long exposition and

quickly introduces the background of the story. They also have the role of the narrator – they describe characters taking part in the event, where they are, what they are doing, and what is happening during the scene. Therefore the play can be easily performed on the radio because the audience does not have to see the stage to understand what is happening. Another distinctive feature of these plays is that they are written only in Sanskrit, all characters use it and there is no line in other languages.

It is noticeable that the plays written by Dr. V. Raghavan are solidly grounded in the tradition of Sanskrit drama. His plays observe the most important principles and have a conventional structure. The most obvious proof is *Anārkalī*, which has an almost textbook-like construction. Nevertheless, he has incorporated some innovations into his plays. The most prominent novelty is the use of a single language, Sanskrit. Contrary to the rules laid down by Bharata, it is the medium of speech for all types of characters who appear in his plays.

As a dramatist, Dr. V. Raghavan has tended to draw inspiration from his academic interests. The themes of his plays, such as music, dance, Sanskrit poetics and literature, overlap with their author's fields of research. There is no doubt that academic background has influenced Dr. V. Raghavan also as a writer. The scholar combined his poetic creativity with scholarly knowledge and attitude.

Dr. V. Raghavan evidently favoured historical or literary themes in his dramas. Though in most of his plays he did not invent the plots all by himself but based them on historical events, literature and legends, his dramas are original and innovative. In his plays, he tried to promote knowledge on various subjects such as Sanskrit poetics, musicology, dance, history and philosophy. The plays are intended for educated readers or audiences who can appreciate them and have the knowledge to recognise their allegorical meanings.

4. *Bālāvidhavā* by Leela Rao Dayalu

The *Bālāvidhavā* "The Girl-Widow" is a drama in three acts written by Leela Rao Dayalu. It was published in the year 1993 within a publication *Leela Nataka Chakram* with twenty one other Sanskrit plays written by the same authoress. This play is devoted to an important social problem – the situation of a widow in Indian society. The main heroine of the play is Pārvatī, a girl who was married and widowed as a child. She even never saw the face of her husband. Pārvatī lives with her family who force her to work whole days without any rest (Ranganath 1995: 51-56).

The play starts with the dialogue between Anūp, a thirty year old farmer and his friend. Anūp confesses that he has fallen in love with

Pārvaṭī and decides to marry her despite her status. He noticed, that she is very beautiful, although her hair has been shaved. A friend advises him against trying to get involved with, even a young widow, explaining that their relationship will not be accepted. Nevertheless, Anūp manages to meet with her and gets to know her better. The girl tells him her story and confides that she was not even fully aware of her marriage or its end. She only remembers that one day her mother announced to her that she had become a widow. She is forced to work all days in the household of her relatives, however, she is forbidden to sleep in their house. Anūp promises Pārvaṭī to marry her, but he wants them to go to Pune. In their village, they would not be allowed to get married and he hopes that in the big city no one would recognize and stop them.

The second scene depicts them struggling to find a priest, who would marry them, but they all refuse. Therefore, Anūp tries to hide from priests the fact that Pārvaṭī is a widow and one of them finally agrees. But before the ceremony he notices the shaved head of the girl and realizes, that she is a widow. Therefore, he also refuses to officiate their wedding, even when the groom offers him more money. Then Anūp wants them to marry in court, but Pārvaṭī refuses, as she wants a religious ceremony. The girl goes back to the home of her relatives. The third and last scene shows, how her family mistreats her after the attempt to get married. She is not accepted by them anymore and they throw her out of their house. The play ends with Pārvaṭī leaving her house and running into darkness, and Anūp rushing after her.

The play does not belong to any classical genre of Sanskrit drama. It consists of dialogues and stanzas, although the prose prevails. The play is realistic, dialogues are simple and dynamic, they suit the depicted situation and emphasize the tragic position of Pārvaṭī. All the characters, though from low social strata, speak Sanskrit. Another interesting feature of the play is its ending. The play without any doubt is a tragedy. The characters cannot fulfil their goal. Also, the play has an open ending, which is a huge innovation to the tradition of Sanskrit drama. While taking a closer look at the plot, one may see that the five stages of development – *avasthās*, are not adequate to describe it. Two first stages can be noticed: *ārambha* – when the hero starts to desire to achieve something when Anūp decides to marry Pārvaṭī, and *prayatna* – when the couple undertakes an effort to get married. However, their hope of obtaining the goal is destroyed, and they cannot fulfil it. This dramatic ending contrasts with the end of *Anārkalī*, which was changed by Raghavan from the original tragic final into a happy end for the sake of being consistent with the rules of Sanskrit drama. Nevertheless, the tragic final stresses the dramatic situation of the young widow and therefore the play has a more powerful impact on its audience.

The *Bālāvidhavā* raises a crucial social issue, especially important for women. The play has a feminist overtone. This shows that Sanskrit poetry can tackle and comment on current social problems.

5. Plays from Samarpaṇam

The last drama examined in this paper comes from the publication titled *Samarpaṇam*. It has been published for the last 20 years to commemorate Dr. Gajanan Balkrishna Palsule a scholar dealing with Sanskrit and Prakrit grammars, Prakrit literature, and Indo-European linguistics, who worked at the University of Pune. Nevertheless, he was interested in Sanskrit not only as a scholar – but he was also a Sanskrit poet. Dr. Palsule wrote numerous dramas in Sanskrit, two *mahākāvya*s, and translated many poems into this language.

Samarpaṇam is published entirely in Sanskrit – even editorial notes are given only in this language. Therefore the publications contain a great number of Sanskrit neologisms. Each volume incorporates works in different genres, mostly written by authors from Maharashtra. The vast majority of them are women. Each volume has a specific topic – for example, *hāsya rasa* was chosen as a theme for the 14th volume released in November 2019. *Samarpaṇam* contains literary works of various genres. Dramas, poems, short stories and even contemporary commentaries on much older works can be found there, although it seems that the prose prevails among other genres. Most of them reveal influences of language and culture of the writers.

One of the works included in the 14th volume of *Samarpaṇam* is a short play titled *Kaliyuge vātsapa tathā ca mahilāḥ*, (*Women and What-App during Kaliyuga*) written by Asha Kulkarni.

The genre of this play seems to be a hybrid between classical Sanskrit drama and some kind of sketch comedy, possibly inspired by some TV show. The element taken from the tradition of Sanskrit drama is the person of *sūtradhāra*. This figure in *Kaliyuge vātsapa tathā ca mahilāḥ* has a different function. Unlike the traditional Sanskrit drama, this play lacks the opening benediction – *nāndī*. It does not have also *prastāvanā* – a prologue. This drama also lacks stage directions and stanzas, *nāndī* and *bharatavākyam*. Although in *Kaliyuge vātsapa tathā ca mahilāḥ* there is no *prastāvanā*, at the very beginning of the play *sūtradhāra* gives a speech and introduces its topic. Then he introduces four short and separate scenes. Each of them resembles a sketch comedy, as it contains only a few lines. They depict situations from ordinary Indian households, but what is not typical here is the behaviour of women addicted to their mobile phones. These scenes are not connected by the plot or in any other way. They simply share the same theme – women

concentrated on virtual reality. For example, one scene presents a video conversation between a young woman living in the United States and her parents in India. She announces, that she is going to get married. However, because her fiancé lives far away, they are going to get married via the Internet, which shocks and upsets her more traditional parents. Another scene depicts a mother-in-law who returns to her home and is surprised to see her daughter-in-law cleaning the house. The young woman explains, that she could not find the charger to her mobile phone, and while searching for it, she organised the house. In the meantime, however, she left the dish she was about to prepare on the cooker and it completely burned.

These scenes are very short – they consist of a few lines of dialogue. The sentences are also very brief and simple. All of those scenes concern only a modern, everyday situation. Therefore, those lines could be very useful if someone wanted to communicate in Sanskrit on daily basics.

In the end, *sūtradhāra* once again appears on the stage and gives a longer speech summarizing the whole play and drawing bitter conclusions. He states, that paying attention to social media, although seems like it brings a lot of profit, is useless.

As the play is about modern technology and its impact on people's lives, it includes a lot of neologisms. Among them there are: *āntarajālatantra* – the Internet, *calabhāṣa* – cell phone, *calabhāṣasya aṅkiyaṃ drśyam* – video call, *svayaṃcitra* – selfie, *śaktipūraka* – charger.

It can be seen, that this text does not have a great literary value. It is not addressed to a sophisticated reader. On the other hand, this drama can be staged very easily. It is short and simple, the lines are brief and the dialogues are quite dynamic. There are no stanzas, which can be difficult to recite and demand a deeper knowledge of the meters. What is more, the lines from the play can be used in everyday life. It is very useful if the goal of the writer is to revive Sanskrit as a spoken language. Such play can be a valuable asset for a person, who wants to be able to speak in Sanskrit.

The realm of modern Sanskrit drama is vast and diverse. The subjects undertaken by contemporary Sanskrit dramatists are various. Dr. Raghavan as a playwright concentrated on historical, religious, and philosophical issues. He knew and obeyed the rules of Sanskrit drama, however, he also introduced some innovations, especially while writing plays for radio performances. Two other plays examined in the presentation are completely different. They are set in contemporary India and concentrate on modern issues.

Nevertheless, it seems like there can be noticed some features common to all those plays. They mostly deal with issues important for their

writer and include a message for its reader or the audience. Even in the case of *Anārkalī*, which is set in the time of Akbar, it can be easily seen that it contains a message of peaceful coexistence between members of different cultures and religions, which is still very actual in today India. There is a tendency among modern Sanskrit writers to write about burning issues. Many modern plays are about current social and even political problems. There are also modern plays based on more traditional sources, such as puranic and epic stories. However, many authors try to show them in new context, or from a different perspective, often to comment on some current problems. Thus, nowadays Sanskrit drama became socially engaged.

It also can be seen that authors of these plays were aware of the traditional rules of Sanskrit drama, however, they did not always decide to apply them. The rule which was not applied by all of the playwrights is the use of Prakrits in a play by certain characters. In this way those plays became more egalitarian, no characters are shown as better than others, especially because of their origin. However, there are also dramatists, who try to preserve this rule of Bharata in their plays. Therefore they often put vernacular languages in the place of Prakrits. As an example can be mentioned two plays written by Mathura Prasad Dikshit. In the play *Bhūbhāroddharanam* he used Hindi instead of Prakrit, and in *Bhāratavijyanātakam* he used the language Newari from Nepal (Naikar 2002: 238).

A break with the ancient tradition can be also noticed in the structure of modern plays. Numerous Sanskrit dramas follow the Western pattern and their acts are divided into scenes. Modern Sanskrit playwrights experiment with structure of dramas combining different theatrical traditions. They take inspirations from ancient Sanskrit plays, as well as from various modern sources. Many of those dramas do not have *nāndī*, *prastāvanā*, and *bharatavākya*. Another visible tendency is creating very short plays, usually with a single act. Therefore the elaborate structure characteristic for old plays is being simplified. This also makes them easier to stage and even performed on the radio. This aspect may also be important for the authors of Sanskrit plays, because there are organizations and clubs which stage Sanskrit dramas, as well modern as ancient.

Sanskrit drama is not only still being created in the 21st century, but this art is even being further evolved. For centuries it resisted innovation and developed only within the rigid framework prescribed by Bharata. Breaking them has allowed modern Sanskrit playwrights to be more creative. Thus, their works have become more nuanced and less repetitive. They also introduce numerous changes to their works to

make them more attractive and accessible to audiences. It is motivated by a desire to popularize this art and take it out of the usual patterns. Therefore, one might even say that Sanskrit drama is currently experiencing a kind of renaissance.

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