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Aesthetic Pleasure in the Worship of the Jina: Understanding Performance in Jain Devotional Culture

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Abstract: Performance has long been recognized to be a meaningful component in the worship of the Jina. This paper will focus on a particular aspect of devotional performance and historicize the phenomenon of ritual re-enactment of the Jina's biography, a practice that remains significant to temple worship today. This paper will argue that the performance of the enlightened soul's biography was familiar to Jains already in the early centuries of the common era and was not confined to the five auspicious events (*kalyāṇakas*). In a Śvetāmbara canonical text called the *Rāyapaseṇīyasutta*, this re-enactment is part of a greater, highly pleasurable spectacle that evokes a variety of aesthetic emotions, including erotic emotion, in the audience of monks. Through this discussion I will question the dichotomies between aesthetic pleasure and ritual efficacy and between drama and meritorious conduct and show that aesthetic pleasure, which lies at the heart of Jina worship, defines its meritorious value in the eyes of the devotees. The more splendid and aesthetically pleasing one's expression of devotion, the more efficacious it is believed to be. I propose that the significance of the aesthetic element in devotional performance for laypeople stems from their temporary transformation into gods and goddesses. Celestial beings, as the paradigmatic enjoyers (*bhoktr*) of sensual pleasures, spend their life-spans relishing joy and rapture. As such, the pleasurable experiences of laypeople are essential for the veracity of their ritual transformation.

Keywords: performance; aesthetic pleasure; Jain theater; ritual; devotional culture; Jina worship

1. Introduction

In their participation in Jain religious culture, laypeople are positioned between celestial beings and mendicants: they emulate gods in their devotion to the Jinas and emulate renunciants in their practices of physical and mental penance. Temple rituals that revolve around the image of the Jina are modelled after what is believed was the original worship performed by gods during the life of the Jina. These rituals represent a re-enactment of the old custom and have a performative element at their core. In emulating ascetics, Jain laity take vows, perform fasts of various length and type, and undertake other sorts of physical and mental austerities. Laypeople's efforts, however, remain inevitably inferior to those of the gods in their expression of devotion for the Jina and to those of ascetics in their rigor of penance. Gods and mendicants are situated on the far ends of the spectrum: the former are born to enjoy pleasures and the latter are compelled to renounce every possible pleasurable experience there is. We know from Jain narratives that in order to attain a celestial birth, one normally needs to renounce the world and its inescapable violence, at least in the last moments of life. By giving up all worldly joys, one, therefore, gets a chance to acquire greater, unlimited, and uninterrupted experiences of sensual pleasure, and ultimately the greatest joy of all, liberation. In light of the inherent contradiction between these two types of existence—as a god and as a renunciant—laypeople come to personify a union of the opposites, at one time becoming the gods and at other times embodying mendicant aspirations.

This tension lies at the heart of Jain culture and often becomes a source of inspiration and ingenuity. One example of the conflation of these seemingly contradictory vectors is what Cort (2002b) called the “devotion of asceticism”, where Jains reframe bhakti, commonly understood as devotional theism, as a non-theistic mode of devotion, aligned with the Jain ideals of austerity and abstinence. The entire fabric of Jainism is woven out of these two extremes of asceticism and opulence, symbolized, respectively, by mendicants, the objects of veneration, and deities, the paradigmatic devotees of the Jina.

This paper focuses on an aspect of lay devotional culture that also appears paradoxical, but for different reasons. This is performance. Performance (*nṛtta*, *nāṭya*) cannot be effectively separated from the other two aspects of what is collectively called *saṅgīta*: song (*gīta*) and instrumental music (*vādyā*). While this paper is particularly concerned with the visual forms of dance and drama as part of the worship of the Jina, it is important to keep in mind that they are always understood to be accompanied by music.¹ The paradoxical nature of performance manifests in at least two ways. First, the Jina is not there to enjoy the performance, as after liberation Jinās are largely believed to reside at the very top of the universe in the unreachable realm of the Siddha Loka. Second, even if he were there, the Jina would not be able to enjoy it, as he has surpassed the emotional receptivity required for the appreciation of pleasure and aesthetic beauty. The relationship between the Jina and his image that represents him in the temple is complex. Granoff (2001) shows through numerous examples that praying to the Jina and the Jain dharma has always been believed to be efficacious for this-worldly and otherworldly benefits. As Granoff (2013) also rightly observes, the miraculous images in Jain stories imply that images are the Jina himself and that the Jina could be receptive to prayer, although this understanding of images was sometimes contested within the tradition.² The notion that the image can be seen as identical to the living Jina himself does not, however, explain why premodern and modern devotional rituals have often included aesthetically pleasing performative elements as meaningful components of the worship.

However fundamental this incongruence is for Jainism, both Jain texts and intellectuals, as well as Western scholars, have commented upon, wrestled with, and attempted to reconcile the seeming contradiction between the Jain ideal of self-restraint and the Jain appreciation of arts and aesthetic beauty. Human beings who enjoy sensual pleasures are often criticized in Śvetāmbara canonical texts. For instance, the *Sūyagadaṅga* delineates right and wrong activities of both mendicants and laypeople.³ Among those people who are wrongdoers, the text describes a man of importance, a king, who wears ornaments and sits on the throne for the whole night in the company of women and followers, enjoying pleasures (*bhogābhoga*), such as “uninterrupted storytelling, dance-drama, singing, and music, such as the beating of rhythm and playing the lute *vīṇā*, wind instruments *tūrya*, the cymbals, and the kettledrum *paṭaḥa*.”⁴ Upon seeing a person like that, wicked people (*anāriya*) say: “This man is a god”,⁵ but wise people (*āriya*) proclaim: “This man commits cruel acts.”⁶ People who engage in such pleasures do not follow the Jain dharma (*adhammapakkha*).⁷ Another early canonical text, the *Piṇḍanijjuti*, implies,

¹ For a recent study of dancing and playing musical instruments during mendicants’ (and householders’) funeral rites as meritorious (*puṇya*) “symbolic performances”, see (Flügel 2017). For a study of devotional songs, sung by Jain laywomen in contemporary India, see (Kelting 2001). Having centered her fieldwork in the Śvetāmbara community in Pune, Maharashtra, Kelting demonstrated that women participated in the composition and singing of *stavans* (“devotional songs”) as a way of self-identification. The genre of *stavan*, Kelting propounds, is not static but ever-changing: laywomen compose new *stavans* for special occasions and modify and sing the old ones. Group singing often becomes a form of performance, in which the women appear dressed in the same saris and even get paid several rupees each for their singing.

² See Granoff (2013, p. 1, n. 2) for more references to the presence of the Jina in an image.

³ *Sūyagadaṅga* 656, p. 338ff. Herman Jacobi identified the most archaic expressions in the Prakrit language that may belong to the third century BCE in several sources, including the *Āyāraṅga*, *Sūyagadaṅga*, and *Uttarajjhayāna*; see (Schubring [1962] 2000, p. 81).

⁴ This is an edited translation of (Jacobi 1884, pp. 371–2). *Sūyagadaṅga* 664, p. 351.

⁵ *Sūyagadaṅga* 664, p. 359: *taṃ eva pāsittā anāriyā vayaṃti deve khalu ayaṃ purise* |.

⁶ *Sūyagadaṅga* 664, p. 351: *āriyā vayaṃti abhikkamṭakūrakamme khalu ayaṃ purise* |.

⁷ For more examples, see, for instance, the *Uvāsagadasāo*. *Uvāsagadasāo* 1.48 relates that when the layman Āṇanda resolved to take the twelve lay vows, a monk enjoined him, among other things, to avoid excessive desire and sensual pleasures (*kāma* *bhogā* *tivvābhilāse*); the commentary glosses *kāma* as pleasure from hearing (*śabda*) and seeing beauty (*rūpa*) and *bhoga* as the sensual enjoyment of smell, taste, and touch (*gandharasasparśās teṣu tivvābhilāso*).

if not directly states, the variance between the dharmic type of drama, which evokes renunciation in the audience, and non-dharmic, defiling theater.⁸

It is well known that around the fifteenth century Jains began to produce costly illuminated manuscripts of a wide range of texts. Guy (1994, p. 97) has noted an inconsistency between these lavish artistic productions and the stance of the texts themselves, which advocate turning away from sensual pleasures. In his study of Śvetāmbara Jains in Patan, Gujarat, Cort (1989) addresses the discrepancy between wealth and abstinence from worldly temptations and shows that worldly wellbeing and the path of liberation, or *mokṣa*, are two divergent choices only on the ideological plane; in practice, these two ways of living are interwoven with, and interdependent of, one another.⁹ Worldly achievements like good health and wealth enable one to contribute to the spread and glory of Jainism through the religious practices of *pūjā* and *dāna* (religious gifting), while the performance of these very practices, as well as fasting and other austerities, both improve one's station in this world through the accumulation of *puṇya* and help one advance on the path of liberation, or *mokṣa-mārga*. (p. 469). Moreover, Cort (1994) has discussed the ways, in which ritual and art remain intertwined with one another in devotional Jainism.

Jain ritual performance is often tied to the five auspicious events in the life of the Jina: conception, birth, renunciation, omniscience, and liberation—which laypeople reenact to bring about the presence of the Jina. Gough (2017, p. 278) has recently discussed the performative character of the contemporary worship of the Jina, during which laypeople temporarily transform into divine kings and queens in order to emulate the god Indra and his consort Indrāṇī, who are imagined as the original and paradigmatic devotees of the Jina. Laypeople put on orange clothes and wear crowns on their heads to indicate their transformation into divine beings. Gough (2017, p. 278) argues that Digambara Jains from at least the twelfth century and Śvetāmbara Jains from the seventeenth century structured the ritual of image “consecration around the reenactment of the five auspicious events in the Jina's life (*pañcakalyāṇaka*).” She shows that in these ritual reenactments, the image represents the Jina, while devotees and professional actors assume the remaining roles (p. 284).¹⁰

This paper will historicize the phenomenon of ritual re-enactment of the Jina's biography and argue that the performance of the enlightened soul's biography was familiar to Jains already in the early centuries of the common era and was not confined to the five auspicious events (*kalyāṇakas*). In a Śvetāmbara canonical text called the *Rāyapaseṇīyasutta*,¹¹ this re-enactment is part of a greater, highly pleasurable spectacle that evokes a variety of aesthetic emotions, including erotic emotion, in the audience of monks, notwithstanding the prohibition for Jain mendicants against experiencing such disquieting feelings.¹² Through this discussion I will question the dichotomies between aesthetic pleasure and ritual efficacy and between drama and meritorious conduct and show that aesthetic pleasure, which lies at the heart of Jina worship, defines its meritorious value in the eyes of the devotees.

⁸ *Piṇḍanijjuttī* 474–80, pp. 71–72. As an illustration concerning the prohibition against obtaining alms by cheating, the *Piṇḍanijjuttī* relates a tale in which the monk Asāḍabhūti (Āsāḍhabhūti) enters a royal theater in search for alms and receives many sweets from an actor. He then thinks that he would give those sweets to his teacher and dresses as another ascetic to collect more alms. The monk does this several times. This behavior eventually results in his disrobing, after which he marries the actor's two daughters. One day, Asāḍabhūti finds his wives intoxicated and asleep and becomes disgusted. He then produces a play called *Raṭṭhapāla* (*Rāṣṭrapāla*) about the great king Bharata who attained omniscience. When this play is staged, five hundred *kṣatriyas* renounce the world. Eventually the play gets burnt.

⁹ See also (Laidlaw 1995) on the relationship between wealth and merit.

¹⁰ See also Gough (2015) where she shows that the reenactment of the Śrīpāla story, first composed around the fourteenth century, became the organizing principle of the *siddhacakra* worship (originally part of Aṣṭāhnikā Parva), which was renamed into the Olī festival by Śvetāmbara Jains.

¹¹ Throughout the article I use the Dīparatnasāgara edition of the *Rāyapaseṇīya*, unless stated otherwise.

¹² *Āyārāṅga* 504 (p. 425) prohibits mendicants from going to festivals (*mahūssava*) and other places where dancing, staging dramas, and playing musical instruments occur. *Pañhāvāgarāṇī* 43 (p. 496) includes dance-drama, singing, and playing musical instruments in the list of prohibited activities for the one who takes a vow of celibacy. *Pañhāvāgarāṇī* 45 (p. 511) enjoins those who took a vow of non-possession to avoid even thinking of dancers and actors (*naḍanattaga*). *Uttarajjhayaṇa* 422 (p. 327) through the monk Citta invites one to renounce dance-drama and singing, along with ornaments and pleasures (*kāma*), as they cause pain (*duhāvaha*).

The more splendid and aesthetically pleasing one's expression of devotion, the more efficacious it is believed to be. I propose that the significance of the aesthetic element in devotional performance for laypeople stems from their temporary transformation into gods and goddesses. Celestial beings as the paradigmatic enjoyers (*bhoktr*) of sensual pleasures spend their life-spans relishing joy and rapture. As such, the pleasurable experiences of laypeople are essential for the veracity of their ritual transformation.

The *Rāyapaseṇiya*, composed in the first half of the first millennium,¹³ tells the story of the god Sūriyābha, who travels to Jambūdvīpa in order to pay homage to the twenty-fourth Tīrthānkara Mahāvīra and worship him with his thirty-two dance-dramas, performed by gods and goddesses produced out of his own body.¹⁴ The *Rāyapaseṇiya* includes detailed accounts of gods venerating the images of the Jina. It relates that there was a spacious Jain temple (*siddhāyatane*), which housed one hundred and eight life-sized Jina images.¹⁵ The temple itself was in the main assembly hall, the Sudharmā Sabhā, inside the main mansion (*mūlapāsāya*) in the marvelous floating palace-world of this god, the Sūriyābha Vimāna.¹⁶ One day, the god Sūriyābha began to think about his next birth and what worthy acts he might perform in this life. Learning about the god's ruminations, the *sāmāṇiya* gods revealed to Sūriyābha that it would be most worthy of him and other gods to worship the one hundred and eight Jina images in the temple, as well as the many bones of the Jina kept in diamond round boxes at the holy pillar (*māṇavae ceie khaṁbhe*).¹⁷ This practice, they added, would bring about wellbeing, happiness, forbearance, and success (*hiya, suha, khamā, nissesa*).¹⁸ Following this advice, the god came to the temple and worshiped the Jina images with water, sandalwood paste, flowers, and incense.¹⁹ The temple, as the *Rāyapaseṇiya* relates, housed four theater halls (*pecchāgharamaṇḍava*) in four cardinal directions, which, along with other temple spaces, Sūriyābha visited, cleaned, and decorated.²⁰ These are the earliest extensive references to the devotional ritual of worship and to the enclosure of a theater pavilion in a Jain temple. The text provides a step-by-step description of the god's worship, which points to the existence of developed devotional rites in the early centuries of the common era.²¹ This agrees with the archeological evidence that we possess, which indicates the production of Jina images at a variety of geographical locations since about 100 BCE.²² As Cort (2002a, p. 69; 2010, p. 49) notes, the *Rāyapaseṇiya* is one of the two canonical texts commonly referenced by Śvetāmbara Mūrtipūjaka

¹³ Dhaky (1989, p. 94) dates it to the late third century CE. *Rāyapaseṇiya* 51 (p. 317) mentions the *Arthaśāstra* (*Atthasattha*), which was composed c. 50 BCE–300 CE. Jain (1947, pp. 35–37) notes that the *Rāyapaseṇiya* contains “various architectural and musical terms which are considerably old and are rarely found elsewhere” (p. 35). Jain (1947, p. 36, n. 19) also observes that the *Rāyapaseṇiya* is variously glossed in Sanskrit as the *Rājaprasānīya* (by Malayagiri), *Rājaprasenakīya* (by Siddhasenagani), and *Rājaprasenajit* (by Muncindrasūri). On the *Rāyapaseṇiya*, see also (Schubring [1962] 2000, pp. 96–97); (Winternitz 1933, pp. 455–56).

¹⁴ *Rāya* 22ff., p. 242ff.

¹⁵ A later text, the *Jambuddhivapannati* (*Jambūdvīpaprajñapti*), the sixth *upāṅga* of the Śvetāmbara canon, omits the description of the life-sized Jina images and refers to the account in the *Rāyapaseṇiya* through the use of *jāva* (“as recounted earlier”); see *Jambuddhivapannati* 14 (p. 79). The *Jambuddhivapannati* is greatly influenced by the *Rāyapaseṇiya*. It explicitly refers to the *Rāyapaseṇiya*, for instance, in the context of Indra's (Sakka's) floating chariot in *Jambuddhivapannati* 228 (p. 397) and mentions the god Sūriyābha himself in *Jambuddhivapannati* 229 (p. 400). More often, the text employs *jāva* to indicate the necessity of a substitution from the *Rāyapaseṇiya*.

¹⁶ *Rāya* 39, p. 294. On the eternal Jina images that inhabit the Jain cosmos and for further references to the original and secondary sources related to Jain cosmology, see (Cort 2010) (esp. chp. 2) and (Granoff 2009, pp. 48–63).

¹⁷ On these holy pillars, see (Shah 1987, p. 11).

¹⁸ *Rāya* 41, p. 299.

¹⁹ For a detailed description of the ritual, see *Rāya* 44, p. 306.

²⁰ *Rāya* 44, p. 308. For instance, *Thānamga* 327 (p. 249), the third *aṅga* of the Śvetāmbara canon, briefly mentions a theater and its sitting areas, housed inside the temple in Jambūdvīpa, and the eleventh-century commentator Abhayadeva glosses the sitting areas (*ākhaṭṭakāḥ*) as “they are known to be comprised of seats for the fans of performances” (*prekṣākārijanāsanabhūtāḥ pratīṭā eva*).

²¹ Cort (2010, p. 49) briefly discusses Sūriyābha's worship of the Jina image; Cort (2010, pp. 64–65) also notes that performance is a type of offering for the Jina image.

²² For an overview of the available archeological evidence about the Jina images, see (Cort 2010, pp. 17–54).

Jains in discussions of image worship, the other one being the *Nāyādhammakahāo*, the sixth *aṅga* of the Śvetāmbara canon.²³

An already elaborate ritual of image worship is further complicated by what precedes the description of it in the text: Sūriyābha's glorious spectacle of thirty-two dance-dramas for the monks and the living Jina Mahāvīra himself, one of the dance-dramas being a play about Mahāvīra's life story from his past births through liberation.²⁴ We thus learn about both of the modes of worship—that of the Jina and that of the Jina image—from Mahāvīra himself, who answers the questions of his disciple Goyama (Gautama). Mahāvīra explains that Sūriyābha earned his fortunate incarnation in heaven from his past birth as King Paesi.

In view of the standard ontological hierarchy, in which even powerful gods with grandiose preternatural powers recognize and embrace the authority of the Jina and Jain ascetics, in the *Rāyapaseṇiya*, Mahāvīra declares the worship of the Jinās by the gods to be ancient (*porāṇa*), well done (*āinna*), and appropriate (*karaṇijja*).²⁵ Sūriyābha's devotional zeal (*bhatti*) towards the Jina and his disciples is portrayed as so overwhelming that, despite the lack of Mahāvīra's verbal consent, the god stages a magnificent performance of dance-drama. Sūriyābha's worship of the Jina with the thirty-two dance-dramas recurs in other canonical texts. In the later *Bhagavaī*, for instance, the lord of *asuras* Camara, the lord of Nāgas Nāgakumāra, the god Devarāja, and the god Indra of Īśāna go to worship Mahāvīra with their supreme opulence, supreme splendor, supreme preeminence, and supreme thirty-two dance-dramas, "as recounted in the *Rāyapaseṇiya*."²⁶ The god Gaṃgadatta, too, addresses Mahāvīra with a request to express his devotion (*bhattipuvvagaṃ*) by demonstrating his supreme opulence, splendor, preeminence, and thirty-two dance-dramas. Just as in the Sūriyābha episode, Gaṃgadatta does not receive a response from the Jina even after repeating his plea three times and, hence, proceeds to carry out his devotional performance without the Jina's explicit assent.²⁷

The ritual performance of the thirty-two dance-dramas also occurs in the account of the child-ascetic (*bālatavassī*) Tāmali, who is thus worshiped by *asuras*, gods, and goddesses.²⁸ This observation suggests that this mode of devotional expression is not confined to the presence of the Jina. Finally, we find a reference to the thirty-two dance-dramas as a form of pure entertainment, for instance, in the *Nāyādhammakahāo*. In this episode, the prince Meha spends his days watching the thirty-two dance-dramas performed by young girls and basking in verbal, tactile, gustatory, visual, and olfactory pleasures generated by all the sense organs.²⁹ The god Sūriyābha's performance of the thirty-two dance-dramas narrated in the *Rāyapaseṇiya* in great detail, therefore, continues to be emulated by others—gods, *asuras*, and kings—as a recognized mode of worship, usually, but not always, directed to the Jina, and has a parallel in dances performed outside the context of ritual.

The performance that Sūriyābha arranges in Bhāratavarṣa in Jambūdvīpa, on the one hand, represents a devotional ritual of worship, but, on the other, embodies a source of aesthetic pleasure and, therefore, causes excitement in the audience of mendicants, detrimental to their monastic discipline.³⁰ In rendering dramatic performance as an important element in the worship of the Jina and mendicants, the *Rāyapaseṇiya* came to serve as a source of authority endorsing such practice. We have seen that its

²³ On the *Nāyādhammakahāo*, see (Schubring 1978). The *Rāyapaseṇiya* is mentioned in a twentieth century Gujarati play called the *Dhuṇḍhak Mat Khaṇḍan* ("Refutation of the Iconoclast Sthānakavāsī Doctrine") (pp. 51, 57) and in Rājendrasūri's *Abhidhānarājendrakōṣa* (pp. 1215–17) as evidence for the early existence of the image worshiping practice in Jainism.

²⁴ *Rāya* 24, p. 251.

²⁵ *Rāya* 9, p. 216.

²⁶ *Bhagavaī* 152ff., p. 163ff. (for the lord of *asuras* Camara); 155ff., p. 167ff. (for the lord of Nāgas Nāgakumāra); 156ff., p. 169ff. (for the god Devarāja); and 160ff., p. 171ff. (for the god Indra of Īśāna). The exegete Abhayadeva (*vṛtti* to 160, p. 173) glosses *jaheva rāyapaseṇiije* ("as recounted in the *Rāyapaseṇiya*") as *tathaiva rājaprasānīyākhye 'dhyāyane sūriyābhadevasya vaktavyatā tathaiva ceheśānendrasya* ("in regards to Indra of Īśāna it must be narrated in the same way as in the episode about the god Sūriyābha in the *Rājaprasānīyasūtra*"). For a study of the *Bhagavaī*, see (Deleu 1996).

²⁷ *Rāya* 23, p. 243; *Bhagavaī* 675, p. 210f.

²⁸ *Bhagavaī* 161ff., p. 175ff.

²⁹ *Nāyādhammakahāo* 28, p. 49.

³⁰ *Rāya* 23, p. 244.

account of the thirty-two dance-dramas was taken over by other texts as a standard mode for worship, while the re-enactment of the Jina's biography created a model ritual for laypeople for the centuries to come.

2. The Past Birth of the God Sūriyābha

The second half of the *Rāyapaseṇiya* contains the *Paesikahāṇiyaṃ*, “The Story of Paesi”, a dialogue between the materialist king Paesi and the Jain monk Kesi, which results in the conversion of the king and his voluntary death by renouncing the intake of food and liquids.³¹ The story opens with Goyama's framing question to Mahāvīra about the past lives of the god Sūriyābha that brought him to the state of a heavenly being possessing supreme opulence, splendor, and preeminence (*divvā deviddhī*, *divvā devajuī*, *divve devāṇubhāve*).³² Mahāvīra's response is the story of King Paesi.

When Paesi became a follower of Jainism and developed the attitude of non-attachment to the material world, including non-attachment to his royal responsibilities, Queen Sūriyakantā was disappointed with the metamorphosis of her husband. She poisoned Paesi with the intention of taking over the kingdom and making the crown prince Sūriyakanta the next king. Paesi's religious quest and righteous conduct at the end of his life led to his rebirth as the god Sūriyābha in the Sūriyābha floating palace (*vimāna*) in the heavenly realm known as the Sudharma Kalpa.³³ Sūriyābha's divine attributes of opulence, splendor, and preeminence were thus earned by the meritorious choices of his previous incarnation as Paesi.³⁴

In Jain cosmology, gods who are born in their last celestial manifestation, with their next rebirth being final, acquire three preternatural abilities: supreme opulence (*divvā deviddhī*), supreme splendor (*divvā devajuī*), and supreme preeminence (*divve devāṇubhāve*).³⁵ These divine properties are often accompanied by a fourth attribute: the ability to perform thirty-two supreme dramatic dances (*divve battisativihē naṭṭavihi*).³⁶ Thus, Sūriyābha was equipped with all of these.

The Sūriyābha episode begins with the moment Mahāvīra arrives at the Āmraśālavana shrine in the city of Āmalakalpa in Bhāratavarṣa in Jambūdvīpa. Sūriyābha saw Mahāvīra through his clairvoyance and at once fell on his right knee, bowed down three times, and uttered prayers to Mahāvīra and the other Jinas. Thereafter, Sūriyābha gave the order to his servant gods (*ābhiyogiya*) to fly to Jambūdvīpa in order to worship Mahāvīra.³⁷ In carrying out the command, the gods transformed themselves into vehicles. I will pause at this point to consider the technique of transformation employed by Sūriyābha and his servant gods for the creation of all sorts of things: from the ritualized preparation of the space to the construction of a theater and floating chariot.

3. The Technique of Transformation

In Jain ontology, living beings (from gods to earth-bodied and two-sensed beings) are believed to possess more than one body. In *Thāṇaṃga* 491–2 (p. 576), we read that human beings possess an internal karmic body (*kammae*) and an external gross, or physical, body (*orālie/audārika*) at all times. The karmic body is linked with three more bodies: the body of transformation (*veuvvie/vaikriya*), the body of transposition (*āhārae/āhāraka*), and the fiery body (*teyae/taijasa*). The karmic and the related three bodies

³¹ For a thorough study and translation of the *Paesikahāṇiyaṃ*, see (Bollée 2002). For a summary and its Buddhist version in the *Dīghanikāya*, see (Leumann [1885] 1998).

³² (Bollée 2002, p. 15).

³³ In Jain cosmology, gods get born on a throne in godly garments.

³⁴ Similar in *Bhagavāi* 172ff., p. 182ff.: Goyama asks Mahāvīra how Camara, the lord of *asuras*, attained his supreme opulence, splendor, and preeminence. Mahāvīra answers this question with the story of Camara's past life as the householder Purāṇa who renounced the world, spent twelve years in asceticism, and died by completely rejecting food and drink.

³⁵ *Bhagavāi* 177, p. 191.

³⁶ For more about specific gods belonging to different levels and divine abodes, see (Schubring [1962] 2000, pp. 213–46).

³⁷ Jacobi (1884) translates a description of the *ābhiyogika* gods from the *Uttarajjhāyana* (XXXVI.263): “Those who practice spells and besmear their body with ashes for the sake of pleasure, amusement, or power realize in the Abhiyogika Bhavana”.

are attached to the soul and do not exist without it; the physical body, however, is independent of the soul, as it gets separated from the soul at the time of death.³⁸ Although, like other living beings, gods, goddesses, and *asuras* possess an internal karmic body, their external body is that of transformation (*bāhira veuvvie*).³⁹ All gods, except those from the uppermost regions of the universe, Gevijja and Aṇuttara, can shift shapes and adopt other, modified forms (*uttaraveuvviyaṃ rūvaṃ vikuovai*).⁴⁰

The technique of transformation (*veuvviyasamugghāya*) is presented as a standard means for gods, goddesses, *asuras*, as well as accomplished ascetics (*bhāviappā*) to transform themselves or part of themselves into other, often multiple, beings and objects in Jain texts.⁴¹ In the episode of Camara, the lord of *asuras*, the commentator Abhayadeva offers a detailed account of Camara's transformations.⁴² Camara first expands his soul space units (*pradeśān vikṣipati*) by applying the technique of transformation and sheds forth a jeweled pillar (*daṇḍa*), which is numerous *yojanas* in length and whose thickness is equal to that of Camara's body (*śarīrabāhalya*). This pillar is comprised of Camara's soul units and external matter (*jīvapradeśakarmapudgalasamūha*). That is because once he brings the soul units outside of his body, karmic particles called *vaikriya* matter get attached to the staff made of the soul units (just as karmic particles are drawn to the soul in living beings). Abhayadeva explains that either the original text means that these particles are akin to jewels in that they are the most splendid, or that these jewels have the power to transform themselves into *vaikriya* particles.⁴³ Next, Camara removes the gross material particles (*ahābāyare poggale*) and transforms the subtle aspects of the physical elements (*ahāsuhume poggale*) to create new bodies and objects. For the omniscient ascetics (*kevalajñānin*), this process works to speed up the course of *nirjarā*, experiencing or getting rid of karmas all at once that otherwise would have taken an incredibly long time.⁴⁴ Here, however, this is not the case, as it is employed to create new forms.

This description of the production of other forms defines the relationship between the internal and external, as well as the material and immaterial in the process of a divine and superhuman creation. Gods, *asuras*, and accomplished ascetics create other beings and objects out of their own soul units while also integrating other, foreign subtle particles. In other words, they multiply their own selves or, one can say, manifest themselves and fragments of themselves in other forms. At the initial stage, the god, *asura*, or accomplished ascetic performs an enlargement of himself (*samugghāya*), "in which the soul is yogically expanded to the very limits of the universe", while remaining connected to his body.⁴⁵ The final result of the creation similarly presents a dialectic process of expansion, on the one hand, and localization in a single site, on the other, as Abhayadeva illustrates in the following way:

³⁸ For more details about the bodies of living beings, see (Schubring [1962] 2000, 137ff.). He explains that all beings possess a karmic and fiery body for their entire lives; animals (with one to five senses) and human beings also invariably have a gross, or physical, body. Gods and *asuras* "always live in bodies of transformation (*veuvviya* s.), but other beings do so only temporarily, while the body of transposition (*āhāraga* s.) merely applies to human beings and in special cases only" (p. 137).

³⁹ (Schubring [1962] 2000, p. 138) notes that because gods' bodies of transformation are "built without attracting foreign particles of matter", they are called *bhavadharaṇijja*. Gods can, however, catch the material body they have cast down earlier, because the material body's speed of movement goes down with time, while gods always move fast; see *Bhagavaī* 175, p. 187.

⁴⁰ (Schubring [1962] 2000, p. 138).

⁴¹ On the accomplished (*bhāviappā/bhāvitātāmā*) ascetics, see *Bhagavaī* 184, p. 197. The commentary (*vṛtti*) glosses *bhāviappā* as *saṃyamatapobhyāṃ evaṃ vidhānām anagārāṇām hi prāyo 'vadhijñānādilabdhayo bhavantīti kṛtvā bhāvitātāmeti uktam* ("accomplished ascetics exercise restraint and perform penance and as a result acquire such abilities as clairvoyance etc.; those who achieve this are called 'accomplished'"). Ratnacandraji's *An Illustrated Ardha-Māgadhī Dictionary* denotes *samohaya* (equivalent to the Sanskrit *samavahata*) as "extended", "soul particles emanated from the body", etc. (Ratnachandraji [1923] 1988).

⁴² *Vṛtti* to *Bhagavaī* 152, p. 164.

⁴³ *Vṛtti* to *Rāya* 8, p. 215: *ucyate iha ratnādigrāhaṇam sārātāmātrapratipādanārthaṃ tato ratnādīnām iveti draṣṭavyam iti na kaścid doṣaḥ, athavā audārikā api taiḥ gṛhītaḥ santo vaikrayatayā pariṇamante* ("The text means that either the word 'jewel' etc. signifies simply the most excellent thing and thus it says 'of things like jewels etc.' and so there is no flaw in this illustration; or it can mean that gross jewel particles are taken up by them (i.e., soul units) and these gross particles transform into *vaikriya* matter." See also Abhayadeva's *vṛtti* to *Bhagavaī* 152, p. 165.

⁴⁴ See *Paṇṇavaṇā* 614, p. 306.

⁴⁵ (Jaini [1979] 1998, pp. 201, 269).

Just as at a festival procession (*yātrā*) etc. a girl, being held tightly by a young man's hand, moves in a place filled with people, in the same way the forms (*rūpa*) that have been generated are tied together in one agent. Just as the single center of a wheel is connected with the many spokes making the wheel solid and devoid of gaps, in the same way [the world] is filled with *asuras*, gods, and goddesses who are connected to his (Camara's) own body.⁴⁶

A girl may be in the thick of people, participating in the festival along with everyone else, but her physical, tangible ties with a young man remain unbroken. Analogously, even though the produced forms may appear independent or engaged in different kinds of life processes, they never lose touch with the source of their existence, and in the event of living beings, their will may be entirely controlled by their creator. The second illustration draws a parallel between Camara's body that has projected numerous celestial beings and the hub that holds and interconnects all the spokes of the wheel, thereby rendering it sturdy and secure. This image, too, emphasizes the palpable, real linkage between the body of the *asura* Camara and his creations.

Understanding the technique of transformation is key to a complete appreciation of Sūriyābha's undertaking to offer a majestic spectacle to Mahāvīra, since the entire creation is generated from the god's expanded being.

4. Production of a Floating Chariot and Theater

The narrative recounts that as Sūriyābha's *ābhiyogika* gods arrived at the Āmraśālavana shrine in the city of Āmalakalpa in Bhāratavarṣa in Jambūdvīpa, they circumambulated Mahāvīra three times, bowed down to, and worshiped him.⁴⁷ In response, Mahāvīra evinced his complete appreciation and approval, declaring the gods' worship of him to be an ancient practice (*porāṇam eyam*). The commentary explains that in the past the gods worshiped the former Jinās in the same manner,⁴⁸ and they all accepted the gods' worship (*abhyānujñātam etat sarvair api*). Mahāvīra explained that, as customary, after bowing to and worshiping him, the gods should report their names and *gotras* (clans or lineages).⁴⁹ The Jina's statement unequivocally reaffirms the hierarchical relationship between the Jinās and gods, locating its legitimacy in the previous time periods. Pleased with Mahāvīra's reception, the gods went on to carry out Sūriyābha's orders.

Similar to the preparatory measures propounded in the earliest extant text on Sanskrit dramaturgy, Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the space around the Jina had to be cleaned and measured prior to the construction of a theater.⁵⁰ In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, this is an important process, not only for the practical reasons that it levels the land and makes it suitable for building but also, as pointed out by Kuiper (1979, pp. 158–59, cited in Gitomer 1994, p. 178), because the theater and its stage signify "a sacred space, which symbolically represented the cosmos", evidenced by the subsequent rituals, installations of gods, and a consecration ceremony.⁵¹ The space for Sūriyābha's devotional show, featuring, among other things, the performance of auspicious symbols and Mahāvīra's life story, had to be demarcated and perfected. Similar to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in the *Rāyapaseṇīya* the ground for a theater was transformed into a pure and singular space, which is "fitting of the gods' presence" (*suravarābhigamaṇa-jogaṇi*).⁵²

⁴⁶ *Vṛtti to Bhagavaī* 152, p. 165: *yathā yātrādiṣu yuvatir yūno haste lagnā pratibaddhā gacchati bahulokapracite deṣe, evaṃ yāni rūpāni vikurvūtāni tany ekasmin karttari pratibaddhānīlyathā vā cakrasya nābhīr ekā bahubhīr arakāḥ pratibaddhā ghanā niśchidrā, evaṃ ātmaśarīrapratibaddhair asuradevair devībhīś ca pūrayed itī*.

⁴⁷ *Rāya* 8, p. 214.

⁴⁸ *Vṛtti to Rāya* 9, p. 216: *cirantanair api devaiḥ kṛtam idaṃ cirantanān tīrthanīkārān pratīti tātparyārthaḥ |*

⁴⁹ *Rāya* 9, p. 216.

⁵⁰ *samā sthīrā tu kaṭhinā kṛṣṇā gaurī ca yā bhavet/bhūmis tatraiva kartavyaḥ kartṛbhīr nātyamaṇḍapaḥ ||* NŚ 2.25 *prathamam śodhanam kṛtvā lāṅgalena samutkṛṣet/asthikīlakapālāni tṛṇagulmāṇś ca śodhayet ||* NŚ 2.26 "A builder should erect a playhouse on the soil, which is even, firm, hard, and black or white. It should first of all be cleared and then smoothed over with a plough, and then bones, pegs, potsherds in it as well as grass and shrubs growing in it, should be removed." (Slightly edited translation of Ghosh 1951). On measuring the land, see NŚ 2.27ff.

⁵¹ See NŚ 2.38–2.41; 3.

⁵² *Rāya* 10, p. 217.

The *Rāyapaseṇiya* further reads that the gods first cleaned the area for one *yojana* in every direction from Mahāvīra by producing a strong wind via the technique of transformation (discussed above), akin to the gale at the end of the world (*saṃvaṭṭavāe*) that removed grass, leaves, wood, little rocks, and all things that were dirty (*asui*), filthy (*acokha*), foul (*apūia*), and smelly (*dubbhigaṃdha*).⁵³ The text introduces an extended simile to illustrate the thoroughness with which the dust and dirt were removed: it suggests imagining a young, healthy, and strong son of a servant with no physical defects sweeping skillfully and confidently with a broom made of bamboo sticks.⁵⁴ It piles up adjectives describing the strength of the young man, leaving no doubt as to his abilities to sweep a variety of different spaces, also individually enumerated. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes the process of preparing the stage in a similar fashion:

In filling [the stage] with black earth, one should place the black earth carefully, having removed from it lumps of earth, grass, and little rocks with a plow. Two white draught animals must be carefully yoked to this plow. Only men who are devoid of flaws must work, and the earth must be brought in new baskets by those who do not have physical defects.⁵⁵

Although in the *Rāyapaseṇiya* the space is made clean and fitting by means of the gods' preternatural abilities, the text paints an image analogous to the description from the *Nāṭyaśāstra*: in both accounts, we find strong men without physical defects, who clear the earth from dirt, grass, and stones. The parallel tropes in these texts, dated to about the same period of time, confirm the presence of similar stock imagery in Jain and non-Jain texts and indicate that the ideas about the organization of a theater space were common in both Jain and non-Jain traditions, which developed in conversation with one another.

Thereafter, Sūriyābha's gods produced roaring clouds, which emitted lightning bolts and moved around the area of one *yojana* on each side of Mahāvīra, showering fragrant rainwater that entirely destroyed any dust. Next, as per Sūriyābha's orders, the gods created flower clouds that showered water- and soil-born bright flowers of five colors. Finally, they made the space pleasant with the fragrance of black agarwood (*kālāguru*), essential oils (*kundurukka* and *turukka*), and incense, filling it with smoke rings and rendering it still more suitable for the gods' presence. Having accomplished this, the gods approached Mahāvīra, circumambulated him three times, worshiped, and bowed down to him, as before, after which they went back to Sūriyābha.⁵⁶

Sūriyābha was content with the gods' report, as the text recounts, and next gathered all the gods and goddesses residing in the Sūriyābha floating palace (*vimāna*) and ordered them to construct a floating chariot (*jāṇa*).⁵⁷ Once the gods produced the floating chariot, they built magnificent stairs on its three sides—in the east, south, and north. In front of the three staircases, they constructed steady, well-founded gateways (*toraṇa*), studded with various jewels and supported by pillars made of jewels. These gateways were embellished with different types of pearls, silver disks (*tarikā*), etc. The depiction of the gateways is identical in part to that of the floating chariot; hence, the commentator Malayagiri substitutes *jāva* ("as recounted earlier") in the original with the description from the account of the floating chariot.⁵⁸ There were eight auspicious symbols on the gateways: a *svastika*, a *śrīvatsa* mark, a *nandikāvarta* diagram, a powder box (*vardhamānaka*), a holy seat (*bhadrāsana*), a holy pot (*kalaśa*), a fish pair (*matsyayugala*), and a mirror (*darpaṇa*). Flags of different colors, umbrellas, lotuses, and other

⁵³ *Rāya* 10, p. 216. Also, *Rāya* 7, p. 213: *taṇaṇi vā pattaṇi vā kaṭṭhaṇi vā sakkaraṇi vā asuiṇi acokkhaṇi vā pūiaṇi dubbhigaṃdhaṇi saṃvaṇi* |.

⁵⁴ *Rāya* 10, p. 216.

⁵⁵ NŚ 2.69b-2.71ab.

⁵⁶ *Rāya* 10, pp. 216–17.

⁵⁷ *Rāya* 14, p. 222.

⁵⁸ *Rāya* 15, p. 223.

flowers also featured on the gateways.⁵⁹ Thereafter, the gods created a beautiful and fully leveled floor inside the floating chariot.⁶⁰ This account of the floating chariot serves as the foundation for the description of the theater that the gods subsequently built inside the chariot; the pillars, paintings, radiance, abundance of jewels and pearls, sweet fragrance, softness, spotlessness, etc. are among the shared features of both structures. They are also the commonly employed stock characterizations of various beautiful and lofty objects in Indic sources.

As the *Rāyapaseṇiya* further narrates, once the gods produced the floating chariot with a perfectly flat floor, the stairs, and gateways leading to it, they undertook the construction of a theater (*pecchāgharamaṇḍava*) inside the chariot in the following way:

Then, the servant gods created a large theater pavilion in the very middle of that supreme floating chariot. It was supported on many hundreds of pillars, was adorned with well-designed and charming railings, gateways, and expertly carved sculptures of women. It had immaculate pillars made of the famous cat's eye gems, beautifully designed and built. The floor [inside the theater] was perfectly flat, shiny, and studded with different jewels.⁶¹ [The theater] was adorned with the wall paintings of a deer, bull, horse, man, sea animal (*magara*), bird, serpent, celestial musician (*kinnara*, akin to a centaur), an antelope, a mythical beast (*sarabha*), yak, an elephant, a forest creeper, and lotus creeper. Its *śikhara* towers were made of gold, jewels, and gems.⁶² The front part of the towers was decorated with various bells and flags of five colors. It radiated a beaming shield of light. [The floor] was daubed with cow dung and [the walls] were white-washed, with thick and bright finger and palm prints of the red sandalwood paste *gośīrṣa*.⁶³ Pots with sandalwood marks were placed around. Each door was decorated by such pots and archways. Many long flower garlands were extended from top to bottom, and a sweet fragrance was coming from the bouquets of flowers of five colors. The space was made pleasant with the fragrance of black agarwood (*kālāguru*), essential oils (*kundurukka* and *turukka*), and incense, filling it with smoke rings.⁶⁴ It was resounding with the music of supreme musical instruments. There were many celestial nymphs; it was immaculate, [polished, smoothed, scoured, cleaned, free from dust, free from dirt, free from mire, saliently bright, luminous, radiant, and shining].⁶⁵ Inside the theater pavilion was created a perfectly flat floor, [like the skin of a drum, the surface of a pond filled with water, the surface of a palm, the moon, or the sun etc.] It was studded with jewels [of five colors that were auspiciously shaped in different ways].⁶⁶

⁵⁹ *Rāya* 15, pp. 224–25. Malayagiri (p. 225) says one should see the following passage *ghatthā matthā nīrayā nimmalā nippamkā nikkakaḍacchāyā samiriyā saujoyā pāsāyā darisañijjā abhirūvā*. For this passage, see Abhayadeva's *vṛtti* to *Uvaṇīya* 4 (p. 76) and the *Rāyapaseṇīyasuttam* (edited by Becardās Jīvrāj Doṣī, 1994), page 19, line 5.

⁶⁰ *Rāya* 15, p. 225: *tassa divvassa jānavimānassa aṇṭo bahusamaramaṇijjā bhūmibhāgaṃ viuvvatī*.

⁶¹ The *Dīparatnasāgara* edition of *Rāya* 15 (p. 231) contains an abridged version of the description: *anega-khaṃbha-saya-saṇṇivittāṃ abbhuggaya-sukaya-varavāyā-toraṇa-khaciya-ujjala-bahunmasama-suvibhatata-desabhāie*. I use here a more complete version from the *Rāyapaseṇīyasuttam* (edited by Becardās Jīvrāj Doṣī, 1994, p. 94). However, the *Illustrated Rai-Pasenīya (Raj-Prashniya) Sutra* edition (45, p. 47) offers an even more elaborate reading: *anega-khaṃbha-saya-saṇṇivittāṃ abbhuggaya-sukaya-vara-veiyā-toraṇa-vara-raiyā-sālabhamjiyāgaṃ susilittā-visittā-latthā-saṇṇhiya-pasattha-veruliya-vimala-khaṃbham nānā-maṇi-khaciya-ujjala-bahusama-suvibhatta-bhūmibhāgaṃ*.

⁶² In *vṛtti* to *Rāya* 15 (p. 232) Malayagiri glosses *thūbhiyā* (*stūpikā*) as *śikhara*.

⁶³ In *vṛtti* to *Rāya* 15 (p. 232) Malayagiri glosses *daddara* (*dardara*) as *bahala* ("thick").

⁶⁴ *Rāya* 15, pp. 232–3. This is analogous to the description of the floating chariot in *Rāya* 10, p. 217.

⁶⁵ See *vṛtti* to *Uvaṇīya* 4 (p. 76) and the *Rāyapaseṇīyasuttam* (edited by Becardās Jīvrāj Doṣī, 1994), page 19, line 5: *acchā saṇhā ghatthā matthā nīrayā nimmalā nippamkā nikkakaḍacchāyā sappabhā samiriyā saujoyā pāsāyā darisañijjā abhirūvā paḍirūvā* |

⁶⁶ *Rāya* 15, p. 231: *tae nām se ābhiyogīe deve tassa divvassa jāna-vimānassa bahū-majjha-desabhāge ettha nām maham picchāghara-maṇḍavam viuvvai anega-khaṃbha-saya-saṇṇivittāṃ abbhuggaya-sukaya-vara-veiyā-toraṇa-[vara-raiyā-sālabhamjiyāgaṃ susilittā-visittā-latthā-saṇṇhiya-pasattha-veruliya-vimala-khaṃbham nānā-maṇi]-khaciya-ujjala-bahunmasama-suvibhatata-desabhāie* | *jāmiya-usabha-turaga-nara-magara-vihaga-vāḷaga-kinnara-ruru-sarabha-camara-kumjara-vaṇalaya-paumalaya-bhatti-cittam* | *kaṃcaṇa-maṇirayaṇa-thūbhiyāgaṃ* | *nānā-viha-paṃca-vaṇṇa-ghaṇṭā-paḍāga-[pa]* | *rimaṇḍiyagga-siharam pavalam mariti-kacayam vinimmutiyam* | *kaḷloiyamahiyaṃ gosisa-ratta-camdana-daddara-dinna-paṃcamgulitalam caviya-camdana-kalasam camdana-ghaḍa-sukaya-toraṇa-paḍiduṇṇa-desabhāgaṃ* | *āsattosatta-viula-vaḷṭa-vagdhāriya-malladāma-kalāvam paṃca-vaṇṇa-sarasa-surabhi mukka-puppha-puṇḍovayāra-kaliyaṃ* | *kālāguru-pavara-kumdarukka-turukka-dhūvamadhama-ghaṇṭa-*

The canopy (*ulloya*) of this theater pavilion also featured paintings of a lotus creeper, etc.⁶⁷ Next, the gods created a large sitting area (*akkhādaga*) out of diamonds in the very middle of the perfectly leveled and charming space of the theater. In the very middle of this public space, a gigantic platform, studded with jewels, was built, eight *yojanas* long and wide and four *yojanas* thick. Being made fully of jewels, it was immaculate, polished, and “as recounted earlier”, smoothed, scoured, cleaned, free from dust, free from dirt, free from mire, saliently bright, luminous, radiant, and shining.⁶⁸

The depiction of the theater is heavily informed by the preceding description of the floating chariot and modeled after the standard accounts of floating palaces, such as the celestial floating palace (*vimāṇa-bhavaṇa*) that Trīśālā, the mother of the Jina Mahāvīra, saw in her twelfth dream, as recounted in the *Kappasutta*.⁶⁹ It is thus laden with stock descriptive elements that we find in a variety of contexts, such as the story of Mahāvīra’s renunciation in the *Āyāraṃga* or the depiction of the chamber of Trīśālā in the *Kappasutta*.⁷⁰ For instance, in the *Āyāraṃga*, through the technique of transformation, Indra creates the palanquin Caṃdappabha for the Jina, which is decorated with the same paintings of animals, celestial and human beings, and plants (a deer to lotus creeper sequence), which decorate the walls of both the floating chariot and theater, as well as the gateways.⁷¹ The palanquin, just like the chariot and theater, is also embellished with a pair of celestial musicians. Imbuing the space with the fragrance of black agarwood, essential oils, and incense, and polishing the floor to perfection, are also stock tropes in Jain literature. Further, the pots with sandalwood marks and the practice of white-washing the walls and leaving the palm prints of red sandalwood paste, which are mentioned in the description of the theater, represent standard auspicious decorations for houses in Jain literature. Many of the general descriptive details such as paintings, statues, pillars, and jewels are common literary embellishments in Sanskrit and Prakrit texts.⁷² It would seem there is hardly anything original about the theater structure as described in the *Rāyapaseṇiya*. What stands out, however, in this overwhelmingly repetitive account is the extended public area for sitting, in the middle of which was placed a colossal jeweled platform. An enormous marvelous throne was built on this platform, delightful to look at and touch. It is exhaustively described in familiar terms.

A cloth of victory (*vijayadūsa*), made of white jewels, was spread over the throne. A diamond hook (*aṃkusa*) was placed at the center of the canopy, and a big pearl string, with four more pearl strings attached to it, was hanging on that hook. In the sitting area, the gods created four thousand seats for the *sāmāniya* gods of Sūriyābha in the north, north-east, and north-west from the throne; four thousand seats in the east for Sūriyābha’s retinue, eight thousand seats in the south-east for the gods of his inner assembly, ten thousand seats in the south for the gods of his middle assembly, twelve thousand seats in the south-west for the gods of the external assembly, seven seats in the west for the chiefs of his seven armies, and four thousand seats in each direction—eastern, southern, western, and northern—for his security gods (*āyarakkhadeva*).⁷³ Once the construction of this majestic floating chariot was complete, the *Rāyapaseṇiya* continues, the god Sūriyābha along with his retinue, four wives, and two armies (*aṇṭiya*) of celestial singers and musicians (*gaṃdhavva*) and actors (*naṭṭa*) circled the chariot, walked in the four directions, and went up the stairs on the eastern side. He sat on the throne

gaṃddhuddhuyābhirāmaṃ sugaṃdha-varaṃgaṃdhiya gaṃdhavaṭṭibhūtaṃ divvaṃ tuḍiya-sadda-saṃpaṇāiṃ laccharagaṇa-saṃgha-vikīṇaṃ pāsāiṃ darisaṇiṃ jāva paḍirūvaṃ tassa naṃ picchāghara-maṃdavaṇṇa bahuṣama-ramaṇiṃ bhūmibhāgaṃ viuvvati jāva maṇiṇaṃ phāsaṃ. The excerpt from “The front part of the towers” to the end of the quote is included verbatim in *Uvavāiya* 2 (p. 71) in the description of the Pūrṇabhadra shrine.

⁶⁷ *Rāya* 15, p. 231: *paumalayabhaticittaṃ jāva*. See *vṛtti* to *Uvavāiya* 4 (p. 76).

⁶⁸ *Rāya* 15, p. 231. What is supplied comes from *vṛtti* to *Uvavāiya* 4 (p. 76) and the *Rāyapaseṇiysuttaṃ* (edited by Becardās Jivraj Doṣī, 1994), page 19, line 5.

⁶⁹ *Kappasutta* 44, p. 30.

⁷⁰ *Āyāraṃga* 754, pp. 382–83; *Kappasutta* 32, p. 32.

⁷¹ Cf. the account of the prince Meha’s palanquin in the *Nāyādharmakāhā*, mentioned in (Flügel 2015, p. 23).

⁷² For instance, see NS 2.72ff.

⁷³ *Rāya* 15, p. 234.

facing east. The *sāmānīya* gods used the northern entrance and the remaining gods and goddesses entered through the southern stairs.⁷⁴

The portrayals of both the floating chariot and the theater are fashioned in conformity with the standard descriptive models for opulence, stressing luminosity, costliness, purity, and perfection. It is the public area that gives the structure of the theater its unique identity. The god Sūriyābha, sitting on a richly adorned throne placed on a platform in the middle of the public area in the theater built inside his floating chariot, is the primary spectator and benefactor of the show. This scene echoes the account in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, where the god Brahmā creates the Veda of Drama (*nāṭyaveda*), arranges the first dramatic performance, and takes the central position on the stage.⁷⁵ In doing so, Brahmā represents the presiding deity of the drama to whom in order to secure success for his undertaking the director of a play must perform a *pūjā*, which is likened to a Vedic sacrifice.⁷⁶ However, when it comes to Sūriyābha's performance for the Jina, the roles are assigned differently. Sūriyābha appears before Mahāvīra as the producer, sole performer (by expanding his soul units to generate new bodies), and one of the spectators of all of the thirty-two dance-dramas, and it is Mahāvīra and the monks to whom the ritual is directed and devoted.

The story of the production of a novel type of knowledge, the discipline of drama (*nāṭyaveda*), is related in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In it, people become possessed by desires and greed in the Tretā Age, while gods, *asuras*, celestial beings (*gandharva*), *yakṣas*, and great serpents engulf Jambūdvīpa. In this circumstance, Indra approaches Brahmā and entreats: "We want entertainment (*krīḍanīyaka*) that can be both seen and heard."⁷⁷ Upon hearing this request, Brahmā agrees and resolves to compose the fifth Veda, which will be conducive to law (*dharma*), the pursuit of money (*artha*), and fame (*yaśas*), and which will contain advice and depict all human activities.⁷⁸ Just as the purpose of theater, as conceived in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, combines the elements of entertainment, instruction, and universal appeal, the devotional theatrical performance in the *Rāyapaseṇīya* is a complex phenomenon that "braids" aesthetic pleasure and meritorious efficacy.⁷⁹ That both the *Rāyapaseṇīya* and the *Nāṭyaśāstra* have been dated to the first half of the first millennium CE and reveal a close relationship between devotional ritual and drama points to the fact that the association of worship with theater was present in both Jain and non-Jain religious traditions. Moreover, a contemporaneous Śvetāmbara canonical text, called the *Aṇugaddāra*, contains expositions on music and nine *rasas*, including peaceful (*pasamta*) *rasa* and shameful (*velaṇaa*) *rasa*.⁸⁰ Although neither the *Rāyapaseṇīya* nor the *Aṇugaddāra* is a treatise on dramaturgy, as the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is, they clearly demonstrate that Jain conceptions about theater are not a later development based on Hindu texts and practices. Rather, forms of theater, singing, and music were part of Jain culture from the early centuries of the common era, and likely developed in conversation with non-Jain ideas and practices.

5. Does Mahāvīra's Silence Imply Consent?

The next scene in the account appears puzzling and evokes various interpretations. It is concerned with Mahāvīra's reaction to Sūriyābha's request to stage his thirty-two types of dance-drama to worship monks and the Jina himself. We find that Mahāvīra does not acknowledge the god's entreaty but ignores it and remains withdrawn. While in the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha's silence often denotes

⁷⁴ *Rāya* 16, p. 236.

⁷⁵ *raṅgapīṭhasya madhye tu svayam brahmapratīṣṭhitaḥ|ity artham raṅgamadhye tu kriyate puṣpamokṣanam ||* NŚ 1.95 "And in the middle of the stage, Brahmā himself took the position; that's why flowers were scattered on the stage." See also 5.72 and 5.75ff.

⁷⁶ NŚ 1.124.

⁷⁷ *mahendrapramukhair devair uktaḥ kila pitāmahaḥ|krīḍanīyakam icchāmo dṛśyaṃ śravyaṃ ca yad bhavet ||* NŚ 1.11.

⁷⁸ *dharmyam arthyaṃ ca sopadeśyaṃ sasaṅgraham|bhaviṣyataś ca lokasya sarvakarmānudarśakam ||* NŚ 1.14.

⁷⁹ Here, I employ the analytical vocabulary of Schechner (Schechner [1977] 2003); see his theory of "the efficacy-entertainment braid" (p. 120).

⁸⁰ On music, see *Aṇugaddāra* 164ff., p. 356ff.; on the nine *rasas*, see *Aṇugaddāra* 213ff., p. 363ff.

acquiescence,⁸¹ I will show that in the *Rāyapaseṇiya* the Jina's silence must be definitively understood as rejection.

Upon arrival at the Āmraśālavana shrine, Sūriyābha went to worship Mahāvīra: "My Lord, I am god Sūriyābha and I bow down, worship, and serve you, the Blessed One."⁸² In response, the Jina once again reaffirmed worship by the gods as an ancient and valid practice.⁸³ Thereafter, Mahāvīra preached a sermon about dharma, which is not included in the *Rāyapaseṇiya* but is fully given in the *Uvavāiya*.⁸⁴ Lastly, the god asked the Jina certain personal questions about his future rebirth and discovered that his next life would be his final incarnation, after which he would attain salvation. This response overjoyed Sūriyābha, enabling him to experience supreme happiness (*haṭṭatutṭhacittam ānaṃdiye paramasomanasse*), and he requested permission to express his profound devotion by displaying his magnificence and thirty-two dance-dramas: "Out of devotion to you, Blessed One, I truly (*naṃ*) desire to demonstrate my supreme opulence, supreme splendor, supreme preeminence, and supreme thirty-two theatrical dance-dramas to Goyama and other monks and ascetics."⁸⁵ Mahāvīra did not acknowledge (*no āḍhāti*) Sūriyābha's appeal but ignored (*no pariyāṇati*) it and remained silent (*tusiṇīe saṃciṭṭhati*).⁸⁶ Mahāvīra's silence marked a change from his initial favorable disposition, when he engaged in conversation with Sūriyābha and the other gods, explicitly condoned Sūriyābha's conduct, finding it to be in conformity with the old custom, preached a religious sermon, and answered the god's questions about his future birth. However, once Sūriyābha expressed his desire to worship Mahāvīra and the monks with his thirty-two dramatic dances, the Jina exhibited no interest in that, perhaps reminding the god that he had withdrawn from this world and transcended the emotional receptivity required to appreciate a performance. Having received no answer, the god implored him two more times but to no avail.

In his commentary, the twelfth-century exegete Malayagiri explains that the Jina's silence ensues from the fact that the Jina himself had conquered all desires and passions and, therefore, had no interest in watching a dance-drama, while monks were not supposed to see it, as it would ruin their religious practice (*svādhyāya*).⁸⁷ Malayagiri insinuates that the Jina's silence signified disapproval or, at the very least, did not imply consent. However, even without the commentator's help, we know that the verbal formula used to describe the Jina's reaction to the god's request indicated the Jina's refusal to give permission, because the same words occur in at least two more episodes in the text and unequivocally express refusal.

In one such episode King Paesi's minister Citta Sārahi asks the monk Kesi Kumārasamaṇa to come with him to his city Seyaviya, but Kesi remains silent (*no āḍhāi no pariyāṇāi tusiṇīe saṃciṭṭhai*). Then the minister asks him in the second and third time, and eventually the monk replies that he does not want to go to Seyaviya, because King Paesi, who is cruel and does not follow the dharma (*ahammie*), is in Seyaviya. The minister replies that the monk should not worry about Paesi, as there are other kings and rich men who will pay respect to him and serve him. Eventually Kesi promises to think about it.⁸⁸ The second episode occurs after King Paesi comes under the influence of the monk Kesi and begins to follow the right path. It is then his wife Sūriyakamṭā becomes dejected and resolves to kill Paesi. She first asks her son to murder the king with some weapon and take over the kingdom, but he remains silent (*no āḍhāi no pariyāṇāi tusiṇīe saṃciṭṭhai*) and does not do that. As a result, Sūriyakamṭā realizes that she must kill Paesi herself and successfully poisons him.⁸⁹

⁸¹ The standard Pali formula for the Buddha's silent assent is *adhivāsesi bhagavā tuṇhībhāvena*, "The Lord consented by remaining mute." Unlike this Buddhist formula, the *Rāyapaseṇiya* does not mention consent.

⁸² *Rāya* 17, p. 239.

⁸³ *Rāya* 18, p. 240; cf. *Rāya* 9, p. 216.

⁸⁴ *Rāya* 20, p. 240.

⁸⁵ *Rāya* 22, p. 242: *taṃ icchāmi naṃ devānuppiyāṇaṃ bhattipuvvagaṃ goyamātiyāṇaṃ samanāṇaṃ niggamthāṇaṃ divvaṃ deviddhiṃ divvaṃ devajuiṃ divvaṃ devānubhāvaṃ divvaṃ battisatibaddhaṃ naṭṭavihiṃ uvadaṃsittae*.

⁸⁶ *Rāya* 23, p. 243.

⁸⁷ *Vṛtti* to *Rāya* 23, p. 245: *svate vītarāgatvād gautamādīnāṃ ca nāṭyavidheḥ svādhyāyādivighātākāritvāt* |.

⁸⁸ *Rāya* 56, p. 326.

⁸⁹ *Rāya* 80, p. 346.

These two examples do not leave us any doubt that this verbal formula denotes disapproval and refusal,⁹⁰ and it is, therefore, safe to say that Mahāvīra did not give his consent to Sūriyābha to stage his thirty-two dance-dramas. But this did not stop the god; rather, he is said to have realized the following truth through his mature intellect (*pāriṇāmikī buddhi*): “It’s only silence that befits the Lord [in this situation], and speaking does not. But I still have to express my devotion (*bhatti*).”⁹¹ Having said that, Sūriyābha stretched out his right arm and one hundred and eight identical, brilliantly decorated young gods, poised to dance, came out of it. He then stretched his left arm and one hundred and eight identical, illustriously decorated young goddesses, ready to dance, appeared from it.⁹² Next, he generated musicians and musical instruments out of his own transformative body via the technique of transformation. Thereafter, Sūriyābha set out to create anew, through his transformative body, a colossal theater space.

Mahāvīra’s silence reflects a deep-seated ambivalence towards theater that is later articulated in the commentary of Malayagiri. Sūriyābha’s realization that, notwithstanding the Jina’s lack of interest in this performance, he still needs to express his devotion points to what devotional worship is really about. The god’s performance satisfies two functions of the celestial rebirth: to generate pleasurable and aesthetically pleasing experiences and to venerate and worship the Jina. The thirty-two dance-dramas of Sūriyābha represent one of his defining characteristics, along with the supreme opulence, splendor, and preeminence, which are nearly always listed together. The staging of the performance can, therefore, be understood as the manifestation of the god’s natural predispositions. We now turn to Sūriyābha’s performance itself.

6. Pleasure and Devotion: The Thirty-Two Dance Dramas

While Mahāvīra’s reaction stresses the tension between the ideology of liberation and worldly well-being, we will see that, on closer inspection, the tension gets resolved through the structure of Sūriyābha’s performance, which embodies the god’s and the audience’s journey from relishing sensual pleasures to aesthetically experiencing Mahāvīra’s life-story at the end, with the re-enactment of Mahāvīra’s biography being a journey in itself from worldly existence to renunciation and liberation. This re-enactment, however, was not confined to the Jina’s five auspicious events; for instance, his youth and enjoyment of sex were also part of the performance. The structuring of the performance strictly around the five auspicious events may have originated in Haribhadra’s injunction to emulate the gods in their devotion to the Jina on the days commemorating the auspicious events (*Pañcāśakaprakaraṇa* vv. 9.30–7). I will return to Haribhadra’s intervention in the conclusion.

All of the god’s creations—the theater, the paraphernalia, and the performers—embody fragments of the god’s being that come into contact with foreign substances, i.e., material particles of another. From this vantage point, the celestials and their dramatic performances present the many guises of Sūriyābha himself, where guises should be understood in the sense of the expanded internal self, joined with the material from outside (*bāhiraḥ poggale*).⁹³ Sūriyābha’s theatrical creation embodies an encounter of his inner reality—his soul—with the external world. The three celestial properties—supreme opulence, supreme splendor, supreme preeminence—indicate the phenomenal ability of celestials to fragment

⁹⁰ These episodes can be multiplied by examples from other canonical texts. As such, in *Bhagavaī* 161 (p. 175) we find a story where *asurakumāra* gods and goddesses worship the ascetic Tāmali and ask him three times to be reborn in their Balicañca kingdom, but he does not give any response. Upon the termination of his lifespan, Tāmali does not get reborn in the Balicañca kingdom as their Indra but becomes the Indra of Īśāna. Tāmali’s silence therefore is not an indication of consent.

⁹¹ *Vṛtti* to *Rāya* 23, p. 245: *tataḥ pāriṇāmikyā buddhyā tattvam avagamyā maunam eva bhagavata ucitaṃ na punaḥ kim api vaktuṃ, kevalaṃ mayā bhaktir ātmīyopadarśanīyete* |

⁹² *Rāya* 23, p. 243.

⁹³ In *Bhagavaī* 189ff. (p. 200ff.) we read that an accomplished ascetic cannot turn into other beings, objects, or perform supernatural activities (jumping over a mountain) without employing external matter (*bāhiraḥ poggale aparīyāṭṭā*); they can do so only by using external matter. The commentary glosses “external matter” as “*vaikriya* matter that is different from the gross, physical body” (*audārikaśarīravatiriktān vaikriyān*). Likewise, an ascetic cannot enter a form of another being by magic (*abhijumjittae*) without employing external matter (*bāhiraḥ poggale*).

and externalize their innerness in order to absorb a foreign material reality, which results in a new creation like the marvelous spectacle of the dance-dramas.⁹⁴

Sūriyābha recognizes that the worship of the Jina brings about great fruit (*mahāphala*).⁹⁵ While the objective of this grand spectacle was to convey the measure of the god's devotion for the Jina and Jain ascetics and gain merit, this show also had a considerable aesthetic value as a source of intense pleasure. As the text reads, everything—the singing, the music, and the dance—was supreme (*divyaṃ nāma pradhānam*), captivating (*maṇahara*), and filled with erotic (*śiṃgāra*) sentiment, so much so that the audience became agitated and started cheering:

This way, supreme singing, instrumental music, and dance-drama (*naṭṭe*) were invoking an erotic aesthetic emotion. They were lofty and magnificent (*urāle maṇunne*). The lovely singing, dance-drama, and instrumental music were stirring (*uppiṇṇalabhūe*) and accompanied by jubilant shouts of approval (*kahakahabhūe*), as gods and goddesses engaged in lovely sports.⁹⁶

The charming and erotic nature of the performance evoked an emotive response in the monks, as they lost control over their sense organs and were shouting and cheering (*kahakaha*). In light of such dangerous effects of the dramatic dance, Mahāvīra's silent treatment of Sūriyābha's proposal can be interpreted as a gesture of compassionate benevolence. The plays and dances integrated in the worship of the Jina and mendicants can be seen as powerful devotional components of lay practice: as such important and meritorious techniques of the worship, they are presented as being reluctantly tolerated by the Jina.

This episode indicates that the ritualized devotional expression of the gods is not distinguished from aesthetic gratification and sensual pleasure, which presents a key complication in the Sūriyābha case. We have seen that Jain mendicants were prohibited from watching and participating in any entertainments, including singing, dancing, and plays, at least from the time of the earliest Śvetāmbara canonical texts, the *Āyāraṃga* and *Sūyagadaṃga*. Moreover, in the Sūriyābha episode itself we read that this spectacle stirred the emotions of the mendicant audience through its aesthetic properties. While the Jina refused to give Sūriyābha permission for staging his grandiose show for Goyama and other monks, the god still went ahead with it, perhaps because gods cannot renounce the world and their primary way of generating merit is through the veneration of the Jinas and ascetics. The pleasurable component did not produce an impediment to the efficacy of Sūriyābha's devotional expression.

Sūriyābha's spectacle is transformed into a religious act by his own intentionality grounded in the sentiment of devotion (*bhatti*) and by the ritualistic preparation that consisted in marking off an area, cleaning and decorating the space around the Jina, producing the celestial dancers, and other preliminary actions. Moreover, the thirty second dance-drama of the god's performance, the re-enactment of Mahāvīra's biography, is an emulation of his path to liberation. If gods are ontologically incapable of asceticism and liberation, they can at least live through his experiences in the drama.

We have seen that Sūriyābha employs the technique of transformation, expounded above, as a means to level and polish the land, build a theater, and conjure up the seating area with a throne. Once finished, the god produced one hundred and eight identical charming young gods and one hundred and eight identical charming young goddesses out of his right and left arms respectively, who were dressed up and ready for a performance (*naṭṭasajja*).⁹⁷ Next, Sūriyābha generated forty-nine types of

⁹⁴ This interpretation is inspired and informed by David Shulman's conceptualizations of innerness, guising, and the external; see, for instance, (Shulman 2012, 2006, 1994).

⁹⁵ *Rāya* 6, p. 212.

⁹⁶ *Rāya* 23, p. 244: *tae naṃ se divve gīe divve naṭṭe divve vāie evaṃ abbhue śiṃgāre urāle maṇunne manahare gīe manahare naṭṭe manahare vatīe uppiṇṇalabhūe kahakahabhūe divve devaramaṇe pavatate yā vi hotthā* [Malayagiri (p. 249) appears to be slightly uncomfortable with the most common meaning of *śiṃgāra* as erotic and suggests that, in addition to that, it could also be understood as simply "ornamented or beautiful" (*alaṅkṛtam*). My translation here follows the commentary.

⁹⁷ *Rāya* 23, pp. 243–44.

musical instruments and musicians, each type being one hundred and eight in number. The god then commanded the celestial performers he created in the following way:

Blessed Ones! Go to Lord Mahāvīra, circumambulate him three times, worship, and bow down to him, and then demonstrate your supreme opulence, supreme splendor, supreme preeminence, and supreme thirty-two types of dramas to Goyama and other Jain monks. Thereafter, immediately come back and report [to me].⁹⁸

Sūriyābha ordered the performers to pay respect to the Jina and present the spectacle to him and the monks. Having received the instructions, young gods and goddesses joyfully set out to carry them out. Upon worshipping the Jina, they picked up their musical instruments and began to play, sing, and dance together, and the entire theater resounded with the sweet echo of the music.⁹⁹ This musical preamble was followed by the thirty-two dance-dramas themselves.

While the titles and brief descriptions of certain dance-dramas indicate the general character of their performance, others remain obscure. They had already been obscured by the time Malayagiri (twelfth century) was composing his commentary on this text. Malayagiri does not provide a gloss of them and states that the meaning and explanation of these dance-dramas are impossible to reconstruct, but that they are included in the *Nāḍayavihipāhuḍa* (*Nāṭyavidhiprābhṛta*), an earlier Jain text on poetics that is no longer extant.¹⁰⁰

The *Rāyapaseṇiya* relates that the gods and goddesses began by performing the eight auspicious objects that decorate the gateways that framed the staircases to the floating chariot of Sūriyābha: a *svastika*, a *śrīvatsa* mark, a *nandikāvarta* diagram, a powder box, a holy seat, a holy pot, a pair of fish, and a mirror.¹⁰¹ This opening presumably served as a technique of protecting the performance from any potential obstacles. Next, the gods and goddesses danced a circle and back, one line and multiple lines, a *svastika*, a type of a planet (*sovattiya*), another type of a planet (*pāsamāṇava*, or *pūsamāṇaga*), a powder box, a fish egg, a sea animal egg, old age (*jāra*), death (*māra*), a flower garland, a lotus leaf, an ocean, a wave, a spring creeper, and a lotus creeper.¹⁰² The third dance consisted in dancing a deer, bull, horse, man, sea animal (*magara*), bird, serpent, celestial musician, an antelope, a mythical beast (*sarabha*), yak (*camara*), an elephant, a forest creeper, and lotus creeper. This is the same list of beings and plants that were painted, as we have seen, to adorn Sūriyābha's floating chariot, the gateways leading to it, and the theater. The recurrence of this stock element of design, common for descriptions in Jain texts, as a type of dance-drama indicates a close imaginative association between the elements of architecture, decoration, painting, and performance.

The gods and goddesses also performed creepers (dance no. 21), the moon and sun in different states (5–9), *maṇḍalas* (10), oceans and cities (12), the Nanda lotus pond and the city of Campā (13), letters (15), sprouts of trees (20), fast and slow movements (22, 23, 24), movements of animals (11), dances involving bending and loud noises (25, 26, 27), and physical expressions of emotional states (31). Thereafter, the gods and goddesses engaged in lovely sports (*devaramaṇe pavatte*). One sequence of dance-dramas appears twice in the spectacle: a fish egg, a sea animal egg, old age, and death (2, 14). It first takes place as part of a longer series at the beginning (2) and recurs as a separate title around the middle (14). This dance-drama limns a picture of the life cycle from its inception in the egg to decay to dissolution.¹⁰³ In the final dance-drama, the performers enacted Mahāvīra's past

⁹⁸ *Rāya* 23, p. 244: *gacchaha ṇaṃ tubbhe devāṇuppiya samaṇaṃ bhagavaṃ mahāvīraṃ tikkhutto āyāhiṇapayāhiṇaṃ kareha karittā vaṇḍaha namaṃsaha vaṇḍitta namaṃsitaṭā goyamāyāṇaṃ samāṇaṇaṃ niggamthāṇaṃ taṃ divvaṃ deveḍḍhiṃ divvaṃ devajutim divvaṃ divvānubhāvaṃ divvaṃ battisaibadhaṃ naṭṭhavihiṃ uvadaṃseha uvadaṃsittā khippāṃ eva eyaṃ āṇattiyaṃ paccappiṇaha |.*

⁹⁹ *Rāya* 23, p. 244.

¹⁰⁰ *Rāya* 23, p. 250.

¹⁰¹ *Rāya* 23ff., p. 244ff.

¹⁰² *Rāya* 24ff., p. 250.

¹⁰³ The terms *jāra* and *māra* also denote certain jewel marks and therefore can signify jewels themselves; *Illustrated Rai-Paseniyā* (*Raj-Prashniya*) Sutra, p. 88.

births, conception, transfer of the fetus, birth, birth celebrations, childhood, youth, enjoyment of sex, renunciation, penance, attainment of omniscience, institution of the four-fold religious community, liberation, and end of life (32).

While the precise character of these dances is unknown, many of them appear to be mimetic where an animal's behavior or the planets' movement is imitated. The largely evocative titles and concise descriptions of the performances convey their themes and implied meanings, such as natural processes, living beings, planets, oceans, letters, etc., which together recreate the diversity, complexity, and allure of this world. The glorious dramatic dance, presented by Sūriyābha in the multifold form of spectacular young gods and goddesses, sketches the world, which, although magnificent and rich, will be eventually renounced and abandoned by Mahāvīra in the final part of the performance. Sūriyābha's dance-drama, therefore, embodies a journey, through which the audience travels a long way from relishing erotic aesthetic emotion at the outset to experiencing Mahāvīra's emancipation from the cycle of rebirth at the end. The final play about Mahāvīra also takes the audience on a trip that begins with a descent into the human realm, continues with a life filled with sensual pleasures, and ends with the final renunciation. It is the god Sūriyābha himself, having embodied the celestials produced out of his right and left arms, undergoes this transformative experience. First, Sūriyābha's expanded self manifests in the phenomena and objects of this world and, thereafter, takes the guise of the very Jina Mahāvīra to arrive at the ultimate point of release from this world in a play.

Upon completing the dance-dramas, the gods and goddesses played four types of musical instruments: stringed instruments (*tata: vīṇā* etc.), percussion instruments (*vitata: drums*, etc.), metallic instruments (*ghana: cymbals, bells, gongs*, etc.), and wind instruments (*suṣira: flutes, conch shell*, etc.). Next, they sang four types of songs, performed four dancing styles, and displayed four acting modes.¹⁰⁴ Having performed this magnificent show that exhibited their supreme opulence, splendor, and preeminence, the performing gods and goddesses circumambulated Mahāvīra three times, honored and worshiped him, and then went back to their creator-god Sūriyābha.¹⁰⁵ Having worshiped Sūriyābha with folded hands, they reported the completion of his order.¹⁰⁶ On ascertaining the successful accomplishment of his undertaking, the god retracted his performers, supreme opulence, splendor, and preeminence back into himself and became one again.¹⁰⁷

Once Sūriyābha left, Goyama asked Lord Mahāvīra:

My Lord, where did all that supreme opulence, splendor, and preeminence of the god Sūriyābha disappear to? Where did all of that go?¹⁰⁸

Mahāvīra replied:

Goyama, [all of that] disappeared to [Sūriyābha's] body, [all of that] went into [Sūriyābha's] body.¹⁰⁹

To illustrate this statement, Mahāvīra painted a verbal picture of a well-designed house, sheltered from the winds (*ñivāyagambhīrā*), with a closed door (*guttaduvārā*). A large group of people was staying nearby. All of a sudden, the people spotted clouds gathering in the sky, rainy clouds or a storm moving in their direction, so they entered the house. In the same way, Mahāvīra concluded, the divine spectacle entered Sūriyābha's body. Sūriyābha conjured up a glorious spectacle that recreated the beauty of the world, displayed Mahāvīra's detachment from it, and swiftly dissolved back into the god's body.

¹⁰⁴ *Rāya* 24, p. 253.

¹⁰⁵ *Rāya* 24, p. 251.

¹⁰⁶ *Rāya* 26, p. 253.

¹⁰⁷ *Rāya* 25, p. 253: *tae ṇaṃ se sūriyābhe deve divvaṃ deviddhiṃ divvaṃ devajuiṃ divvaṃ devāṇubhāvaṃ paḍisāharai, paḍisāharetā khaṇeṇaṃ jāte ege egabhūe |*.

¹⁰⁸ *Rāya* 26, p. 253: *sūriyābhassa ṇaṃ bhaṃte devassa eṣā divvā deviddhī divvā devajuttī divve devāṇubhāve kaḥiṃ gate kaḥiṃ anuppaviṭṭhe |*.

¹⁰⁹ *Rāya* 26, p. 253: *goyama sarīraṃ gate sarīraṃ aṇuppaviṭṭhe |*.

Kulkarni (Kulkarni [1962–1968] 2005, p. 21) observes that the phenomenon of an abrupt ontological change often becomes the cause of detachment (*vairāgya*) in Jain Śvetāmbara literature. For instance, Ajitasvāmī attained detachment on seeing the lotuses rapidly wither, and Muni Suvrata came to that state on noticing the clouds disappearing in the fall. In the Sūriyābha episode, we find an analogous motif in Mahāvīra's illustration: a huge gathering of people near the house is a strong presence before they all of a sudden completely vanish into the house, just as the celestial dancers of Sūriyābha one moment perform a grandiose spectacle and another moment disappear in his body. Thus, the ending of the god's performance is an indication of its additional potential meaning: the profound truth of impermanence, believed to evoke detachment and renunciation in the Jain tradition.

7. Conclusions

As the discussion above demonstrates, the Sūriyābha episode, which comprises the earliest detailed account of a drama based on the Jina's biography, features a magnificent spectacle that combines pleasurable, ritually efficacious, and devotional elements. Prior to his travel to Jambūdvīpa, Sūriyābha had realized that even merely thinking of Mahāvīra would entail great fruit (*mahāphala*); hence, worshipping and serving him in person would surely bring about great benefit.¹¹⁰ Sūriyābha's worship of the Jina had the specific goal of accumulating merit. His spectacle also endorsed artistic expression and pleasurable experience as a worthwhile practice and created a model ritual for laypeople who even today assume the identities of gods and goddesses during their worship and re-enact the life of Mahāvīra. I propose, therefore, that the significance of the aesthetic element in devotional performance for laypeople stems from their temporary transformation into celestial beings. Since deities are born to be the paradigmatic enjoyers (*bhoktr*) of sensual pleasures, their lives are filled with continual gratification of desires. As such, the pleasurable experiences of laypeople are crucial for their effective ritual transformation into gods and goddesses, whose other key ontic function is to worship and serve the Jina.

We learn about the connection between aesthetic pleasure and the accretion of merit from other literary examples. For instance, in a tale about King Dasaṇṇa (Daśārṇa), included in a ninth-century Prakrit collection of stories about the twenty-four Jain great men, called the *Caupaṇṇamahāpurīṣacariya* and composed by the monk Śīlāṅkasūri, we find that humans, even those as powerful as kings, fall short in their attempts to match and recreate the grandiosity and beauty of the gods' worship. As a result, humans lose to gods in the production of merit. It is this realization of inevitable inferiority that compels King Dasaṇṇa to renounce the world and become a monk, thereby ultimately defeating the god Indra in the amount of merit he generates. In this story, the greater opulence and pleasure result in greater merit but transcending them generates even more merit and promises a more pleasurable outcome, that is the highest bliss of liberation. The Dasaṇṇa tale shows that the efficacy of worship is contingent upon the scale of aesthetic grandeur it generates and, therefore, encourages devotees to celebrate the Jina in the most splendid ways.

Moreover, the Jain famous pandit and polymath Hemacandra (c. 1088–1172) suggests that wealth needs to be channeled to the right cause in order to follow the Jain righteous path. It is the responsibility of a wealthy layperson to augment the glory of Jainism by building new temples and having plays and dances performed in them in the presence of Jain devotees.¹¹¹ Thus, the celebrated Jain patron and minister Vastupāla, who lived in the thirteenth century in Gujarat, is said to have worshiped the image of the Jina Ādinātha on Mt. Śatruñjaya by arranging a dance, during which "the earth was

¹¹⁰ *Rāya* 6, p. 212.

¹¹¹ *Yogaśāstra* 3.78–80: *gītanṛttanāṭakādīnirīkṣaṇam* [...] *pariharet pramādācaraṇam sudhīḥ* || A wise person should renounce such careless acts as [...] musical shows, dance, and dramas. *Yogaśāstra* 3.120: *yaḥ śadbāhyam anityam ca kṣetreṣu na dhanam vapet* | *katham varākaś cāritram duścaraṇ sa samācaret* || "He, wretched thing, who possesses wealth that is external to what is real and fleeting, but doesn't sow it in the right field, will not be able to abide by the right conduct that's difficult to observe." See Hemacandra's autocommentary (*svopajñā*) where he understands "the right field" to denote the construction of temples and organizing dance-dramas in them (p. 586).

littered with jewels that fell from the jeweled necklaces of the dancing girls as they bounced against their breasts.”¹¹² The dance was accompanied by drums and lasted for the whole night.¹¹³

Dance as a mode of worship is ubiquitous in Indic traditions. For instance, [Granoff \(1998\)](#) discusses the *Prabhāsamāhātmya* that is included in the *Skandapurāṇa*, where chapter thirty features a conversation between Śiva and Pārvatī, in which Pārvatī asks Śiva about the acts of a pilgrim. Śiva describes the temple rituals a pilgrim should perform for the image of Someśvara. The ritual includes song, music, and a theatrical performance. Devotional dance and drama (*līlā*) are well known components of the Hindu bhakti traditions and indicate a method of getting closer to divinity by re-creating, through performance, the original time and place of the god. The re-enactment of the Jina’s life resembles, to a certain extent, later devotional plays, *līlās*, in which the participants personify the god Kṛṣṇa and his devotees (*vrajaloka* or *gopīs*, “shepherdesses”) in a staged drama in order to enter the mythical and eternal Vraja-līlā, the cosmic play of the god.¹¹⁴ In esoteric Buddhism, too, an offering of dance is not an unusual occurrence.¹¹⁵ From medieval to modern times, Jain laypeople participated in this larger ritual culture. The *Rāyapaseṇiya* episode and the other examples demonstrate that in Jainism, too, aesthetically pleasing dance-drama has been seen as an offering for the Jina and monks from the early centuries of the common era, and the *Sūriyābha* episode may be our earliest evidence of a dramatic performance based on the Jina’s biography as part of devotion. We have seen that the *Rāyapaseṇiya* is an earlier text than the *Nāyādhammakahāo*, *Bhagavaī*, or *Jaṇbuddhāvapannati*, since all of them explicitly and implicitly (through *jāva*) refer to the *Rāyapaseṇiya*. This points to a considerable resonance the *Sūriyābha* story generated for the theoretical foundation of image-worshipping and devotional practices, in which aesthetic dance-drama and the re-enactment of the Jina’s biography occupied the central roles.¹¹⁶ However, because, as we have seen, Mahāvīra, in fact, did not approve of *Sūriyābha*’s performance, and because it does not sit well with some of the theoretical presuppositions mentioned above, at different points of time Jain mendicants attempted to regulate and curtail the role of pleasure in the temple ritual.

The earliest such endeavor appears to come from the Jain scholar Haribhadra, who divides drama into dharmic or edifying (*dhammiya*) and non-dharmic and prescribes singing the kind of songs and playing the kind of music that evoke thoughts about the right dharma, not those that make one laugh.¹¹⁷ He states that laypeople must decorate themselves¹¹⁸ and perform these dharmic dramas at the celebration of the Jinās’ five auspicious events (*kallāṇa*)—the conception, birth, renunciation, omniscience, and liberation—and other festival occasions (*yātrā*) in imitation of Indra and other gods (*devīmādīanugiti*).¹¹⁹ Haribhadra limited the range of permissible aesthetic practices in the temple to only edifying dramas and appropriate songs and music that involve the praising of the Jina and evoke a desire to renounce the world (*saṃvega*).¹²⁰ We have seen that the god *Sūriyābha*’s performance was not confined to the re-enactment of the Jina’s biography (which in itself contained, for instance, the

¹¹² See Bālaçandra’s *Vasantavilāsamahākāvya*, a thirteenth-century court epic: *prekṣaṇakṣaṇam atho vicakṣaṇas tīrthabhartur ayam agrato vyadhāt | narttakikucataṭatruṭanmaṇisragmaṇiprakarapuñjitāvani || Vasantavilāsa 10.84* This wise man (Vastupāla) arranged a delightful dance in front of the Lord of that sacred place (Ādinātha), whereby the earth was littered with jewels that fell from the jeweled necklaces of the dancing girls as they bounced against their breasts.

¹¹³ *Vasantavilāsa* 10.85.

¹¹⁴ See ([Haberman 1988](#), 61ff). See also ([Kinsley 1979](#), 56ff).

¹¹⁵ It appears, for instance, in the *Vajrasekharasūtra*, see [Giebel \(2001, 56ff.\)](#) and [Shinohara \(2014, pp. 187–89\)](#). I thank Koichi Shinohara for pointing this out to me.

¹¹⁶ The practice of performing the Jina’s biography by gods is also mentioned in a Digambara text called the *Jambūdivapannati-saṃgaha* (*Jambūdivapaprajñapti-saṅgraha*) (c. early eleventh century) in the context of the Jina’s birth celebration (4.219f.).

¹¹⁷ *Pañcāśakaparakaraṇa* 9.11, 9.9. For a recent interpretation of verse 9.11, see ([Chojnacki and Leclère 2012](#), p. 168f). The dating of the *Pañcāśakaparakaraṇa* is contested. Most recently, [Gough \(2017, p. 272, n. 19\)](#) questioned Williams’ (1965) attribution of the *Pañcāśakaparakaraṇa* to sixth century Haribhadra Virahāṅka and suggested that it was likely authored by Haribhadra Yākinīputra who has been dated to the eighth century. See also ([Kawasaki 2017](#), p. 2, n. 10).

¹¹⁸ *Pañcāśakaparakaraṇa* 9.8, 9.29.

¹¹⁹ *Pañcāśakaparakaraṇa* 9.30–7.

¹²⁰ *Pañcāśakaparakaraṇa* 9.10.

episode of the enjoyment of sex) but included a variety of aesthetically pleasing elements that generated erotic emotion even in the monks. Haribhadra's classification of drama into dharmic and non-dharmic appears to be the first attempt to regulate devotional practices for laypeople in the temple. Later, in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries, the Kharatara monks continued speaking against the performance of dance-dramas in temples. They built upon Haribhadra's remarks in order to establish and promote their emerging religious tradition by encouraging devotees to construct new, "correct" (*vidhi*) temples, free from the defiling, pleasurable activities.¹²¹ It appears, however, that the proscription of aesthetic theater was not always followed in the actual practices of Jain laypeople.

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