

Buddhist Evidence for the Early Existence of Drama

In his masterly survey of the evolution of the Sanskrit drama, Professor Berriedale Keith summarily disposes of the relevant Buddhist evidence with the unequivocal statement that "The extreme dubiety of the date of the Buddhist Suttas renders it impossible to come to any satisfactory decision regarding the existence of drama at an early date, while the terms employed, such as Visūkadassana, Nacca and Pekkā, and reference to Samajjas leave us wholly without any ground for belief in an actual drama."¹ But a critical examination of the Pāli Nikāyas shows us that the evidence afforded by these collections of dialogues throws much more light on this obscure problem than may be implied in a cursory allusion to the occurrence of such terms as Visūkadassana etc., and, that the available facts establish, with an appreciable degree of certainty, for the beginnings of dramatic spectacles in India, if not for the Sanskrit drama in a primitive form, a date that anticipated the one assigned to it by Keith *at least by a century, if not more.*

Professor Keith bases his main argument for the conclusion that "..... the Sanskrit drama came into being shortly after, if not before, the middle of the second century B.C.,"² on the criticism of Kātyāyana's rule regarding the use of the imperfect tense and the occurrence and import of the words Naṭa, Śobhanika (or Saubhika) and Kathaka etc., as found in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali whom he places "with reasonable assurance" about 140 B.C.³ For him, Indian literature before the time of Patañjali contains no positive evidence for the existence of drama even in a primitive form. Referring to the mention of 'Naṭasūtras' in Pāṇini (iv. 3. 110 f.) whom he places in the fourth century B.C., he remarks: "But we unfortunately are here as ever in no position to establish the meaning of Naṭa, which may mean no more than a pantomime."⁴ It is regarded as significant that Naṭa does not occur in the *Yajurveda* list of "persons of every kind covering every possible sort of occupations." In the *Mahābhāṣya*, however, he sees more certain evidence: "We seem in fact to have in the *Mahābhāṣya* evidence of a stage in which all the elements of drama were present; we have acting in

1 *Sanskrit Drama*, p. 43.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

dumb show, if not with words also; we have recitations divided between two parties. Moreover, we hear of Naṭas who not only recite but also sing.... We cannot absolutely prove that in Patañjali's time the drama in its full form of action allied to speech was present, but we know that all its elements existed, and we may legitimately and properly accept its existence in a primitive form."⁵

Now, it is difficult to understand how the important word Naṭa which occurs a number of times in the Pāli literature has escaped the notice of Prof. Keith. In the Nikāyas there are references to Naṭas and even Naṭagāmaṇis who were not merely mimes or dancers, but were clearly 'comedians' who by mimicry and words delighted audiences at fairs and shows. In the *Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta* we meet with the following:—

"Ekamantaṃ nisinna kho Tālapuṭo Naṭagāmaṇi Bhagavantam etad avoca: Sutam me taṃ bhante pubbakānaṃ ācariyapācariyānaṃ naṭānaṃ bhāsamanānaṃ: Yo so naṭo raṅgamajjhe samajjamajjhe saccālikena janaṃ hāseti rameti so kāyassa bhedaṃ parāṃ maraṇā Pahāsānaṃ devānaṃ sahayyantaṃ upapajjati. Idha Bhagavā kiṃ āhāti."⁶ "Then Tālapuṭa, the chief of the village of dancers, came to the Exalted One, saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated Tālapuṭa said to the Exalted One: 'I have heard, lord, traditional teachers of old who were actors speaking (in this wise): "A player who on the stage or in the arena makes people laugh and delights them with truth and falsehood, on the dissolution of the body after death, is reborn in the company of the Laughing Devas." What does the Exalted say regarding this matter?'

It goes without saying that the above passage is of great importance for the subject, origin of dramas, in that it contains not only the important word Naṭa, but also refers to a number of other facts. One important fact that emerges from a careful scrutiny of the above quotation is that the Naṭa was originally a figure of mirth (hāseti, rameti), thereby supporting the contention in favour of an at least partly secular origin for the drama. Let us take the important terms one by one. First of all, the name of the interlocutor itself is highly suggestive of the source of the main inspiration of comedy. The name Tālapuṭa (*not* Talapuṭa, Tāla—being supported by two Burmese Mss. and Cy.; cp. also *Tb.* l. 1145, p. 103) alludes to the custom quite common in ancient India

5 *Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 36, 37.

6 *S.* IV. p. 306 §3.

of using nicknames for reputed persons (cp. 'Kaṇāda,' name of the author of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtras, which literally means 'atom-eater'). Here 'tāla-' must mean 'musical rhythm' or 'beating time' as found in the ancient texts on musical theory. The second member of the compound viz. '-puṭa' means 'the hollow of the folded palm.'" The reference is no doubt to the practice prevalent even today among Indian musicians of beating time by clapping in either leading an orchestra or teaching pupils the rudiments of rhythm. This sense agrees perfectly well with the connotation of the word Naṭagāmaṇi or 'leader of Naṭas,' a term that later obtained vogue in dramatic theory as a designation for Sūtradhara or Nāṭyācārya.⁸ This identification of Naṭagāmaṇi and Sūtradhara leaves no room for doubt as to the former's connection with drama proper. Moreover, we may dismiss the suggestion of the commentator Buddhaghosa as unwarranted, though highly amusing, when he explains Tālapuṭa as referring to the person's "bright complexion which was like the colour of a ripe palmyra nut severed from the stalk" (bandhanā-mutta-tāla-paka-vaṇṇo viya mukha-vaṇṇo vippasanno ahoṣi, *Sāratthappakāsinī*, III. 102). Woodward's "basket of woven palm-leaves" for 'Tālapuṭa' is clearly beside the point.⁹

Next, the phrase 'pubbakānaṃ ācariyapācariyānaṃ naṭānaṃ,' despite its stereotyped phraseology, must be taken in this context to refer to a genuine tradition regarding generations of such 'Naṭa-preceptors' of the past,—a fact that cannot be ignored in discussing the nature of the Naṭa-sūtras mentioned by Pāṇini. As for the key-word Naṭa itself, the succeeding sentence proves without a shadow of doubt that the persons referred to here were *at least comedians if not actors of comedies*, who entered the stage (raṅga) to delight and make people laugh, with—and this is the most important fact—*truth and lies* (saccālikena; Buddhaghosa: 'saccena ca alikena ca,' *Sāratth.*, III. 193, which also shows that Woodward's "counterfeiting of the truth" falls far short of the actual significance). So these Naṭas were much more than mere mimes or dumb actors. Furthermore, we may suggest with some plausibility that the word 'alika' here might contain an implicit reference to 'fiction,' that is to say, fabricated anecdotes which form part of the stock-in-trade of comedians everywhere in the world. Important also is the word 'raṅga'¹⁰ inasmuch as it must needs refer in

7 Cp. *Mūl.* p. 87, 'hatha-puṭa'.

8 Vide Keith, *ibid.*, p. 360.

9 *Book of Kindred Sayings*, p. 214, fn. 1.

10 Cp. *Vinaya*, II. 10, 12.

the context either to an arena in general or to a play-house or theatre. The term is found in Pāṇini (vi. 4. 27) and the Petersburg Dictionary has (s.v.) "Theater, Schaubühne, Schauplatz, Arena"; in the technical literature *raṅga* is universally used for 'stage'.¹¹ Similarly, this passage makes it certain that the word 'samajja' denotes a concourse of people come together for amusement, a 'show' where the Naṭas took a leading rôle. In this connection we may observe that the *Rāmāyaṇa* in one of its genuine portions (ii. 67. 15) refers to 'samājas' where Naṭas and Nartakas, comedians and dancers, delight themselves.¹² According to Prof. Winternitz,¹³ this part must have been composed earlier than the third century B.C., and as we shall see later the Buddhist reference is equally old, if not older, from which it may be inferred that at this time the samājas or samajjas were a recognized institution. It may be mentioned that 'naṭa-nartakāḥ' occurs in the Anuśāsana Parvan of the *Mahābhārata* (xiii. 33. 12), and that the commentator Nīlakaṇṭha takes the compound to mean 'comedians and dancers' a sense that may not seem so improbable as Kieth supposes (p. 28) when taken in the light of the Saṃyutta passage. We may suggest, *en passant*, that the older root *nṛt* (*vide* naṭa, Petersburg Dict.) with its derivatives nartaka, nṛtya etc. in Sanskrit, and naṭṭaka, naṭṭakī (*Tb.* I. 267), nacca, naccaka etc. in Pāli referred to *dancing*, whereas its later dialectical form *naṭ* which gives naṭa, naṭaka, naṭī (also nāṭya in Skt.) etc. signified *gesticulation* and in course of time came to be applied to the art of the 'comedian' and thence to 'acting' proper. As for Pāli, the distinction seems to have been preserved at least in pre-Christian times,¹⁴ though the commentators often confuse the two (VvA. 210 naṭati = naccati). In the face of the above facts the conclusion is irresistible that the Naṭas were originally a class of comedians who performed on the stage or at assemblies using words to delight their audiences, and that Pāṇini's Naṭasūtras may, therefore, legitimately be taken to refer to something more than mere rules regulating the mode of gesticulation of the pantomime.

Another important passage bearing on the subject is found in the Brahmajāla Suttanta of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, containing as it does a list of terms denoting various amusements and shows (*visūkadassana*):—

11 *Vide* Keith, p. 359; cp. Manu, iv. 215 'raṅgāvataraka,' "stage-player" according to Bühler.

12 Keith, p. 29. 13 *History of Indian Literature*, vol. I, p. 516.

14 *Miln.*, p. 359 'naṭa-naccaka'.

"Yathā vā pañc'e bhonto samaṇa-brāhmaṇā saddhā-deyyāni bhojanāni bhujjivā te evarūpaṃ visūkadassanaṃ anuyuttāviharanti- seyyathidaṃ naccam gītaṃ vāditaṃ pekkham akkhānaṃ pañissaraṃ vetālaṃ kumbhathūnaṃ Sobha-nagarakam.....iti vā iti evarūpā visūkadassanā paṭivirato Samaṇo Gotamo ti" (D. I., p. 6, §13). Professor Rhys Davids rendered this passage as follows:—"Or he might say: 'Whereas some recluses and Brāhmaṇas, while living on food provided by the faithful, continue addicted to visiting shows; that is to say, nautch dances, singing of songs, instrumental music, shows at fairs, ballad recitations, hand-music, the chanting of bards, tam-tam playing, fairy scenes,.....Gotama the recluse holds aloof from visiting such shows.'"¹⁵

Here 'naccam gītaṃ vāditaṃ' refer to the old conception of 'saṃgīta' or 'triple symphony', viz., dancing, singing and instrumental music. Such entertainments are said to have been held at public assemblies such as those already referred to, concourses or fairs, samajjas¹⁶ and at the so-called mountain-fairs or giragga-samajjas¹⁷ said to be frequented even by ministers and other high personages.¹⁸ The word 'nacca' may refer to the dancing of both sexes; female dances are specifically called 'lāsa'¹⁹ and the four are sometimes mentioned together.²⁰ The last no doubt refers to an old practice and it is of significance for the later division into tāṇḍava and lāsyā types attributed to Śiva and Pārvatī respectively.²¹

Of doubtful, but not negligible, importance is the word 'pekkham' which is clearly a *collective-abstract* formation with the suffix 'a' from 'pekkhā' (Skt. prekṣā > *praiḥṣam) as most words in the list are (cp. pañissaraṃ < pañissaro). The Sanskrit is not found in any work earlier than *Manusmṛti*²² and *Harivaṃśa*.²³ Rhys Davids refuses to agree with Weber, Neumann, Burnouf and others who saw in the Pali 'pekkhā' "theatrical representations", and remarks: "But it is most unlikely that the theatre was already known in the fifth century B.C."²⁴ It is significant though that Buddhaghosa equates the word to 'naṭa-samajjam'²⁵ a gloss that estab-

15 *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Pt. I, pp. 7, 8.

16 *Vide D.* III, 183.

17 *Vin.* II, 107.

18 *Vin.* II, 150.

19 Skt. lāsaḥ; cp. *Miln.* p. 331, 'lāsa' = female dancer.

20 *Vin.* II, 10 "naccanti pi gāyanti pi vādenti pi lāsenti pi."

21 *Nāṭyaśāstra*, I. 2; Keith, p. 12.

22 'Prekṣā-samajjam' ix. 84; ix. 264.

23 'Prekṣāsu tu subahviṣu' 8702, 8685.

24 *Dial.* I. 7. fn. 4.

25 *Sum.* I.84; cp. III. 946.

lishes the connection, at least in tradition, between 'pekkhā' and 'samāja' as evidenced by the quotations from the Sanskrit sources, and also connects these shows with the activity of the Naṭas who, as seen from the Saṃyutta passage, performed also at samajjas.

Commenting on 'akkhāṇaṃ' the exegetist says that it refers to "recitations of Bhārata and Rāmāyaṇa" ('Bhārata-Rāmāyanādi, tam yasmiṃ thāne kathiyati...' *Sum.* I. 84); the word 'kathiyati' no doubt refers to the work of the Kathakas mentioned by Patañjali. But, if these recitations were of any "epics", it is clear on chronological grounds that the reference is not to the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* as we now have them but to the original "ballad" form of these legends. In the case of the former, Winternitz calls it "the old heroic poem" which he believes²⁶ is contained in the so-called "nucleus" of the *Mahābhārata*. The latter, according to him, "..... was composed in the third century B.C. by Vālmiki on the basis of ancient ballads."²⁷ The word 'veṭāṃ' meaning 'the chanting of bards,'²⁸ also alludes to similar recitations of wandering minstrels. The occurrence of these two terms in the list is of considerable importance for the subject of the origin of drama for, as Keith himself points out, "while the epics cannot be said to know the drama, there is abundant evidence of the strong influence on the development of the drama exercised by the recitation of the epics" (p. 29). The Sigāla Sutta²⁹ gives 'akkhāṇaṃ' as one of the six features of the samajjas where, as we have already seen, the Naṭas took a leading part, and, thereby establishes the contact between the 'comedians' and the 'ballad reciters.' Moreover, our passage proves that these ballad recitations, from which probably developed in the course of time the vocation of the Kathakas, were at least as old as the oldest dialogues of the Pāli Canon, if they were not already popular in the time of the Buddha. Consequently, the inspiration for the origin of drama from this source must be admitted to be much older than the middle of the second century B.C. as has been supposed by Keith (p. 45).

But the most important word in the list is undoubtedly the term 'Sobhanagarakam'—a term that has intrigued both the old and the new commentators. The reading itself is far from settled. The Sinhalese MSS

26 *Sum.* I. p. 459.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 517.

28 Rhys Davids; cp. "naṭavaitālika-stotra nartakāḥ sūtamāgadhāḥ" *M.Bh.* i. 940, *Hariv.* 8575, referred to *sub* Naṭa in the Petersburg Dict.

29 *D.* III. 183.

read 'Sobhanagarakam,' 'Sobhanakarakam' and 'Sobhanagananam,' whereas a Burmese MS. of the text has 'Sobhanakam.' The Sinhalese MS. of the commentary gives the reading 'Sobhanagarakam,' a Burmese MS. of the same having a variant 'Sobhanagam.' It may be observed that the Burmese MSS. of text and commentary do actually agree, for the -g- of the latter can easily be explained as phonetic variation of -k- in the former, the presence of the cerebralized -ṅ- in both (as opposed to the dental in all Sinh. MSS.) supporting the identification. These variants may point to two main traditions: 'Sobhanagarakam' among the Sinhalese, and 'Sobhanakam' among the Burmese. Now what is important is that both these forms can be satisfactorily explained, though the latter is by far the more likely historical one as we shall presently see. If the reading is taken to be 'Sobhanagarakam' the allusion may be to the city of Sobha which, as Weber discovered,³⁰ may refer to the city of the Gandharvas by that name. He quotes from a commentary on Śatarudriya: 'Sobha iti gandharva-nagaram' referred to also by Rhys Davids.³¹ So this compound viz. 'Sobha-nagarakam' may mean 'a collection of Sobha-denzens,' i.e., 'a troupe of Gandharvas,' with a probable reference to the traditional connection of these celestial musicians with the drama. On the other hand Rhys Davids' translation 'fairy scenes' is only a surmise based on the gloss 'paṭibhāna-citta' of the commentary, which as we shall see below is not what Buddhaghosa considered as the more probable sense. Now to take the other reading viz. 'Sobhanakam,' this is grammatically to be explained as a *collective formation*, of the same order as 'pekkham' discussed above, from a Pāli masculine noun 'Sobhanaka.' This brings us to the most important observation that this is no other than the Pāli counterpart of Sanskrit 'Sobhanika' as found in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali, the suffixes -aka and -ika being syntactically interchangeable. Now, Patañjali, in justification of the use of the present tense for deeds of the remote past as found in such sentences as 'He causes the death of Kāṃsa' etc., says that the *present* is permissible "because the sense is, not that they are being actually done, but that they are being described."³² He then sets out three such modes of description of which the first refers to the profession of the Sobhanikas: 'ye tāvad ete śobhanikā (v. 1. śaubhikā) nāmaite pratyakṣam Kāṃsam ghātayanti pratyakṣam Balim bandhayanti' (iii. 1. 26). Here Keith argues that these were pantomimists: "The obvious view, that of

30 *Indische Studien*, II. 38.31 *D. I*, 6 fn. 1.

32 Keith, p. 32.

Weber, that we have a reference to a pantomimic killing and binding, seems irresistible" (p. 33). The only doubt according to him is whether the Śobhanikas used words (p. 34). Anyway he leaves the question open whether the reference is to 'actors' in the proper sense. Whatever the real sense of the term may be, the fact is clear that the Pāli word 'Śobhanaka' also refers to the same, or at least a similar, class of performers. Once this identification is regarded as plausible the word 'Śobhanakaṃ' in the Dīgha passage must be taken to mean 'a troupe of Śobhanikas,' and, this is exactly how Buddhaghosa seems to have understood it, for he comments: 'Śobhanagara-kaṃ (v. 1. Śobhaṇagaṃ) ti naṭānaṃ abbhokiraṇaṃ, Śobhanagara-kaṃ (v. 1. Śobhanakaraṃ) vā paṭibhāna-cittan ti vuttaṃ hoti.'³³ The hesitancy of the editors regarding the reading and syntactical considerations incline one to the view that what probably Buddhaghosa meant to say was: 'Śobhaṇagan ti naṭānaṃ abbhokiraṇaṃ Śobhanagara-kaṃ vā (*sci. ti pi pāṭho*), paṭibhāna-cittan ti vuttaṃ hoti,' the first word 'Śobhaṇagaṃ' occurring in the Burmese MS. of the commentary being only the phonetic variant of 'Śobhaṇakaṃ' found as Burmese variant for the text. In any case, the important fact is that Buddhaghosa was more inclined to favour the meaning naṭānaṃ abbhokiraṇaṃ' than the sense 'paṭibhāna-cittan'; hence he places the former phrase at the beginning and gives the latter only as a possible alternative introduced by 'vā.' As for the exact significance of 'naṭānaṃ abbhokiraṇaṃ' it seems fairly likely that what is meant here is 'a troupe (*lit.* crowd, concourse) of actors.' The verbal noun 'abbhokiraṇaṃ' is formed from the root *kṛ*, to scatter, with the prefixes *abhi-* and *ava-*. Syntactically we may regard this as equal in sense to *ā-kiraṇa* (cp. *ākiṇṇa*, crowded), for it is observed that the use of the compound prefix 'abhi + ava' corresponds, probably with slightly more intensive sense, to that of 'ā'.³⁴ Hence we may conclude that the term 'Śobhanagara-kaṃ' or 'Śobhaṇakaṃ' of the *Dīgha Nikāya* alludes, as is implied in the gloss of Buddhaghosa, to some class of Naṭas,—an interpretation that has the support of Indian tradition as recorded by Kaiyaṭa in his comment on the word 'Śobhanika' of the *Mahābhāṣya*³⁵ and, that these Naṭas were either the *same* persons as referred to by Patañjali's 'Śobhanikāḥ' or at least were *their precursors* in the art.

33 *Sum.* I, p. 84.

34 Cp. Pāli *abbhokāsa*, open space, = *ākāsa*, space; Skt *abhyavaskandana* = *āskandana*, attacking; *abhyavahāra* = *āhāra*, food, etc.

35 'Kaṃsādyanukāriṇāṃ naṭānaṃ vyākhyānopādhyāyā', *vide* Keith, p. 33, fn. ii.

We have seen that Prof. Keith's reluctance to discuss the Buddhist evidence is based on two presuppositions: first, to use his own words, "the extreme dubiety of the date of the Buddhist Suttas," and second, the supposed paucity of information contained in the Pāli literature—he refers only to *Nacca*, *Pekkhā* and *Viśūkadassana*—concerning the question of dramatic origins (p. 42). We hope that the second point has been somewhat satisfactorily answered by the foregoing discussion. Now it remains to be seen how far the expression "extreme dubiety of the Buddhist Suttas" is historically justified. It is admitted on all sides that the Pāli Canon *en masse* is a growth of considerable duration and that the last word is yet to be said on the question of chronology. But this or any such consideration must not blind us to the important fact that, so far as the early *Nikāyas* and the *Vinaya* are concerned, there is enough evidence to prove that in substance, apart from their literary form, they go back to a period considerably anterior to the third century B.C. With certain reservations and limitations, we may say with Winternitz "that our Pāli *Tiṭṭaka*, at least the *Vinaya* and *Sutta Piṭaka*, does, on the whole, correspond to the *Māgadhi* Canon of the third century B.C."³⁶ This is proved by the edicts of *Aśoka*, particularly the *Bairāt* or *Bhābhrū* Edict (249 B.C.) which shows, in the opinion of the same authority, that the Pāli Canon on the whole is pre-*Aśokan* (p. 25). Now this '*Māgadhi* Canon' must have taken at least a century to have evolved into the hypothetical form in which we conceive it, and the language itself must have closely resembled the canonical Pāli. Indeed we must not, as is usually done, unduly exaggerate this linguistic, properly dialectical, difference because, as Winternitz himself admits, the '*Canon of the Vibhajjavādins*', a century after the Buddha's demise, was probably in an older form of Pāli (p. 13). Furthermore, we may now accept as a historical fact that *Moggaliputta Tissa*, 236 years after the demise of the Master, convened an assembly of monks at *Patna* "with the object of compiling a Canon of texts of the true religion or the *Theravāda*" (p. 6), and that the *Kathāvatthu*, ascribed to *Tissa* himself who presided at the Council, presupposes not only the texts of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and of *all the Nikāyas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka* but the other books of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* as well. "It would be quite feasible," says Winternitz, "to assume that the book (*Kathāvatthu*) was not written until the time of the compilation of the Canon by *Tissa*

himself....." (pp. 11, 12). These considerations would suffice to show that Bühler was not far wrong, when, in the last work he published, he expressed the opinion that the Nikāyas as we have them in the Pāli "are good evidence, certainly for the fifth, probably for the sixth, century B.C.," a conclusion that was endorsed by Prof. Rhys Davids who added: ".....that will probably become, more and more, the accepted opinion. And it is this which gives to all they tell us, either directly or by implication, of the social, political, and religious life of India, so great a value."³⁷ It is, of course, true that these statements must necessarily be modified in the light of later research, but no such consideration, we believe, can invalidate the main proposition that the early Nikāyas, at least the *Dīgha*, *Majjhima* and *Saṃyutta*, do, on the whole, contain "good evidence," if not for the period of Buddha's own activity (c. 535-485 B.C.), at least for that of his very early disciples to whom must be ascribed the creation of the original tradition embedded in these works. As for the genuineness of the particular passages forming the subject-matter of our present investigation, we may without hesitation observe that neither the Brahmajāla Sutta nor the Gāmaṇi Saṃyutta, from which we have quoted, betrays any evidence whatsoever, whether linguistic or otherwise, of lateness or spuriousness of composition; on the other hand, the Naṭagāmaṇi dialogue shows every sign of being a record of an actual event both by the tone of naturalness running through the whole narrative and also in point of style and method, while the Brahmajāla Sutta, though obviously a résumé of the existing philosophical and religio-social institutions of the time, contains material that is proved to be old by the very obscurity of its terminology and the close resemblance of doctrines discussed to the ideas of the ancient Upaniṣads.³⁸

Now to sum up: We hope we have succeeded in proving that the evidence afforded by the Nikāyas is of considerable importance for the problem of the evolution of drama in India, particularly for the history of the key-word Naṭa and also of Śobhanika, and, that the available evidence would take back its origin to at least *the third or fourth century B.C.*, if they do not conclusively prove that there were dramatic spectacles of some kind, probably comedy *in nuce*, in the time of the Buddha himself. This conclusion is supported by the further consideration that if, as Prof. Keith himself admits, "the Vedic ritual contained within itself the germs of drama"

37 *Dial.* I, p. xx.

38 Cp. Rhys Davids, *Dial.* I p. xxvi.

(p. 23), and if, as Winternitz has shown with great plausibility, the beginning of the Vedic literature was nearer to 2500 or 2000 B.C. than to 1500 or 1200 B.C. as generally held³⁹ then it makes the belief well-nigh impossible that with such materials as present in the Vedic culture, the ballad recitations which seem to be pre-Buddhistic, as shown above, and other tendencies reflected both in Sanskrit and Pāli literature, the drama, at least in some crude form, could not have come into being all throughout the course of a whole millennium: The fact that the Naṭa of the Saṃyutta is a 'comedian' shows that in its origin the secular influence on the drama was also considerable and that it was not evoked solely "by the combination of epic recitations with the dramatic moment of the Kṛṣṇa legend,"⁴⁰ a contention that gains strength by the fact that the earliest dramas we possess, viz., those of Aśvaghōṣa, have very little in common with the epics or the Kṛṣṇa legend in point of theme and subject-matter.

O. H. DE A. WIJESSEKERA