

BHARATA'S *NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA*, THE *POETICS* OF INDIA:
POSTCOLONIAL READINGS OF BHARATA'S
NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA IN THE LIGHT
OF ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*



ABSTRACT: This essay will present the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* by Indian scholars in the light of its comparison with Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, by placing the issue within the broader framework of post-colonial studies. I will start by providing a short introduction on the reception of classical antiquity in colonial and post-colonial India and then I shall attempt to demonstrate the difficulties inherent in the comparison between the two works, in order to argue that in general terms the interpretation of Bharata's text is subordinated to and influenced by the signification of 'national identity'. Equally importantly, this interpretation produced a discourse that, while questioning Aristotle's domination, it also took for granted the intellectual structures on which this domination was based.

POST-COLONIAL STUDIES AND INDIA

BY PARAPHRASING SIR WILLIAM JONES'S "Kalidasa, the Shakespeare of India" the title of this paper seeks to lay emphasis on the dominant position of Aristotle's *Poetics* within the history of (Western) literature, a dominance which at the very least has resulted in a dynamic of exemplar, confrontation and competition. Especially as India is concerned, this dynamic is highly antagonistic, given that India did not merely possess indigen-

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ous theatre, but also enunciated an equally advanced theoretical discourse on the poetics of theatre.

Generally speaking, the ideological construction put forward by the 'new colonialism' (or 'imperialism')¹ of the 19th century concerning the 'civilizing mission' (or 'civilizing conquest') of the colonial powers, was intended to exculpate an hegemonic agenda on the basis of cultural superiority. Further, this ideological construction needed to be adjusted to each colony's preexisting culture, or in other words, to take into account the adaptability or not of the indigenous culture. In the case of India, namely an immense and culturally diverse country (as far as racial characteristics, language and religion are concerned), this interaction has proved even more complicated since, firstly, Indians already possessed their own 'classics' (i.e. literary cultures) that reached as far back in time as the ancient Greek classics, and, secondly, the conquests of Alexander the Great seem to have worked as a point of convergence for their ancient tradition and the Western one. The situation becomes even more complicated when one considers the fact that although Sanskrit (as is the case with Greek and Latin) represents an inactive language, the religious customs and the culture, more generally, that emanates from the ancient Indian texts is still active in modern India, thus highly resistant to any effort at westernization.

It is therefore obvious that ancient Indian texts could hardly be ignored by the colonialists; on the contrary, a delayed Oriental Renaissance indeed took place in the late 18th century and generated a systematic study and translation of those texts.² In fact, it was this Renaissance that made it possible for the label 'classic' to be applied to non-European cultures — such as the Persian, Chinese, Arabic and Sanskrit — in order to impose a canonization of literature along the lines of the European conceptions of the 'classical'. To offer an eloquent example, within the construct of 'classical India', the history of Hinduism was endowed via contradictory and proportional processes with a 'classical heyday' and a subsequent 'medieval darkness' in order to conform to the European historiographical model of the triadic division of 'classical glory, medieval decline and modern renaissance' that interpreted all civilizations in terms of the high and the low.³ Within this framework, Sir William Jones, who is considered as the initiator of the Orientalist movement in India,

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1. For a meticulous analysis of the terms 'colonialism', 'imperialism', 'neocolonialism' and 'postcolonialism', see Young (2001) 15-70.
 2. See Trivedi (2007) 289-290. About the explanation of India's modern political and cultural 'degradation' offered by the colonial rulers, see Nandy (1989) 17-18.
 3. Vasunia (2013) 11.

in the preface of his translation of *Sakuntalam*, published in 1789, refers to Kalidasa with the honorific description “the Shakespeare of India”.⁴ This qualification offers an illustrative example of the fact that it was through the comparison with Western unquestionable superiority and the concomitant detection of similarities that the value of Sanskrit was introduced by intellectuals associated with the British rule in India, such as Sir William Jones, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Macaulay, Rudyard Kipling et al., and it is thus that a comparison-based discourse was produced.

In view of this comparison-based discourse a further crucial question was raised: whose classics are better, or whose classics would it be more beneficial to adopt in order to educate the indigenous? Macaulay’s 1835 proposal, entitled “Minute on Indian Education”, which argued for English- instead of classics-based syllabi, in order to produce “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”, seemed to offer a realistic and effective solution to the dilemma.⁵ Whether his project finally led to the elimination of Greek and Latin from the curricula in Indian universities or not seems to be a matter of controversy, but it is certainly true that English authors effectively dominated the curricula, while this Westernized class of persons, who were educated on Macaulay’s model, collaborated with the British prior to the independence and succeeded them as the ruling class after it.⁶

This being the broad outline of the cultural situation in colonial India, the assertion of a national identity, one of the expressions of the struggle against colonial exploitation to follow at the end of the 19th century, resorted to ‘Orientalism’, this time as a means for the establishment of a case in support of the superiority of Eastern literature. In an extreme form of argumentation it was even claimed that Shakespeare is nothing more than a pale imitation of the by far oldest Indian poet Kalidasa.⁷ Hence, within this context of the emergence of ‘nationalism’⁸

4. As quoted in Trivedi (2007) 290.

5. As quoted in Trivedi (2007) 292.

6. Trivedi (2007) 292-293. Cf. Vasunia (1989) 22 ff. who disagrees with Trivedi’s view that no Greek or Latin texts were ever taught in India. For an overview of educational problems in modern India see Faust and Nagar (2001) 2878-2883.

7. See Trivedi (2007) 290.

8. Generally speaking, ‘nationalism’ is an ideology which articulates the same duality existing between cultural and civic nation (i.e. cultural and civic nationalism), while at the same time the ambiguity of the term allows us to distinguish between the more valuable or acceptable forms of nationalism, e.g. the assault on tyranny and imperialism, from their less appealing counterparts, e.g. some of the greatest cruelties to which human beings have ever been subjected. See Yack (2012) 24 ff.

and the 'national question',⁹ new distortions replaced the older ones: distortions reinforced by an inferiority syndrome which stemmed from a long-lasting occupation and was clearly aggravated by the latest conquest, the British.

Thus, another kind of heterogeneous discourse, that formed a synthesis of two opposing and contradictory tendencies, was enunciated. As Chatterjee's analysis on the idea of nationalism in the case of India concludes, nationalism "produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based".¹⁰ This is in fact the very same idea that was expressed a few years later by Nandy, when suggesting that colonialism is a state of mind expressed in the field of psychology and addressing a warning both to those who "have chosen their alternative within the West" and to "the standard opponents of the West" who "have been integrated within the dominant consciousness".¹¹

As Nandy accurately states, colonialism is "a shared culture which may not always begin with the establishment of alien rule in a society and end with the departure of alien rulers from the colony".¹² The comparison of India and Greece by Nehru, the first prime-minister of the independent country, in his *Discovery of India*, provides a typical example of this contradiction. Despite renouncing "fixed concepts which prevent reasoned thought" he effectively resorts to oversimplification when characterizing India as "religious, philosophical, speculative, metaphysical, unconcerned with this world, and lost in the dreams of the beyond and the hereafter" and attributing India's long-standing tradition to "a tender humanity"; at the same time he claims for India a closer proximity 'in spirit and outlook to the old Greece' when compared with the nations of Europe, i.e. with the "children of the Hellenic spirit".¹³

In the light of the above analysis I will deal with the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in India by pointing to a number of misconceptions or generalizations which are indicative of the (pre-, post- and neo-) colonial background just described. What shall effectively emerge is the fact that comparability is a continuous process through which the colonial claim is challenged and at

9. As Chatterjee (1986) 18 observes, "the national question in the non-European world is historically fused with the colonial question, meaning that the assertion of national identity was a form of the struggle against colonial exploitation".

10. Chatterjee (1986) 30. Also see Young (2001) 343-345.

11. Nandy (1989) xiv-xv.

12. Nandy (1989) 3.

13. Nehru (1946) 152.

the same time the colonial domination reaffirms itself since, in the meanwhile, it has already exerted its strong influence.¹⁴

ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS* IN INDIA

Aristotle's *Poetics* indeed provides a good example in order to establish our thesis, since it is a text of prominent position within Western literary — and especially dramatic — theory and criticism, namely a text that is considered, especially due to its reception from the Renaissance onwards (mainly by neo-classicism), as “the emblem of the traditional, and particular naturalistic, theatre, and of the views of those who claimed knowledge of the ‘eternal laws of the theatre’”.¹⁵ All the more so, since India was able to present its own equivalent version of theoretical discourse on theatre in antiquity, codified in the ancient treatise known as *Nāṭyaśāstra*.¹⁶ It was in fact through Macaulay's “English in taste” group of persons that the *Poetics* was introduced in India and has since generated an intense debate about the relationship between the two texts. To a great extent the popularity of the subject forms part of the dynamics of exemplar previously described, which in turn was amplified through the ‘borrowing theory’ of the end of the 19th century that soon bore many fruits and generated both supporters and critics. Namely, as it was likely to happen, along with the acknowledgement of the value of Sanskrit drama by the majority of intellectuals, the suggestion that this kind of drama had its ori-

14. Kumar's idea of ‘decolonization’ in his article on the attempts to decolonize Indian theatre is a typical example of this process: ‘Re-inventing Bharata's *Natyashastra* raises India to, at least, compete with the Aristotelian theatre’ (Kumar [2013] 146). About the way Japanese modern drama engaged in a conversation with ancient Greek tragedy after the Meiji period see Sampatakakis (2014) 487-507, where relevant literature is also cited.

15. See Halliwell (1986) 316.

16. Hereafter referred to as *NŚ*. It should be noted that the *Poetics* is approached from the original language, while the *NŚ* from its English translation. *Poetics* is everywhere quoted from Kassel's edition (1965). However, I take note of the latest edition of Tarán – Gutas (2012). *NŚ* is quoted from Ghosh's translation (vol. I: 1951, vol. II: 1961). Technical terms are always quoted in italics from the original text — Sanskrit transcribed in the Latin alphabet — since their translation is often bound to be inaccurate or even downright impossible. Certain terms, where appropriate, are given in parentheses directly from Ghosh's translation, unless otherwise indicated. Rangacharya's most recent translation (2010), though very helpful, was not selected since it only provides a shorter paraphrase of the text. For the textual tradition and the editions of *NŚ*, see Ghosh (1961) LXXI-LXXVIII and Kalé (1967) 21-23. It should finally be mentioned that the deviations between the available versions of the text of *NŚ* are so significant, that in fact none of the currently available editions may properly be considered as a ‘critical edition’; see Gerow (1977) 226.

gin in or was influenced by Greek drama was equally introduced.¹⁷ Thereafter, any attempt at the interpretation of *NS* has been in a way doomed to either a subjection to the Western criteria through the accentuation of similarities or to the assertion of its uniqueness through the foregrounding of differences.¹⁸

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Starting with the first; The accentuation of similarities and accordingly the mitigation or elimination of differences in order to legitimize comparison seems to constitute a common ground for monographs from the Indian side that undertake the task of comparatively reading the two texts.¹⁹ However, it needs to be emphasized that, despite the existence of analogies, Bharata's *NS* and Aristotle's *Poetics* are texts with diverging temporal and geographical backgrounds, differing topics of discussion and targeting. As far as their eligibility to function as sources for the history of the theatre is concerned, we encounter an extremely complex issue, which is additionally complicated due to the insufficiency or often absence of evidence, the specific nature of the texts and the difficulty or impossibility to interpret some passages (*loci desperati* are abundant in both texts).

Taking the dating issue as an example, we notice that scholars who attempt to compare the two treatises pay special attention to reconciling the temporal distance that separates the two texts or supporting the seniority of the Indian one, a tendency which apparently stems from the common fallacy "the oldest the better or the closest to Greek drama and hence the most unlikely for India to have borrowed it".²⁰ Thus, despite the fact that *NS*

17. See Keith (1924) 57-68. For the repudiation of this theory see Shekhar (1977) 54-60.

18. We may schematically categorize this debate on the basis of discourse subject to: first, comparison between Greek and Indian drama (historical analyses), and second, comparative literature (theoretical analyses). I propose the 'elimination of or accentuation of differences' as a schematic presentation which seems to fit well with the first category.

19. To the extent that I was able to locate: Singal (1977); Gupt (1990); Rai (1992); Dhavan (2010).

20. Although *NS* is not accurately dated, there is no doubt that the text available today has undergone multiple corrections and additions. Scholars disagree on issues such as when the original text was synthesized, which parts of the available text can be traced back to the original and which are subsequent interventions, which tradition is being described and other similar and extremely complex questions. After an overview of the available evidence Ghosh (1951) LXXXI-LXXXVI concluded that the text that we possess today ought to be dated around AD 200, while the tradition recorded in it can be located in 100 BC. Kalé (1967) 27 cites other scholar's views as follows: Kane places the treatise in the 3rd-4th ce. AD, Keith in the 3rd ce. AD, De dates the oldest layers in the 4th-5th ce. AD, while the latest in the 8th ce. AD. Rangacharya (2010) 346-355 argues that the work is a compendium that seeks to impose

is a synthesis of diverse elements, without stylistic consistency,²¹ involving discontinuities, duplications and contradictions, and commonly dated somewhere between the first and second century AD, both Singal and Gupt argue that the beginning of the composition should be placed in the 5th century BC.²² In Dhavan's most recent analysis, we come across the rather unexpected declaration that the two texts will be treated "as contemporary texts belonging to a single frame in history".²³ These views are in general indicative of a tendency to support extreme and undocumented views, in order to force an impracticable comparison.

Likewise, in Gupt's attempt to reconcile the differences, the texts are analyzed in a way which allows us to argue that the ritual background that both theatrical traditions have in common can be considered as a shared point of reference. His analysis enables him to talk about theatre as "hieropraxis", which is an approach that focuses on performativity instead of textuality.²⁴ For him it is the fact that the dramatic performances took place on the occasion of religious festivals that constitutes the link between the two theatrical genres, as well as the unity of speech, music and dance which contradicts the typical for later theatrical genres domination of speech at the expense of the other modes.

Gupt is certainly right to argue for the performativity of the genres described in Bharata's treatise, as *NS* indeed seems to have worked as a theatrical 'manual', which served as the benchmark for hundreds of theatrical forms surviving until today. It is also important to note that the relationship between drama and dance is so close in *NS*, that the idea of 'performing a play' emerges as almost identical to the idea of 'dancing a drama'.²⁵ As Schechner accurately notes: "The *NS* is much more powerful as an embodied set of ideas and practices than as a written text. Unlike the *Poetics*, the *NS* is more danced than read [my italics]".²⁶

a systematic rule, a treatise that integrates and assimilates previous treatises and aims at upgrading the existing drama, while its composition can be located in the 4th or 5th ce AD.

21. To a great extent it is composed of *śloca* verses, to a lesser extent consists of *Āryā* lyrics, while some prose pieces are also included.
22. Singal (1977) 19; Gupt (1990) 34.
23. Dhavan, (2010) 2.
24. See Gupt (1990) 3-17. Especially his quote on p. 13: "Today, a comparison of performance modes is likely to be more illuminative than a comparison of literary genres". For a review of his book see Heath (1995) 195-196; Schechner (1997) 153-156.
25. Ray (2007) 132.
26. Schechner (2001) 28.

On the other hand, the text of the *Poetics* may prove inadequate in order to support a reading that is continuously facing towards the direction of performativity and the ritual origins of ancient Greek drama. That is because, to our disappointment, Aristotle avoids any discussion of the connection between theatre and religion, while the *Poetics* remain almost silent when it comes to the chorus and the performance in general, despite the fact that the performativity of the tragic texts appears to be regarded by Aristotle as being closely intertwined with the process of poetic creation (see 17.1455a22ff., 26.1461b26ff.).²⁷ Furthermore, whether Aristotle's analysis about the origins of ancient Greek drama reflects historical reality or not is still a point of controversy and a question that cannot be answered with confidence.²⁸ These kinds of silences or omissions on the part of the Aristotelian text are liable to cause a series of misunderstandings. When, for example, Gupt takes as granted that "The ancient theorists [...] considered gesture and not the spoken word to be the starting point of the drama",²⁹ he does not clarify whether he is referring to theories about the origins of ancient Greek drama or to the views expressed by Aristotle, since in the *Poetics* there is no reference to 'gesture' as the starting point of theatre.³⁰

Eventually, there is no doubt that common, primordial and recurrent elements constitute the inter-temporal and inter-cultural material base of theatrical action *per se*, namely what Barba describes as 'similar principles' that performers share "in spite of the stylistic forms specific to their traditions".³¹ However, the quest for common principles among cultures can be ascribed to an overall, whether conscious or not, mental and psychological desire to converge with the well-established and authenticated Western civilization. This is a tendency stemming from the evolutionist scheme inherited from the Victorian era, which, as Eriksen notes, though "severely criticized, it nevertheless continues to exert a certain influence on anthropological thinking".³²

27. See Sifakis (2002) 148-64, esp. 138ff.

28. According to Aristotle *ποίησις* emerged *ἐκ τῶν αὐτοσχεδιασμάτων* and was separated *κατὰ τὰ οἰκεία ἦθη* into *ὑμνος* and *ἐγκώμια*, on the one hand, and *πόγους* on the other (4.1448^b23-26). The most plausible assumption is that these *αὐτοσχεδιάσματα* were choral songs, i.e. songs with *ῥυθμός*, *λόγος* and *ἁρμονία*, while the only part that they were in need of in order to evolve into tragedy or comedy was dialogue.

29. See Gupt (1990) 273-274, cf. 6.

30. For a similar inconsistency see Heath (1995) 195: "in taking dance as the nucleus of drama he [i.e. Gupt] does not distinguish sharply enough between dance as a nucleus from which drama developed and dance as a nucleus of drama in its developed form".

31. Barba and Savarese (2005) 6.

32. Eriksen (2010) 12.

This tendency is prone to generalizations that contradict the fact that different elements lead each time to a “different performance”, a fact that, according to Barba, is the result of the “human being’s socio-cultural and psychological behavior in a performance situation”.³³

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It is now time to proceed with *the second category of interpretations*. To a great extent, a reverse approach, i.e. a defense of the uniqueness of Indian drama through the accentuation of differences, is attempted within theoretical discussions that aim at uncovering divergent structures that arose independently and form part of the general discussion about the relationship between Western and Eastern worldview, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics and so on. Those scholars consider Aristotle and Bharata as the authorities on the path of the creation of literary criticism and are prone to generalizations, classifications and dichotomies. Hence, they are reproducing the very same perceptions of contrast between the East and the West, which in fact constitute the outcome of what Said describes as “distortion and inaccuracy, or rather the kind of inaccuracy produced by too dogmatic a generality and too positivistic a localized focus”.³⁴ As a result, a range of stereotypes about invariable differences that constitute the Otherness — that can be and have been questioned — are being reproduced. To name some of these: tragic or comic context versus variety of drama types, restrictions concerning the unity of time, space, and the number or gender of the actors versus flexibility, public versus elite audience, realistic versus stylistic theatre, imitation of action versus imitation of emotional state, dramatic versus poetic achievement et al.³⁵

I will focus on the ‘realistic-stylistic’ quasi-dilemma, which is illustrative of the generalities that these approaches introduce. Several scholars have attempted to export their conclusions regarding the nature of Greek and Indian drama,³⁶ on the basis of linguistic synonymy with respect to drama’s *genus*

33. Barba and Savarese (2005) 6.

34. Said (2003) 8.

35. See Shekhar (1977) 57-58. The very same stereotypical differences are reproduced in Kumar (2013) 149-150. For a deconstruction of some of these stereotypes see Hogan and Pandit (1995) 3-44.

36. The mainstream argumentation suggests that although for Aristotle theatre is “mimesis of an action” (*μιμῆσις πράξεως*), for Bharata it is “mimesis of the emotional states” (*Bhāvas*, NS I 111-112). This means that for Bharata representation of emotions prevails over the representation of human action or, to put it differently, a static sense of plot, a deceleration in order to emphasize the psychological situation experienced by the heroes prevails over Ar-

proximum — that is *mimesis* for Aristotle and *anukaraṇa* or *anukīrtana* (*NS* I 106-121) for Bharata.³⁷ Bharata also distinguishes between *lokadharmī* and *nāṭyadharmī* (*NS* XIV 62-76), an analysis that approximates us to the ‘realistic-stylistic’ contrast, while in fact he admits that only the second is workable when it comes to drama.³⁸ On this basis, the majority of studies draw a distinction between the Western realistic and the Oriental stylistic theatrical form and argue for idealism, transcendence, spirituality, deceleration of plot and action, absence of the tragic, when it comes to Indian drama as opposed to realism, pragmatism, secularity, materialism, elaborate plot and action, tragic quality, when it comes to the Western idea of drama.³⁹

Two questions arise concerning the ‘realistic-stylistic’ dilemma and they both seem to arise out of anachronisms. First, is it legitimate to retrospectively

istotelian action. Therefore, the concept of conflict (*crisis*) which promotes action (*πρωξις*) is absent from the Indian theatre, and as a consequence, while the Aristotelian hero acts (*πράττει*), the Indian experiences, in fact tastes, an (emotional) state. All of the above were bound to be associated with the overall divergence between different worldviews, which can be summarized as follows: despite specific deviations, all Indian systems of philosophy (except from Materialism [Cārvāka]) agree that the outcome of every (good or bad) action (*karma*) is being registered on the route of every human being and is always assigned to him either in the present or in a following lifetime. Hence, this idea of successive births, which provides humans with the opportunity to complete what remains unfulfilled during their life or to correct any errors, excludes the concept of the tragic, namely the idea that human persons are defined by a predetermined and inexorable ‘fate’, which forces them to make choices with serious consequences. See Das Gupta (1922-1961) 71-74 and Wolpert (2006) s.v. ‘Hinduism’, ‘Vedic Aryan India’, ‘Upanishadic Philosophy’ et passim.

37. *Anukaraṇa* and *anukīrtana* are generally translated as “imitation”, “representation”, “presentation” or “mimicry”. These two words also appear as compounds with another component word that refers to the object of imitation: *bhāvānukīrtana*, *lokavṛttānukaraṇa* *saṅgadvīpānukaraṇa* and *saṅkīrtana*. See Gupt (1990) 99.
38. The terms have been interpreted in various ways, starting with *dharmī* (or *dharma*; for difference in meaning see Gupt [1990] 240-242) which is translated as “mode” (Kalé [1967] 218), “nature” (Rangacharya [2010] 115), “practic” (Ghosh [1990] 245); subsequently, we meet equally various translations of *lokadharmī-nāṭyadharmī*: “realistic-dramatic” (Rangacharya, *ibid.*), “realistic-conventional” (Ghosh, *ibid.*), “representational-presentational” (Kalé, *ibid.*), “realistic-idealistic” (V. Raghavan “Idealism and Realism of Bharata’s Stage”, *Journal of Oriental Researches* 7, 1933, pp. 359-375 [as cited in Ghosh, (1990) 245 and Raghavan (1967)] 48). For the various interpretations of the terms see Gupt (1990) 236-247. For a meticulous analysis based on discussions with artists see Barba and Savarese (2005) 7-20.
39. See, e.g., Swann (1969) 110-119; Katak (2001) 38-39 (as cited in Ray [2008] 170); Virtanen (2006) 55-84. In general, this kind of schismatic views have been considered simplistic and generalizing from Kalé (1967) 217. Especially for the lack of tragic in Indian theatre see Kalé (1967) 234-236 and Bhattacharji (1978) 6-17. For the quasi-dilemma between idealism and materialism within Indian culture, see Nandy (1989) 79-85. About the breaking down of polarities in general see Nandy’s conclusion (Nandy [1989] 112-113).

apply a modern concept to the Aristotelian conception of drama? Second, can Greek drama, and more specifically as it emerges from Aristotle's description, be described as 'realistic', and further what do we mean by 'realism'? Ray, for example, argues that since the object of imitation of *nāṭya* are "the heavens, the domain of death (our world) and the nether world", it "precludes the possibility of a realistic presentation in the Western sense".⁴⁰ However, his argument does not specify the differentia between the two theoretical views, since neither the theatre described by Aristotle could be considered realistic on the basis of the criteria adopted by a modern spectator. In fact, both Aristotle's and Bharata's real world are hardly restricted within the narrow limits set by the modern 'realistic' representation, but may also include heroes, gods, monsters, the Underworld and everything that seems supernatural to us today. Furthermore, based on Bharata's concept of *pramāṇa*, Ray observes that "in the Indian concept the likeness of something to its artistic representation should never be a copy but analogical or exemplary. [...] The design must evolve out of highly conventionalized and often stylized forms and symbols". Still, Aristotle's idea of the superiority of poetry when compared to history (1451b5-6), due to the former's ability to generalize the individualized subject of the latter (*καθόλου-καθ' ἑκαστον*), militates against the notion of poetry as an imitation of the real world and brings us really close to Bharata's analogical, exemplary and conventional theatre. Hence, it seems that the illusive and conventional nature of drama, as well as the idea that the work of art is produced via a process of abstraction or even arbitrary signification, which precludes the modern concept of realism, constituted a common assumption and was taken for granted by both Aristotle and Bharata.⁴¹

After all, it is quite safe to infer that Greek tragedy was highly conventional, especially when compared to the modern conception of drama: all actors were male and wore masks, one single actor acted more than one role, entrances and exits conformed to a specific typology etc.⁴² However, Aristotle does not supply a codification of rules comparable to the one offered by

40. See Ray (2007) 133.

41. The idea that art is a re-presentation of reality is based on an 'archetypal' perception of art's function, which from Plato to Auerbach and from the Renaissance perspective to photorealism is still valid today. See Preminger and Brogan (1993) s.v. 'imitation' and 'representation and mimesis'. On the other hand, over time 'imitation is based on a system of codification that produces illusion', while 'what is rather thoughtlessly called imitation of reality in theatre has always been merely a matter of conventions, even when there was no awareness of them'. See Pavis (1998) s.v. 'imitation' (the second quote is from Mannoni [1969] 166, as cited in Pavis).

42. See for instance Halleran (2005) 198-214.

Bharata to the Asian performer. In fact, he does not provide us with a codification at all. And that appears to be the main difference between the two authors. Aristotle's text is composed after the heyday of the kind of theatre it describes, mainly in an attempt to valuate and retrospectively delineate poetic efforts up to his time, while its normative impact is not necessarily intentional.⁴³ In other words, whether and to what extent Aristotle's essay influenced and determined the development of the theatre is a question that is connected with the issue of the evolution of theatre from the 4th century onwards — in fact it has much to do with the reception of the *Poetics* from the Renaissance up until modern times⁴⁴ — and is less related to the Athenian theatrical tradition from which the vast majority of the surviving dramas originate. *NŚ*, on the other hand, is of the *śāstra* kind of texts,⁴⁵ namely sacred texts of intentional legislative and normative dynamic that are handed in advance, while the rules that it imposed ensured its survival until today, being handed over from one generation of actors to the other. Under these circumstances, the Asian performer is provided with a codification system⁴⁶ of a kind that, as Barba notes, contemporary Western performers are deprived.⁴⁷

43. For an analysis of the *Poetics*' descriptive and normative parts see Söffing (1981).

44. See Halliwell (1986) 286-323.

45. The term *śāstra* signifies the 'teaching manual', the 'instruction', the 'rule'. It is assigned to works of divine origin or generally of scientific nature, often as the second component following an indication of the subject of negotiation. *Śāstra* tradition includes a variety of texts that follow the *sūtra* form (sententious expressions aiming at memorizing) as the *Manu Smṛti* about *dharma* (religious and social obligations), the *Artha śāstra* for *artha* (politics), the *Kāma śāstra* for *kāma* (pleasure, especially sexual), etc. See MacDonell (1920) 244-276; Keith (1920) 403-535.

46. In general, no Indian has ever challenged the validity and authority of Bharata's dogma, while many Indians today invoke verses from the text of the first master of the theatre as a panacea for the impasses of contemporary theatre. It should also be noted that the strict rules about structure, delineation of characters and other aspects of dramatic composition imposed by the *NŚ* proved an obstacle for the creativity of the playwrights. It is consequently considered that in combination with other causes the strict and dogmatic adherence to the inflexible laws of *NŚ* contributed to the decline of Classical Indian theatre, which is placed around the 10th century CE. Although the gradual reduction of people who could understand Sanskrit and the Muslim invasion are considered as the primary causes of the decline of Classical Indian theatre, Shekhar argues that the causes should be detected in inherent characteristics of the genre, among which he includes the writers' inability to distant themselves from normative manuals. See Shekhar (1977) 131-152 (Chapter 8: "Malaise. Symptoms of Decadence") and 132-170 (Chapter 9: "Causes of Decadence"). This idea about the restraining effect of the *NŚ*'s rules is emphasized by other scholars as well; e.g. Keith (1924) 276, 295, 353 and Kalé (1967) 239-242.

47. Barba and Savarese (2005) 6 ff.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, in the preceding analysis I suggested that the quest of the differentia of Indian drama can result in half-truths when it is endeavoured within the framework of a comparison with Greek drama and vice versa. On the one hand, it can undermine the specificity of the human being, which is determined by socio-cultural and psychological mechanisms. Indeed, the obsession with the 'once great but now fallen' culture has imbued the consciousness of both colonizers and colonized to an extent that it may not be an exaggeration to argue that every attempt to compare cultural products is *a priori* condemned to conceal, betray or even distort cultural idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, it also seems to be true that comparability, as one of the most powerful colonial practices, has produced a range of stereotypes that have informed most discourses on East and West in both colonial and postcolonial eras and that still continue to enforce the inhumane hegemony of bipolarity.

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