



University of  
Zurich<sup>UZH</sup>

Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies – Indian Studies



Frieze with Dancer and Musicians, Cleveland Museum of Art

4<sup>th</sup> Zurich International Conference on  
Indian Literature and Philosophy (ZICILP)

*“For pleasure, for liberation?  
Discourses on the performing arts  
in classical and medieval India”*

University of Zurich, June 29<sup>th</sup> - July 1<sup>st</sup> 2023

A fundamental ambiguity characterizes premodern Indian discourses on the performing arts. They are represented, on the one hand, as spectacles in which the arts of music, dance, storytelling, or poetic recitations are performed for the sake of pleasure, entertainment, and social prestige, and on the other as instruments for attaining religious merit and liberation.

Starting from the first centuries of the Common Era, there is textual evidence attesting to a negative perception of the performing arts in Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain sources. These texts often criticize performative practices as resulting in transgressions of norms of purity and moral propriety, and as hindering one's progress on the religious path. This attitude stands in contrast with texts which extol theatrical and other performances as means for disseminating religious doctrines, displaying devotion to gods and religious teachers, and supporting ascetics aiming at otherworldly goals. The arts are generally accorded an important role as commodities in the worldly, pleasure-oriented ethos of courts and urban centres, but they also form part of temple rituals, worship, and religious festivals. Tantric traditions of the early medieval period consolidate the use of the performing arts in public religion, along with transgressive rites of possession. Eventually, these uses were re-framed in the philosophical texts of Kashmir Śaivism, wherein theological teachings become closely interwoven with aesthetic speculations.

This conference moves away from modern interpretations of Indian art as "spiritual" and from an aesthetic paradigm disconnected from social and political contexts. The focus is on the historical embeddedness of performance practices, and on the religious, aesthetic and intellectual discourses that inform the relationship between pleasure-orientation and soteriological goals.

**Venue**

University of Zurich  
Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies  
Room RAA E-08  
Rämistrasse 59  
CH-8001 Zurich

**Organizers**

Dr. Elisa Ganser  
Prof. Dr. Angelika Malinar

**Contact**

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Day 1: Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> June

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- 13.30-13.45**      **Angelika Malinar and Elisa Ganser, University of Zurich**  
Welcome and Introduction
- 13.45-14.30**      **Donald Davis, The University of Texas at Austin**  
Anxieties of ritual, class, and sex: Performing arts in  
Dharmaśāstra
- 14.30-15.15**      **Angelika Malinar, University of Zurich**  
Ritual acts, artistic performances: The *Mahābhārata* and  
the frame-narrative of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*
- 15.15-15.45**      **Coffee break**
- 15.45-16.30**      **Elisa Ganser, University of Zurich**  
Sāman, Gāndharva, and other forms of singing in  
Dharma- and Nāṭya-śāstras
- 16.30-17.15**      **Nirajan Kafle, Ashoka University, Delhi**  
Performing arts in early Śaivism
- 17.30-18.30**      **Keynote Lecture (online)**  
**Lyne Bansat-Boudon, EPHE Paris**  
Is Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka then not (or not entirely) a Mīmāṃsaka?  
A new approach to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's exegesis on the first  
chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*
- 19.30**              **Dinner**

Day 2: Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> June

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- 9.30-10.15**      **Vincent Tournier, LMU Munich**  
Performing arts and the economy of merit in Indian Buddhism of the Middle Period (1<sup>st</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century CE)
- 10.15-11.00**    **Henry Albery, Ghent University**  
Like a tree whose roots have been cut: Art and “aesthetic shock” in Indic Buddhist monasticism
- 11.00-11.30**    **Coffee break**
- 11.30-12.15**    **Andrew Ollett, University of Chicago**  
Tragedy as a motive for renunciation in Jain narratives
- 12.15-13.00**    **Basile Leclère, Université Jean Moulin Lyon III**  
How Sīlāṇa the jester made king Ajayapāla ashamed of his sins: On a satirical performance depicted in Jain Prabandhas
- 13.00-14.30**    **Lunch**
- 14.30-15.15**    **Csaba Dezső, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest**  
“But there will be born some kindred spirit to mine”:  
Authors’ thoughts on their art and craft in the *prastāvanas* of classical Indian plays
- 15.15-16.00**    **Whitney Cox, University of Chicago**  
Artifice and mise-en-scène in Bhaṭṭajayanta’s *Āgamaḍambara*
- 16.00-16.30**    **Coffee Break**
- 16.30-17.15**    **Daniele Cuneo, Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle**  
The flavours of peace: Mapping *śāntarasas* from Kashmir to Kerala
- 17.15-18.00**    **Sylvain Brocquet, Université d’Aix-Marseille**  
Double meaning: Double pleasure or double salvation?
- 19.00**            **Dinner**

Day 3: Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> of July

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- 9.00-9.45**      **Naresh Keerthi, Ashoka University, Delhi  
& Andrew Ollett, University of Chicago**  
Reinforcing *rasa* in *Udayana the Ascetic*
- 9.45-11.00**      **Luther Obrock, University of California Berkeley**  
Harṣa's drama: Performance, history, and materiality in  
Kalhaṇa's *Rājataranṅiṇī*
- 11.00-11.30**      **Coffee break**
- 11.30-12.15**      **Anna Tosato, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign**  
Performing arts and performing artists in the Virūpākṣa  
temple at Paṭṭaḍakal. A survey of literary, epigraphical, and  
sculptural sources
- 12.15-13.00**      **Anna A. Ślącza, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam**  
Why Bhṛṅgin stopped dancing? On the changing iconography  
of Bhṛṅgin in Tamil Nadu and his connection with Jvaradeva
- 13.00-13.30**      **Final discussion**
- 13.30**              **Lunch**