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 Rāyapaseniyasutta, 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 (bhokṣyas) 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 (nr̥ita, nātya) cannot be effectively separated from the other two aspects of what is collectively called saṅgīta: song (gīta) and instrumental music (vādyya).

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. The paradoxical nature of performance manifests in at least two ways. First, the Jina is not there to enjoy the performance, as after liberation Jinas 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 Jina 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. 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. 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 vina, wind instruments tīrīya, the cymbals, and the kettledrum patāha.” Upon seeing a person like that, wicked people (anāriya) say: “This man is a god”, but wise people (āriya) proclaim: “This man commits cruel acts.” People who engage in such pleasures do not follow the Jain dharma (adhammapakkha). Another early canonical text, the Pīṇḍanījyuti, implies,

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1. For a recent study of dancing and playing musical instruments during mendicants’ (and householders’) funeral rites as meritorious (punya) “symbolic performances”, see (Flügel 2017). For a study of devotional songs, sung by Jain laywomen in contemporary India, see (Keling 2001). Having centered her fieldwork in the Śvetāmbara community in Pune, Maharashtra, Keling demonstrated that women participated in the composition and singing of stavaṁ (“devotional songs”) as a way of self-identification. The genre of stavaṁ, Keling propounds, is not static but ever-changing: laywomen compose new stavaṁs 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. Sāvyagadanga 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 Āṣṭānga, Sāvyagadanga, and Uttarajjhayana; see (Schubring [1962] 2003, p. 81).

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

5. Sāvyagadanga 664, p. 359: tām eva pāśīttā aṇṇirīṇa vaṇṇantī deve khalu āyam purīsre |

6. Sāvyagadanga 664, p. 351: aṇṇirīṇa vaṇṇantī abhikamantākramakam khala āyam purīsre |

7. For more examples, see, for instance, the Uṅvāsaṅgadās. Uṅvāsaṅgadās 1.48 relates that when the layman Ānanda resolved to take the twelve lay vows, a monk enjoined him, among other things, to avoid excessive desire and sensual pleasures (kāmabhōgā śīvālaṁhilaṁ); the commentary glosses kāma as pleasure from hearing (śākda) and seeing beauty (rīpa) and bhoga as the sensual enjoyment of smell, taste, and touch (gandharasaparśas teṣa śīvālaṁhilaṁ).
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 moksα, 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 puṇya 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 moksa-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 Rāyapaśeniyasutta,\(^11\) 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. *Pīndanijjātī* 474–80, pp. 71–72. As an illustration concerning the prohibition against obtaining alms by cheating, the *Pīndanijjātī* relates a tale in which the monk Asādabhūti (Asādhabhūti) 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, Asādabhūti finds his wives intoxicated and asleep and becomes disgusted. He then produces a play called Rattīhapsa (Rāstraṇī) about the great king Bharata who attained omniscience. When this play is staged, five hundred ksatriyas renounce the world. Eventually the play gets burnt. But see also (Laidlaw 1995) on the relationship between wealth and merit.

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

10. Throughout the article I use the Diparatnasāgara edition of the Rāyapaśeniya, unless stated otherwise.

11. *Āṣṭāṅkha* 504 (p. 425) prohibits mendicants from going to festivals (mahāśace) and other places where dancing, staging dramas, and playing musical instruments occur. *Panṭhāvāgaranāi* 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. *Panṭhāvāgaranāi* 45 (p. 511) enjoins those who took a vow of non-possession to avoid even thinking of dancers and actors (nadhānattāga). Uttarāṣṭaṇa 422 (p. 327) through the monk Cita invites one to renounce dance-drama and singing, along with ornaments and pleasures (kāma), as they cause pain (duḥkha).
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 Ṛayapaseninya, composed in the first half of the first millennium, tells the story of the god Śūriyābha, who travels to Jambūdvīpa in order to pay homage to the twenty-fourth Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra and worship him with his thirty-two dance-dramas, performed by gods and goddesses produced out of his own body. The Ṛayapaseninya includes detailed accounts of gods venerating the images of the Jina. It relates that there was a spacious Jain temple (siddhāyatan), which housed one hundred and eight life-sized Jina images. The temple itself was in the main assembly hall, the Sudharmā Sabhā, inside the main mansion (miḻappāsīya) in the marvelous floating palace-world of this god, the Śūriyābha Viṃāna. One day, the god Śūriyābha began to think about his next birth and what worthy acts he might perform in this life. Learning about the god’s ruminations, the sāmāṇya gods revealed to Śūriyābha 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 (mānavaca ceke khambhe). This practice, they added, would bring about wellbeing, happiness, forbearance, and success (hiya, suha, khāmā, nissesā). Following this advice, the god came to the temple and worshiped the Jina images with water, sandalwood paste, flowers, and incense.

The temple, as the Ṛayapaseninya relates, housed four theater halls (pecchāṭharaṇamanḍapa) in four cardinal directions, which, along with other temple spaces, Śūriyābha visited, cleaned, and decorated. 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. 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. As Cort (2002a, p. 69; 2010, p. 49) notes, the Ṛayapaseninya is one of the two canonical texts commonly referenced by Śvetāmbara Mūrtipūjaka

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

14 Rāja 22ff., p. 242ff.

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

16 Rāja 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 Rāja 41, p. 299.

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

20 Rāja 44, p. 308. For instance, Thānanga 327 (p. 249), the third anīga 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 (ākūṭalokaḥ) as “they are known to be comprised of seats for the fans of performances” (prekṣākūṭarudásabhaḥ pratīkā eva).

21 Cort (2010, p. 49) briefly discusses Śūriyābha’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 Nāyādharmakkahāo, the sixth aṅga of the Śvetāmbara canon.

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. 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 Jinas by the gods to be ancient (porata), well done (aṇīna), and appropriate (karanijja). 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 Bhagavati, for instance, the lord of asuras Camara, the lord of Nāgas Nāgakumāra, the god Devarāja, and the god Indra of Śiṣṇa go to worship Mahāvīra with their supreme opulence, supreme splendor, supreme preeminence, and supreme thirty-two dance-dramas, “as recounted in the Rāyapaseṇiya.” The god Gamgadatta, too, addresses Mahāvīra with a request to express his devotion (bhāttipurovagam) by demonstrating his supreme opulence, splendor, preeminence, and thirty-two dance-dramas. Just as in the Sūriyābha episode, Gamgadatta 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.

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. 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 Nāyādharmakkahāo. 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. 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 Jambudvīpa, 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.

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

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23 On the Nāyādharmakkahāo, see (Schurbing 1978). The Rāyapaseṇiya is mentioned in a twentieth century Gujarati play called the Dhuṇḍhak Mat Kuanāṇ (“Refutation of the Iconoclast Śāhānakavast Doctrine”) (pp. 51, 57) and in Rājendraśūri’s Abhidhānaraṇāyendrakoṣa (pp. 1215–17) as evidence for the early existence of the image worshiping practice in Jainism.

24 Rāyapaseṇiya, 25.

25 Rāyapaseṇiya, 9, p. 216.

26 Bhagavati 152ff. (for the lord of asuras Camara); 155ff. (for the lord of Nāgas Nāgakumāra); 156ff., p. 169ff., (for the god Devarāja); and 160ff., p. 171ff., (for the god Indra of Śiṣṇa). The exegete Abhayadeva (17th to 16th, p. 173) glosses saṇcara rāyapaseṇīṣa (“as recounted in the Rāyapaseṇiya”) as tathāva ca rājapraśnāṇīṣa (“in regards to Indra of Śiṣṇa it must be narrated in the same way as in the episode about the god Sūriyābha in the Rājapraśnāṇīṣatri”). For a study of the Bhagavati, see (Deleu 1996).

27 Rāyas 23, p. 243; Bhagavati 675, p. 210ff.

28 Bhagavati 161ff., p. 175ff.

29 Nāyādharmakkahāo 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 Rāypadapeniya contains the Paesikahāniyaṁ, “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. 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 deviḍḍhit, divvā devajut, divvē devaṇubhāve). 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. Sūriyābha’s divine attributes of opulence, splendor, and preeminence were thus earned by the meritorious choices of his previous incarnation as Paesi.

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 deviḍḍhit), supreme splendor (divvā devajut), and supreme preeminence (divvē devaṇubhāve). These divine properties are often accompanied by a fourth attribute: the ability to perform thirty-two supreme dramatic dances (divve battiṣativihe nataviviḥ). 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 Bhāratavarsa in Jambudvīpa. 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 Jambudvīpa in order to worship Mahāvīra. 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 Thānaṅga 491–2 (p. 576), we read that human beings possess an internal karmic body (kammatae) and an external gross, or physical, body (orāle/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 Paesikahāniyaṁ, 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 Bhagavat 172.1, p. 182f.: 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 Bhagavat 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 Uttarajjhayanā (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.\textsuperscript{38} Although, like other living beings, gods, goddesses, and asuras possess an internal karmic body, their external body is that of transformation (bāhīrāḥ veuvviyā).\textsuperscript{39} All gods, except those from the uppermost regions of the universe, Gevijja and Anuttara, can shift shapes and adopt other, modified forms (uttoveuvviyām rūcam vikuvvai).\textsuperscript{40}

The technique of transformation (veuvviyāsamugghhāya) 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.\textsuperscript{41} In the episode of Camara, the lord of asuras, the commentator Abhayadeva offers a detailed account of Camara's transformations.\textsuperscript{42} Camara first expands his soul space units (pradeśāṃ vikṣipatī) by applying the technique of transformation and sheds forth a jeweled pillar (daṇḍā), which is numerous yojanas in length and whose thickness is equal to that of Camara's body (śartrabhālīya). This pillar is comprised of Camara's soul units and external matter (jīvaradesakarmapudgalasamūhā). 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.\textsuperscript{43} Next, Camara removes the gross material particles (ahābhāyare poggale) and transforms the subtle aspects of the physical elements (ahāsulhume poggale) to create new bodies and objects. For the omniscient ascetics (kevalajñānān), 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.\textsuperscript{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 and transform parts of themselves into other, often multiple, beings and objects in Jain texts.\textsuperscript{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:

\textsuperscript{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 (veuvviyā s.), but other beings do so only temporarily, while the body of transposition (dāhārā s.) merely applies to human beings and in special cases only” (p. 137).

\textsuperscript{39} (Schubring [1962] 2000, p. 138) notes that because gods' bodies of transformation are “built without attracting foreign particles of matter”, they are called bhavadhiharaṇīya. 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 Bhagavat 175, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{40} (Schubring [1962] 2000, p. 138).

\textsuperscript{41} On the accomplished (bhāviappā/bhāvitātmā) ascetics, see Bhagavat 184, p. 197. The commentary (vṛtti) glosses bhāviappā as sanyamatapoṣhyām evam vidiṣṇuṇān anugātraṇāṃ hi prthiṣo “vadhihītāḍādāhāṇo bhavanakkāḥ kṛtva bhāvitātmeyo 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 As An Illustrated Ardha-Māgadhī Dictionary denotes samohaya (equivalent to the Sanskrit sannava) as “extended”, “soul particles emanated from the body”, etc. (Ratnacandraji [1923] 1968).

\textsuperscript{42} Vṛtti to Bhagavat 152, p. 164.

\textsuperscript{43} Vṛtti to Rāya 8, p. 215: ucçaṭe iba ratnādighramānāṁ sārāṇātām-pratipadānāṁ tato radnādānāṁ iccāvi drastāyaṇam iti na kaścīto dūṣh, athavā advarīkā api taḥ gṛhitam santo vaikriyaṇaṅ pratipadānāmbī. “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 Bhagavat 152, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{44} See Panḍaravāsa 614, p. 306.

\textsuperscript{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 ābhujogika gods arrived at the Āmraśālavana shrine in the city of Āmalakalpa in Bharatavarsa in Jambudvīpa, 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 Jinas in the same manner,48 and they all accepted the gods’ worship (abhyanujñātam 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 Jinas 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 Nāṭyasastra, the space around the Jina had to be cleaned and measured prior to the construction of a theater.50 In the Nāṭyasastra, 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 Nāṭyasastra, in the Rāyapaseniya the ground for a theater was transformed into a pure and singular space, which is “fitting of the gods’ presence” (surarābhigamanā-jogam).52

46 Vṛtti to Bhagavata 152, p. 165: yathā yātrādīsū yuvatir yūno hasta labhe pratiḥaddha gacchati baludokaparīte deṣe, evam yāni rāpāni vikṣuruvatīnām tany ekasmi kartā pratiḥaddhiniyāthāṁ ca kaccaśya nabhīr eka baludhir arakaiḥ pratiḥaddhā ghanā nisichādāṁ, evam ātmasaṁapratiḥaddhair asuṇḍaco tarvair devaṁ gacchati iti.
47 Rāja 8, p. 214.
48 Vṛtti to Rāja 9, p. 216: cirantanaṇa api decauḥ kiṃ samadā cirantanaṇā tīrthākārānām pratiḥ tatpratīrthēḥ |
49 Rāja 9, p. 216.
50 saṃ same shirā tu kathinā kṛṣṇā gauri ca gā bhavet/abhūmīs tatra ca kartavyaḥ kartībhīr nītyamandapaḥ // NŚ 2.25 prathamam śodhanam lakyāt lāṅgalema samukhyet/arihīrīkāpāítica praṇeṣu lāṁgam ca śodhaṇaḥ // 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 Rāja 10, p. 217.
The Rayapasen. iya 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 (samvatata) that removed grass, wood, little rocks, and all things that were dirty (asui), filthy (acokha), foul (apūia), and smelly (dubbhigamdhā). 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. 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 Nātyaśāstra 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. Although in the Rayapasen. iya 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 Nātyaśāstra: 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 (kālaguru), 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.

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 (jāna). 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 (torana), 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.

There were eight auspicious symbols on the gateways: a svastika, a śrivatsa mark, a nandikāvarta diagram, a powder box (vardhamānaka), a holy seat (bhadrāsana), a holy pot (kalaśa), a fish pair (matsyayugala), and a mirror (darpana). Flags of different colors, umbrellas, lotuses, and other

53 Ray 10, p. 216. Also, Ray 7, p. 213: tanuṁ va pataṁ va kaṭhaṁ va sakkaṁ va asuṁ acokkhaṁ va pūiṁ dubbhigamdhāṁ savvam.
54 Ray 10, p. 216.
55 NS 2.69b-2.71ab.
56 Ray 10, pp. 216–17.
57 Ray 14, p. 222.
58 Ray 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 Rāypadasiṇiya 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 (pecchatgharamāndara) 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 sīkharā 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 gośīra.\(^{63}\) 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 (kālīgura), 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 ghatṭhā matṭhā nirayā nimmalā nippankā nīkkakadacchāya samirīya saujjya pāsaṁya darisajja abhirīcchā. For this passage, see Abhayadeva’s vr.tti to Uvāciya 4 (p. 76) and the Rāypadasiṇiyasuttam (edited by Becardās Jīvra Došī, 1994), page 19, line 5.

\(^{60}\) Rāya 15, p. 225: tassa divassa jān사이 eva-vañca t. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham.

\(^{61}\) The Diparapatasaagara edition of Rāya 15 (p. 231) contains an abridged version of the description: anega-khambhā-saṅga-samuccīthām abhuggaṇa-sukṣaṇa-vāra-vāra-torana-khuciya-uljala-bahuṃsasama-suvihaṇatā-desahā. I use here a more complete version from the Rāypadasiṇiyasuttam (edited by Becardās Jīvra Došī, 1994, p. 94). However, the Illustrated Rai-Paseniyasuttam (Rai-Praseniyah) Sutra edition (45, p. 47) offers an even more elaborate reading: anega-khambhā-saṅga-samuccīthām abhuggaṇa-sukṣaṇa-vāra-vāra-torana-vāra-raiye-sālābhamjīyakāyam susilīta-cīṣṭha-latthā-samjitā-pasattā-vaṇiṇā-khamā-khamā-maṇi-khuciya-uljala-bahuṃsasama-suvihaṇatā-desahā. Malayagiri glosses (stāpiṣṭa) as sīkharā.

\(^{62}\) In vr.tti to Rāya 15 (p. 232) Malayagiri glosses (stāpiṣṭa) as sīkharā.

\(^{63}\) In vr.tti to Uvāciya 4 (p. 76) and the Rāypadasiṇiyasuttam (edited by Becardās Jīvra Došī, 1994), page 19, line 5: accha san dhīthā matthā nirayā nimmalā nippankā nīkkakadacchāya sappabhā samirīya saujjya pāsaṁya darisajja abhirīcchā padarāvā | Rāya 15, p. 231: tae nām se abhipuṣṭe deve tassa divassatā jān사이 eva-vañca t. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham.

\(^{64}\) This is analogous to the description of the floating chariot in Rāya 10, p. 217.

\(^{65}\) See vr.tti to Uvāciya 4 (p. 76) and the Rāypadasiṇiyasuttam (edited by Becardās Jīvra Došī, 1994), page 19, line 5: accha san dhīthā matthā nirayā nimmalā nippankā nīkkakadacchāya sappabhā samirīya saujjya pāsaṁya darisajja abhirīcchā padarāvā | Rāya 15, p. 231: tae nām se abhipuṣṭe deve tassa divassatā jān사이 eva-vañca t. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham.

\(^{66}\) See vr.tti to Uvāciya 4 (p. 76) and the Rāypadasiṇiyasuttam (edited by Becardās Jīvra Došī, 1994), page 19, line 5: accha san dhīthā matthā nirayā nimmalā nippankā nīkkakadacchāya sappabhā samirīya saujjya pāsaṁya darisajja abhirīcchā padarāvā | Rāya 15, p. 231: tae nām se abhipuṣṭe deve tassa divassatā jān사이 eva-vañca t. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham. t. a-pad. a-ga-gham.
The canopy (ulloya) of this theater pavilion also featured paintings of a lotus creeper, etc. Next, the gods created a large sitting area (akkhādagga) 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.

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 (vimāna-bhavana) that Triśālā, the mother of the Jina Mahāvīra, saw in her twelfth dream, as recounted in the Kappasutta. 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 Āyāranga or the depiction of the chamber of Trīśālā in the Kappasutta. For instance, in the Āyāranga, through the technique of transformation, Indra creates the palanquin Camḍappabha 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. 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. It would seem there is hardly anything original about the theater structure as described in the Rāyapasenīya. 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.

A cloth of victory (vimāna-dibālīsa), made of white jewels, was spread over the throne. A diamond hook (ankusā) 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 sūmaṇīya gods of Śūriyābha in the north, north-east, and north-west from the throne; four thousand seats in the east for Śūriyābha’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 chief of his seven armies, and four thousand seats in each direction—eastern, southern, western, and northern—for his security gods (ayarakkhadeva). Once the construction of this majestic floating chariot was complete, the Rāyapasenīya continues, the god Śūriyābha along with his retinue, four wives, and two armies (anīya) of celestial singers and musicians (gandhavvā) 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

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67 Flügel 2015, p. 231: paumalayabhatticittam jāva. See vrīti to Uvavaīya 4 (p. 76).
68 Flügel 2015, p. 231. What is supplied comes from vrīti to Uvavaīya 4 (p. 76) and the Rāyapasenīyasuttam (edited by Becardās Jivrāj Doṣ, 1994), page 19, line 5.
69 Kappasutta 44, p. 30.
70 Āyāranga 754, pp. 382–83; Kappasutta 32, p. 32.
71 Cf. the account of the prince Meha’s palanquin in the Nāyādhammakāhā, mentioned in (Flügel 2015, p. 23).
72 For instance, see NŚ 2.72ff.
73 Rāya 15, p. 234.
facing east. The sāmāniya gods used the northern entrance and the remaining gods and goddesses entered through the southern stairs.  

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 Śūriyābha, 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 (nātyaveda), arranges the first dramatic performance, and takes the central position on the stage. 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. However, when it comes to Śūriyābha’s performance for the Jina, the roles are assigned differently. Śūriyābha 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 (nātyaveda), is related in the Nāṭyaśāstra. In it, people become possessed by desires and greed in the Tretā Age, while gods, asuras, celestial beings (gandharva), yaksas, and great serpents engulf Jambūdvīpa. In this circumstance, Indra approaches Brahmā and entreats: “We want entertainment (krtaṇītyaka) that can be both seen and heard.” 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 ( accidental or fameful (velaga) rasa. Although neither the Rāyapasiṇi nor the Anuogaddāra 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 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 Śūriyābha’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
acquiescence,” I will show that in the Rayapaseniya the Jina’s silence must be definitively understood as rejection.

Upon arrival at the Amrâslavana shrine, Sûriyabhâ went to worship Mahâvîra: “My Lord, I am god Sûriyabhâ and I bow down, worship, and serve you, the Blessed One.” In response, the Jina once again reaffirmed worship by the gods as an ancient and valid practice. Thereafter, Mahâvîra preached a sermon about dharma, which is not included in the Rayapaseniya but is fully given in the Uvavāya.

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 Sûriyabhâ, enabling him to experience supreme happiness (hattatutthacittam anänditvam 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 (nam) desire to demonstrate my supreme opulence, supreme splendor, supreme preeminence, and supreme thirty-two theatrical dance-dramas to Goyama and other monks and ascetics.” Mahâvîra did not acknowledge ( nø adhāti) Sûriyabhâ’s appeal but ignored ( nø paryāntati) it and remained silent ( tusinī samcitthati). Mahâvîra’s silence marked a change from his initial favorable disposition, when he engaged in conversation with Sûriyabhâ and the other gods, explicitly condoned Sûriyabhâ’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 Sûriyabhâ expressed his desire to worship Mahâvîra 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 imploded 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). 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 Sārahī asks the monk Kesi Kumarasamā to come with him to his city Seyaviya, but Kesi remains silent ( nø adhāti nø paryāntī tusinī samcitthāi). 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 (ahambhī), 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.

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 Sûriyakamā 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 ( nø adhāti nø paryāṇī tusinī samcitthāi) and does not do that. As a result, Sûriyakamā realizes that she must kill Paesi herself and successfully poisons him.

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81 The standard Pali formula for the Buddha’s silent assent is adhivâsesi bhagavā tującihāvâcena, “The Lord consented by remaining mute.” Unlike this Buddhist formula, the Rayapaseniya does not mention consent.
82 Rayā 17, p. 239.
83 Rayā 18, p. 240; cf. Rayā 9, p. 216.
84 Rayā 20, p. 240.
85 Rayā 22, p. 242: tan icchāni nam desaṇṇaṁ paṇṇaṁ bhaviteva va jñayāntaṁ sambandhaṁ nippamethāṁ diccam deviṣāṁ diccam devaśāṁ diccam devaṇāṁ diccam devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāṁ devaṇāmó ṇāvāhām uddhāsitvā.
86 Rayā 23, p. 243.
87 Vṛtti to Rayā 23, p. 245: svate vittavatvāt gautamaṁ nāṁ naśyati bhāsāvāhādivegathakāritvāt |.
88 Rayā 56, p. 326.
89 Rayā 80, p. 346.
These two examples do not leave us any doubt that this verbal formula denotes disapproval and refusal, and it is, therefore, safe to say that Mahāvīra did not give his consent to Śūriyābha 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 (pārīnāmikā 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)." Having said that, Śūriyābha 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. Next, he generated musicians and musical instruments out of his own transformative body via the technique of transformation. Thereafter, Śūriyābha 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. Śūriyābha’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 Śūriyābha 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 Śūriyābha’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 Śūriyābha’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 (Pāñcāśakaprakaraṇa 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 celestial properties—supreme opulence, splendor, preeminence—indicate the phenomenal ability of celestials to fragment their 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 their inner reality with the external world.

90 These episodes can be multiplied by examples from other canonical texts. As such, in Bhagavatī 161 (p. 175) we find a story where āsarakamāsuras 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 Ṣaṅkā. Tāmali’s silence therefore is not an indication of consent.

91 Vṛttī to Rāya 23, p. 245: tataḥ pārīnāmikā buddhiḥ tattvam avagamanam eva bhagavata uciṣṇa na punah kim api vaktum, kevalam mayā bhaktir ātityopadarsāniyeti | Rāya 23, p. 243.

92 In Bhagavatī 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 (bhīhīre poggale aparījatā); they can do so only by using external matter. The commentary glosses “external matter” as “valīriṣa matter that is different from the gross, physical body” (ausakariṣāramatraṇkān vakturān). Likewise, an ascetic cannot enter a form of another being by magic (abhijumujjītae) without employing external matter (bhīhīre 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

Sūryābha 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 (divyam nāma pradhanam), captivating (manahara), and filled with erotic (simgāra) sentiment, so much so that the audience became agitated and started cheering:

This way, supreme singing, instrumental music, and dance-drama (natṭe) were invoking an erotic aesthetic emotion. They were lofty and magnificent (urale manjumne). The lovely singing, dance-drama, and instrumental music were stirring (uppim jalabhūte) and accompanied by jubilant shouts of approval (kahakahabhūte), 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 Sūryābha’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 Sūryābha 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 Āyāramga and Sūyagadama. Moreover, in the Sūryābha episode itself we read that this spectacle stirred the emotions of the mendicant audience through its aesthetic properties. While the Jina refused to give Sūryābha 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 Sūryābha’s devotional expression.

Sūryābha’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 Sūryābha 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 (nattasaja).97 Next, Sūryābha generated forty-nine types of

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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 Rāṣṭra 23, p. 212.

96 Rāṣṭra 23, pp. 243–44: taē nam se divve gīve divve naṭṭe divve vāie evam abbhue singhāre urale manhumne manahare gīte manahare naṭṭe manahare vāie uppimjalabhūte kahakahabhūte divve devaraman pavatate gā vi hotthā/Malayagiri (p. 249) appears to be slightly uncomfortable with the most common meaning of śrōgāra as erotic and suggests that, in addition to that, it could also be understood as simply “ornamented or beautiful” (alankṛtam). My translation here follows the commentary.

97 Rāṣṭra 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].

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 worshiping 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. 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 Nādayavighāpāhuda (Nātyavidhiprābhīrta), an earlier Jain text on poetics that is no longer extant.

The Rāyapaseniya 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 nandikāvartha diagram, a powder box, a holy seat, a holy pot, a pair of fish, and a mirror. 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 (svatthiya), another type of a planet (pāsamāṇava, or pāsamāṇaga), 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. 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 (devaramane 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. In the final dance-drama, the performers enacted Mahāvīra’s past

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98 Rāya 23, p. 244: gacchhātu n. tubhbe devānuppiya samanam bhagavam mahāvīraṁ tikkhuuo ājñāhaṁsāhānaṁ kareha karittā vandala namamsala vadidita namansitaṁ goyamāṁsānam samanānah niggamāṁsānam tam divvam devedāṁ divvam divvam paccappin. aha |.
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-Paseniya (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 Sūryābha 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. Sūryābha’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 Sūryābha himself, having embodied the celestials produced out of his right and left arms, undergoes this transformative experience. First, Sūryābha’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: vīnā etc.), percussion instruments (vitata: drums, etc.), metallic instruments (ghana: cymbals, bells, gongs, etc.), and wind instruments (susīra: flutes, conch shell, etc.). Next, they sang four types of songs, performed four dancing styles, and displayed four acting modes. 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 Sūryābha. Having worshiped Sūryābha with folded hands, they reported the completion of his order. 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.

Once Sūryābha left, Goyama asked Lord Mahāvīra:

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

Mahāvīra replied:

Goyama, [all of that] disappeared to [Sūryābha’s] body, [all of that] went into [Sūryābha’s] body.

To illustrate this statement, Mahāvīra painted a verbal picture of a well-designed house, sheltered from the winds (nīyāgamabhīrā), 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 Sūryābha’s body. Sūryābha 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.

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104 Rāja 24, p. 253.
105 Rāja 24, p. 251.
106 Rāja 26, p. 253.
107 Rāja 25, p. 253: tae nam se sūryābhhe dveda dveva m dveda dveda da diveda diveda dveda padāhara, padāharetā kisme am jāte ege ege gāvahē.
108 Rāja 26, p. 253: sūryābhassa nam bhante deva esa diveda diveda diveda diveda da kisme gate kahin anupavitthe.
109 Rāja 26, p. 253: goyama sartrama gate sartrama anupavitthe.
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, Ajītasvāmī 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 Śuriyābha 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 Jambudvīpa, Śuriyābha had realized that even merely thinking of Mahāvīra would entail great fruit (mahāphala); hence, worshiping and serving him in person would surely bring about great benefit. Śuriyābha’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 (bhoktṛ) 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 Dasāṇṇa (Daśārṇa), included in a ninth-century Prakrit collection of stories about the twenty-four Jain great men, called the Caupamṇ̄amahāpurisacārya and composed by the monk Śīlāsūrī, 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 Dasāṇṇa 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 Dasāṇṇa 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. 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. Śatrūṭījaya by arranging a dance, during which “the earth was

110 Rāja 6, p. 212.
111 Yogaśāstra 3.78–80: gitanrāttanātaśādindirīkṣanam [ . . . ] pariharēt pramādācaranam sudhīḥ || A wise person should renounce such careless acts as [ . . . ] musical shows, dance, and dramas. Yogaśāstra 3.120: yah sadbāhyam autyuṁ ca kṛteṣu na dhanam vaper[ka]thathā varākā cāritram duścaram sa samācāret || “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 (svopañā) 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.”

Dance as a mode of worship is ubiquitous in Indic traditions. For instance, Granoff (1998) discusses the Prabhāsāmāhātmya 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 (tṛajalokā or gopās, “shepherdesses”) in a staged drama in order to enter the mythical and eternal Vṛṣa-Ilā, the cosmic play of the god. In esoteric Buddhism, too, an offering of dance is not an unusual occurrence. From medieval to modern times, Jain laypeople participated in this larger ritual culture. The Rāyapāseniya 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 Śūriyābha 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 Rāyapāseniya is an earlier text than the Nāyādhammakāhālo, Bhagavāți, or jambuddīvapannatī, since all of them explicitly and implicitly (through jātva) refer to the Rāyapāseniya. This points to a considerable resonance the Śūriyābha story generated for the theoretical foundation of image-worshiping and devotional practices, in which aesthetic dance-drama and the re-enactment of the Jina’s biography occupied the central roles. However, because, as we have seen, Mahāvīra, in fact, did not approve of Śūriyābha’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. He states that laypeople must decorate themselves and perform these dharmic dramas at the celebration of the Jinas’ five auspicious events (kallāna)—the conception, birth, renunciation, omniscience, and liberation—and other festival occasions (yātṛa) in imitation of Indra and other gods (deviṃdādīmaṇigiti). 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). We have seen that the god Śūriyābha’s performance was not confined to the re-enactment of the Jina’s biography (which in itself contained, for instance, the

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112 See Bālacandra’s Vasantavilāsanahākātīya, a thirteenth-century court epic: prekanaksanaam alho vicakṣaṇas tirthabhurtar ayam agrato vañhāt | narttākukucatātāraṇam naśrāgamanapraṇāpataḥṭātāvaih || Vasantavilāsīa 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 Vasantavilāsīa 10.85.

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

115 It appears, for instance, in the Vajraśekharasūtra, 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 jambuddīvapannatī-saṅgraha (jambudīvatparajapti-saṅgraha) (c. early eleventh century) in the context of the Jina’s birth celebration (4.219ff.).

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

118 Patīcāsākaprakaraṇa 9.8, 9.29.

119 Patīcāsākaprakaraṇa 9.30–7.

120 Patīcāsākaprakaraṇa 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. It appears, however, that the proscription of aesthetic theater was not always followed in the actual practices of Jain laypeople.

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121 See Jinadatta’s Carcarī 12, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 28 and Upadeśasāgamanāsā 32–34, 37. On the relationship between Haribhadra and Kharataras, see (Granoff 1992). On Jineśvara’s views on temples, see (Dundas 2008).
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