

# FROZEN SENTIMENTS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF KĀLIDĀSA'S DRAMA TO SACRED ART AT THE CĀLUKYA COURT

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## ABSTRACT

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Bas-reliefs of scenes from the epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are extremely common in temples all over India, but depictions of scenes from a Sanskrit play (*mahānāṭaka*) in places of worship are virtually unheard of. A few bas-reliefs at the Lokeśvara Temple and the Trailokyēśvara Temple at Paṭṭadakal depict scenes centring around a female figure, who is arguably Śakuntalā. The story of Śakuntalā is first mentioned in Book I of the *Mahābhārata* and was subsequently dramatised by Kālidāsa in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE in a Sanskrit play called the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*. From a comparison of these bas-reliefs with the aforesaid texts in the original Sanskrit, it is evident that they match the storyline in the play better than that of the epic. Apart from corroborating the probability that these reliefs may have been inspired by a medieval Sanskrit play, this article also explores the artistic relationship between the Cālukya kingdom and the famous Sanskrit playwright Kālidāsa, as well as the possible connection between medieval Indian temple architecture and the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a Sanskrit treatise on dramaturgy. The result demonstrates that the works of Kālidāsa were known and cherished by the Cālukya royal figures, some of whom memorialised them in stone, in an unusual form of temple iconography in the two temples at Paṭṭadakal.

**Keywords:** Paṭṭadakal, India; art history; Hindu temple; iconography; Sanskrit play; Kalidasa; performing art

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Named after its founder, Lokamahādevī, a principal queen of Vikramāditya II (r. 733–744 CE), who built it to commemorate her husband's victory over the Pallavas at Kanchipuram in 740 CE (Brown, 1971), the Lokeśvara temple (now more commonly known as the Virūpākṣa temple) is the largest in the group of Paṭṭadakal temples (Kāḍasiddheśvara, Jambuliṅgeśvara, Galaganātha, Candrasekhara, Saṅgameśvara, Kāśīviśveśvara, Trailokyēśvara, Lokeśvara, Pāpanātha and Jain Nārāyaṇa Temples) located in the state of Karnataka, approximately 444 kilometres from the city of Bengaluru. Today, the Lokeśvara Temple is considered to be the finest monument of the Cālukya dynasty. The temple is built in the *drāviḍa* style (South Indian) of architecture and according to two separate inscriptions found at the site the two principal architects were Tribhuvan and Sarvasiddhi Ācāryas, "Master of the Three Worlds and Master of the Abode of Good Qualities" (Michell, 2014). The most noteworthy praise of the architects came from Percy Brown:

'so harmonious is the entire conception it conveys the impression that the deepest emotions of its creators were concentrated on its production' (Brown, 1971). In fact, many believe the temple to have been modelled after the Kailāsanātha temple in Kanchipuram and that the architects were imported from there, due to an inscription at the Kailāsanātha itself that states that Vikramāditya II made lavish endowments for the temple. Despite the existence of inscriptions stating that the architects came from the 'South', Brown, however, thinks there is not enough evidence to support this claim as 'South' does not necessarily mean the Tamil country (Brown, 1971).

The temple faces east and the *garbhagrha*, housing a *śivaliṅga*, is surrounded by a *pradakṣiṇapatha* with latticed windows on three sides. The *vimāna* over the sanctum is topped with a *kalaśa* and consists of three storeys comprising intricate carvings and kudus, which are a common feature of Dravidian architecture. The *maṇḍapa* (cella) in front of the sanctum consists of sixteen columns and can be entered from the north, east or south. The raised outer walls of the temple bear some of the finest masterpieces of the Cālukya Period, depicting gods such as Trivikrama, Liṅgodbhava, Narasiṃha, Brahmā, Naṭarāja, Ardhanārīśvara.

Inside the *maṇḍapa*, episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* carved on stone are found on three panels at the southwest corner. The narrative progresses in anticlockwise sequence: the fight between Vali and Sugrīva, the combat between Rāvana and Jaṭāyu, the abduction of Sītā, Rāma shooting the golden deer and Lakṣmaṇa dismissing Suparṇakha. The columns inside the temple also contain various *Rāmāyaṇa* depictions: Lakṣmaṇa cutting off Suparṇakha's nose and the subsequent battle between the brothers and Rāvana, the story of the golden deer, the abduction of Sītā by the flying chariot, the fight between Rāvana and Jaṭāyu, Rāma blessing the injured Jaṭāyu, and the fight between Vali and Sugrīva.

Scenes from the *Mahābhārata* are depicted, too, on the columns, starting with the war council, then, Bhīṣma on the bed of arrows, the battle between Bhīma and Dūryodhana, and the combat between Arjuna and Karṇa in their chariots. The next set of narratives includes scenes from the *Kirātārjuniya* starting with Arjuna and Śiva as hunters; Arjuna fights Śiva for the *paśupatāstra* and Arjuna shows the weapon to Dūryodhana.

Besides the depictions of the two epics, scenes from Purāṇas are also displayed here, including stories of Kṛṣṇa, the churning of the cosmic ocean, the descent of the Gaṅgā and the rescuing of Mārkaṇḍeya from Yama. As well as the friezes of religious figures, secular images are found inside the temple including erotic depictions of lovers embracing, touching and fondling each other (on the half columns set against the walls of the *maṇḍapa*). Finally, stone reliefs arguably depicting scenes from Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, which are thought to represent the first reference ever made to any theatrical drama in a temple and which are the main focus of this article are also found here.

Just as in the case of the Lokeśvara Temple, the Trailokyeśvara Temple (now known as the Mallikārjuna Temple), also a temple dedicated to Śiva, was built by Trailokyamahādevī, the second queen of Vikramāditya II for the same reason, to commemorate her husband's victory. It was built around the same time as the former and is almost identical to it; but the latter is slightly smaller perhaps to reflect the rank of the queen, or due to the limited space, as its north portion seems to be so close to the Kāśīviśveśvara temple. This may be why Trailokyeśvara Temple is thought to be of lesser quality than its sister temple as many artistic elements may have had to be left out due to lack of space. There are, nevertheless, some difference between the two temples. Firstly, the entire axis of Trailokyeśvara seems to be directed to the northeast while Lokeśvara's is towards the southeast (Filliozat, n.d.). Additionally, the former has a hemi-spherical *vimāna* with an image of Naṭarāja located on the *śukhanāsa*, unlike the latter, which sports a squared *vimāna* (Michell, 2014). In terms of iconography, the Trailokyeśvara Temple also contains a plethora of images spanning various Hindu sects, namely Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta and their associated mythologies. There are notable images from the *Pañcatantra* on pillar 15 and from the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* on pillar 11 of the eastern façade.

## 2. THE ŚAKUNTALĀ RELIEFS

Three bas-reliefs with a female figure appearing at the centre of the scene are found on pillars 10 (east) and 18 (north) at the Lokeśvara Temple and on pillar 11 (east façade) at the Trailokyeśvara Temple. All three reliefs depict a female figure reclining on some kind of bed with her head resting on one hand and one leg bent or crossed, evoking a sense of the erotic. The main figure is accompanied by two or more female figures. Given the evidence of trees and other vegetation, the scenes on pillar 18 in the first temple and on pillar 11 in the second temple probably take place in a forest. Such scenes do not match any story told in the Purāṇas and hence it is unlikely that the female is the figure of a goddess or a celestial being. This leaves the epics: the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Although the *Rāmāyaṇa* does contain narratives of Sītā living in the forest, it does not describe her lying down at any point in the story. Additionally, it is not usual for a figure of a goddess to be depicted in this position or in a sensual manner such as this.

The *Mahābhārata* contains an episode called *Śakuntalopakhyaṇa* (*Mahābhārata* I, 68–69), which tells the story of a woman named Śakuntalā, the mother of Bharata, who became the ancestor of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, the protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*. Śakuntalā was born out of wedlock to an *apsara* (celestial nymph) called Menakā and Sage Viśvāmitra but was abandoned and raised by Sage Kaṇva in a forest hermitage. Śakuntalā grew up to become a beautiful woman. One day while on a hunting expedition, Duṣyanta, the king of Hastināpura came across a hermitage deep in the forest and wished to pay respects to the Sage, but Kaṇva being out collecting fruits, Śakuntalā welcomed the king. The two fell in love instantaneously and were married according to the rite of Gāndharva marriage.<sup>1</sup> Soon after, Śakuntalā became pregnant, but the king had to return to look after the affairs of the kingdom. Śakuntalā gave birth to a very strong and handsome son, Bharata. When the boy reached the age of six, Sage Kaṇva advised Śakuntalā that it was not appropriate for a mother and child to stay in the forest without a father or husband and that they should go and see Duṣyanta. When they arrived at the palace the king did not recognise them and doubted if the boy was his son, but soon a voice from heaven proclaimed that Bharata was indeed his son and so he accepted the mother and child.

Kālidāsa, however, turned the epic into a play by altering the plot and introducing ingenious dramatic elements, the most successful of these being the introduction of the ring the king gives as a token of love and remembrance to Śakuntalā before returning to the capital. Later in the story, Śakuntalā loses the ring en route to the palace with her son and so Duṣyanta does not recognise or accept them. Fortunately, a fisherman has caught a fish and found the ring inside its stomach; when the ring is subsequently taken to the king, he immediately recognises his mistake and flies to heaven to retrieve Śakuntalā, who has retreated to be with her mother. The placement of the typical *deus ex machina* plot in the *Mahābhārata* version with a dramatic device in the form of the ring propelled Kālidāsa's version to long-lasting success for centuries to come.

There are many small differences between the two versions. It became apparent while looking at some of these details that the bas-reliefs in the two temples at Paṭṭadakal follow Kālidāsa's work rather than the epic. The most obvious scene, which points to the story's being taken from the play can be found on pillar 10 at the Lokeśvara Temple (Figure 1). It is from Act III of the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, which tells the story of the love-stricken Śakuntalā who has just been spending some passionate days with the king when he is suddenly called to return to his capital, Hastināpura, to preside over a Vedic sacrifice. But before leaving Duṣyanta decides to linger behind a bush to spy on Śakuntalā who is confiding in her two friends about her lovesickness. The detail of the scene shows Śakuntalā lying on a stone slab surrounded by the women and a senior ascetic of the *āśrama* (hermitage), namely Anasūyā, Priyaṃvadā, Gautamī and a few others; this matches the following passage in the play:

*aye labdham netranirvāṇam | eṣā me manorathapriyatamā sakusumāstarāṇam śilāpaṭṭam adhiśayānā  
sakhībhyām avāsyate | bhavatu | śroṣyām yāsām viśram bhakathitāni | (3.6)*

Ah! The elixir of my eyes is found. Here is the beloved of my heart, reclining on a stone-slab covered with flowers and waited on by her two friends. Well, I shall hear their confidential talks (Kale, 2005: 91).

Even more tellingly, Śakuntalā's facial and bodily expressions depicted on the pillar match the subsequent verse uttered by Duṣyanta:

*kṣāmakṣāmakapolam ānanam uraḥ kāthinyamuktastanam  
madhyaḥ klāntataraḥ prakāmavinatāv aṃsau chaviḥ pāṇḍurā |  
śocyā ca priyadarśanā madanakliṣṭeyam ālakṣyate  
patrāṇām iva śoṣaṇena marutā sprṣṭā latā mādhavī || (3.8)*

Her face has its cheeks excessively emaciated; her bosom has its breasts destitute of hardness; her waist is even more slender; her shoulders are exceedingly sunken; and her complexion is pale, she, (thus) tormented with love, appears both lovely and deplorable, like a *Mādhavī* creeper shaken by the wind causing its leave to wither (Kale, 2005: 91).

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Manusmṛti* (Hindu code of law), Gāndharva is one amongst the 8 types of Hindu marriages - permissible only for the *kṣatriya* caste: "when the girl and the groom have sex with each other voluntarily, that is 'Gāndharva marriage' based on sexual union and originating from love" (3.32). See Olivelle (2004).



**Figure 1:** Pillar 10 (East), Lokeśvara Temple

The next relief can be found on the top row of pillar 18 (north) (Figure 2) but is not as intricate as the previous one. The one on the left side shows a lady reclining on a stone slab under a tree, while that on the other side shows a couple sitting very close to one another. It is imaginable that the image of the couple is a portrayal of verse 19 of the play – when the king, who is identifiable by the high hairdo, the *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread) and the *rājalīlāsana* (royal ease pose) has just reappeared from the bush to say his farewells to Śakuntalā and they are now sitting in an embrace:

*añke nidhāya karabhoru yathāsukhaṃ te  
saṃvāhayāmi caraṇāvuta padmatāmrāu || (3.20)*

O you with thighs so beautifully tapering like the forearm, shall I, placing your lotus-red feet in my lap, shampoo them so as to soothe you? (Kale, 2005: 113).

I agree with Filliozat (n.d.) that the scene on the right side might have been from verse 19, but would also add that the relief is a combination of two sections of Act III and that the image from the left is taken from verse 24, at the very end of the act, when the king is having a last look at Śakuntalā, again reclining on a stone-slab, before being called by a voice that tells him the sacrifice is about to start:

*tasyāḥ puṣpamayī śarīralalitā śyyā śilāyāmiyaṃ  
klānto manmathalekha eṣa nalinīpatre nakhair apitaḥ |  
hastādbhṛṣṭimidam bisābharaṇamityāsyaṃnēkṣaṇo  
nirgantu sahasā na vetasagrḥācchaknomi śūnyādapi || (3.24)*

Here, on the stone-slab, is her flowery couch, crushed by her body; here is the faded love-letter incised with her nails on a lotus leaf; here is a lotus-stalk (which served as) an ornament (around her wrist) dropped down from her hand. My eye being thus riveted (on several objects). I cannot depart all at once from this cane-arbour even though vacant (Kale, 2005: 119).



**Figure 2:** Pillar 18 (North), Lokeśvara Temple

I see the imagery on this pillar as a continuous narrative in which multiple scenes are illustrated in a single frame. In this case, scenes described in verse 19 and verse 24 appear in a single frame, separated by two women, possibly Anasūyā and Priyaṃvadā who are in turn separated by trees and may therefore be serving as scene breakers.

At the Trailokyeśvara temple, the relief on pillar 11 in the east façade (Figure 3) is also from Kālidāsa's play and is similar to the aforementioned reliefs at the Lokeśvara temple. Once again, it depicts Śakuntalā reclining on a stone-slab. The panel directly above is probably also from the same play and shows the scenery of the hermitage belonging to Śakuntalā's foster father, Kaṇva (Filliozat, n.d.).



**Figure 3:** Pillar 11 (East Façade), Trailokyeśvara Temple

The other frieze depicting a scene from the same play is located in the *nandīmaṇḍapa*, the pavilion housing Nandī, the bull-vehicle of Śiva. The scene shows a boy sitting on a lion and pulling on his mane. This scene does not exist in the *Mahābhārata* version, but the imagery of the bas-relief echoes a scene from Act VII of the play when the king sees his son for the first time and is astonished at the child's strength:

*ardhapīstanaṃ māturām ardakṣiṭakesaram |  
prakṛitum siṃhaśiṣum balātkāreṇa karṣati ||* (7.14)

Who, for the purpose of playing is forcibly dragging away from its mother, a lion's cub that has, but half sucked the teat and has its mane disordered in the act of tugging and pulling (Kale, 2005: 267).

Just as Sanskrit plays communicate *rasas*<sup>2</sup> (sentiments) to the audience through recitations and acting, the verses transformed into a form of stone reliefs consequently became the medium by which the *rasas* are communicated to the viewers without the need of words or gestures. Similarly, Kālidāsa is famous largely because of his ability to communicate different *rasas* through his writing, which includes many dramatic devices achieved through the building of characters and mastery of the Sanskrit language and metres. *Abhijñānaśakuntalam* is renowned particularly for the *śṛṅgārarasa* or love sentiment, which is brought out through the character of the female protagonist. *Śṛṅgārarasa* is also divided into sub-types, as love can bring sadness, melancholy and pain as well as happiness. Scenes from Act III, which are depicted on most of the bas-reliefs at both the temples at Paṭṭakkal also demonstrate two types of the *śṛṅgārarasa*. Friezes on pillar 10 (east) at the Lokeśvara Temple and pillar 11 (east façade) at the Trailokyeśvara, which depict Śakuntalā lying with an emaciated face on a stone slab (verse 3.6) and on a flowery couch (verse 3.24) respectively, clearly communicate the *vipralambhaśṛṅgārarasa*, or love in separation, because she has just been separated from her husband. The top row of pillar 18 (north) at the Lokeśvara temple, which I have suggested is a continuous narrative of two scenes, thus comprises two *rasas*: Śakuntalā lying on a flowery couch on the left of the frieze (verse 3.24) represents the *vipralambhaśṛṅgārarasa*, while the figure of Śakuntalā together with Duṣyanta to the right of the frieze (verse 3.20) communicates the contrary – the *sambhogaśṛṅgārarasa* or love in union. Hence the dichotomy of this particular *rasa* is represented in this frieze.

<sup>2</sup> The *Nāṭyaśāstra* prescribes eight *rasas*, namely *śṛṅgāra* (love), *hāśya* (comic), *raudra* (anger), *kāruṇya* (compassion), *bībatsa* (disgust), *bhayanaka* (fear), *vīra* (heroic) and *adbhuta* (wonder/amusement) with the ninth *rasa* – *śānta* (peace) – added by later poets.

### 3. KĀLISĀSA AND THE CĀLUKYA DYNASTY

Apart from the images from both the temples mentioned, there are a number of other images and motifs that could possibly come from the same play, but they are too vague to be precisely identified. It is very likely that the Śakuntalā reliefs from both temples were made according exclusively to the royal decrees of Queen Lokamahādevī and Queen Trailokyamahādevī who, according to an inscription<sup>3</sup> within the complex, were patrons of art, music and drama. An inscription in Sanskrit states that Lokamahādevī confirmed the rights of the singers of the locality regarding their enjoyment of the grants and privileges that had been conferred on them by the previous monarch Vijayāditya (696–733 CE) (Filliozat, n.d.). There are two more Sanskrit inscriptions that mention the existence of a well-known actor named Achalan, the son of Devayya, who bore the title *Naṭasevya* and was the most renowned authority on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in the court of Vikramāditya II as well as being a very proficient dancer and actor (Sundara, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

The connection between the Cālukya Dynasty and Kālidāsa, however, started a century before the time of Lokamahādevī, during the reign of Pulakeśi II (r. 610–642 CE); an inscription at Aihole praises Ravikīrti, the court poet as possessing poetic excellence the style of which bears comparison with Kālidāsa and Bhāravi:

*yenoyoji nave aśmashthiram arthavidhau vivekinā jinaveśma  
sa vijayatām ravikīrtiḥ kavitaśrita kālidāsabhāravikīrtiḥ*

May that Ravikīrti be victorious, who, full of discernment has used the abode of Jina firmly built of stone for a new treatment of his theme and who thus by his poetic skill has attained to the fame of Kālidāsa and Bhāravi (Kielhorn, 1990: 144).

Another noteworthy personage who linked the dynasty and Kālidāsa is Queen Vijjikā (also known as Vijjī and Vijayā), the daughter-in-law of Pulakeśi II and a competent poet in her own right. She is the author of a Sanskrit play in five acts – *Kaumudīmahotsava* and was the contemporary of another great Sanskrit poet Daṇḍin (active around 680–720 CE), the author of *Kāvyaḍarśa* (Rangaswami, 2015). Their relationship is confirmed by the fact that she supposedly wrote a verse in the form of a friendly retaliation to Daṇḍin for having described Goddess Sarasvatī as having a fair complexion. Here are the verses by both poets:

Daṇḍin's *Kāvyaḍarśa*:

*caturmukhamukhāṃ bhōjavanahaṃsavadur mama |  
mānase ramatāṃ nityaṃ sarva śuklā sarasvatī ||*

Vijjikā from *Sūktimuktāvali*:

*nīlotpala dalaśyāmāṃ vijjikāṃ māmajānatā |  
vr̥thaiva daṇḍinā proktā sarva śuklā sarasvatī ||*

Not knowing me, Vijjikā, who is dark like the petal of a blue lotus. Daṇḍin has in vain called Sarasvatī totally white (Nanjundaiya Sreekantaiya, 2001: 33).

In turn, another eminent Sanskrit poet of the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, Rājaśekhara who is renowned as the only poet to praise women in his work *Kāvyaḃmīmāṃsā*, mentions Vijjikā along with other women, namely Śīlabhaṭṭarikā and Devī for their excellence in poetry (Prabhu, 2011).<sup>5</sup>

The verse praising Vijjikā / Vijayā goes as follows:

*sarasvatīva karnātī vijayāṅkā jayatyasau  
yā vaidarbhaḡirāṃ vāsaḡ kālidāsād anantaram ||*

<sup>3</sup> Kohalpur plates, regnal years 13, *Śakha* 614 (= CE 692–93). See Rangaswami (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Translation: 1) The pride of the rutting elephant in the form of another dancer vanishes by hearing the roaring sound of this dancer (*naṭasevya*) who is the follower of the work on dramaturgy composed by Bharata. The mountain of the art of the deceptive dancer is shattered by the falling of the thunderbolt in the form of the words of the dancer expert in the art advocated by Bharata 2) The name of the dancer is Achalan. See Annigeri (1961).

<sup>5</sup> *Śabdārthayo samo gumphāḡ pāncālīvr̥ttir īśyate  
śīlabhaṭṭarikā vaci bhāṅktiṣu ca yā sadā.  
śuktīnāṃ smarakeḡināṃ kalānāṃ ca vilāsabhūḡ  
prabhur devī kavī laṭī gatāpi hr̥di tiṣṭati.*

Vijayā by name, of Karnataka country, is famous like Sarasvatī. After Kālidāsa, she is the heaven of poetry in the *vaidarbhī* mode. (Translation by T. Nanjundaiya Sreekantaiya, 2001: 33)

Taking the passages concerning Daṇḍin and Vijjikā into account, Nanjundaiya Sreekantaiya observes that Daṇḍin probably came from Karnataka and lived before 660 CE (as Vijjikā was the daughter-in-law of Pulakeśi II who reigned during that period). Therefore, judging by the evidence from various sources for the poetic contributions to the kingdom, it is clear that the Cālukya kings and queens were great patrons of the arts and many poets actually lived under their patronages.

In similar fashion, Queen Lokamahādevī was a connoisseur of the arts and had surely intended to continue the legacy of her ancestors. Due to the connection of her kingdom with the great poet, Kālidāsa, her choice to use his work as part of the grand project to mark her husband's victory was probably not a random one and the choice of the scenes from the play chosen either by her or her chief architect was not an accident, as Act III of the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* has long been considered to be Kālidāsa's finest achievement owing to his legendary ability to express the sentiments through his fine verses.

By virtue of these Śakuntalā panels in the temples, the buildings also exude a subtle feminine undertone and brings out *śrīngāra rasa*, which could have been intentional as the temple was commissioned by queens. In like manner, the panel depicting Duṣyanta and his son in Act VII brings out *vīra rasa* – masculinity, which stands for the king's strength and his legacy and balances the feminine panels depicting Śakuntalā.

Furthermore, Queen Lokamahādevī and Queen Trailokyamahādevī might have attempted to equate their husbands' reign with that of Pulakeśi II (r. 610–642 CE), who is considered as one of the greatest monarchs of the dynasty, having reclaimed the throne from his uncle Maṅgaleśa, conquered the Pallavas and militaristically stabilised the entire Deccan. He was known, moreover, for his excellent taste in the arts and he employed many great poets; Daṇḍin could have been one of them, not to mention his daughter-in-law who, as mentioned, was a gifted poet in her own right.

#### 4. NĀṬAKAŚĀLĀ

Nāṭakaśālā is the Sanskrit term for a performing art theatre, often located near the centre of town, not far away from the main temple. Like classical Greek theatre, Indian theatre was considered sacred and was performed only in temples or in the king's court (Das, 2015). The *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata states that Sanskrit plays must be performed on sacred ground and that the large type of playhouse is meant exclusively for gods as can be seen in the following verse:

*devānāṃ bhavanam jyeṣṭham nṛpāṇāṃ madhyamam bhavet |  
śeṣāṇāṃ prakṛtīnām tu kaṇīyah saṃvidhīyate || (11)*

The large playhouse is meant for gods and the middle-sized one for kings, while for the rest of people has been prescribed the smallest (theatre) (Ghosh, 2003: 19).

As kings and queens of the Cālukya Kingdom were great admirers of the arts, and here I would venture to say that the rules laid down in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* were perhaps practised in the court, the play could have been performed in the temple or in a playhouse built in the style described in the treatise and located within the precincts of the temple.

The close proximity of the two buildings would have been convenient for the priests, who had to come and perform the *pūjā* (worship) before the performances as prescribed by the rules stated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Similarly, dancers, actors and musicians who, according to the inscriptions, played a very important role in the Cālukya court, may have served as performers in both temple and theatre and the short distance between the two would have been practical. In Kerala, traditional *Kūṭiyattam* performers still perform in temples. A good example would be the case of the Padmanābhavāmī temple in Tiruvananthapuram where a *nāṭakaśālā* (dance/drama hall), located near the *Rājagopuram*, is the venue for the staging of Kathakali performances during the temple's 10-day festival (*Brahmotsavam*) held around October of each year.

It is highly likely that performances regularly took place within the temple complex at Paṭṭadakal as various *āgamas* (Hindu ritual texts) prescribe the offering of music and dance as one of the *upacāras* (offerings) to the presiding deities and that the *maṇḍapas* facing the sanctum were a suitable place for this (Filliozat, n.d.).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Built to reinforce the dynasty's legitimacy, the Lokeśvara and Trailokyeśvara temples, considered as gems of Dravidian architecture and as having inspired a number of the great temples in subsequent centuries, contain a small number of reliefs depicting scenes from the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, which do not exist anywhere else. Hence these two temples are probably the first and, so far, the only ones found to contain images from a Sanskrit play. Although the bas-reliefs were inspired by Kālidāsa's work, technically they still adhere to the unspoken temple-building tradition because the story still has its source in the epic. Being ingeniously incorporated into the temple structure, these friezes also reflect the queens' taste and their patronage of the arts. They also demonstrate that Kālidāsa was already well known long before the construction of the temple and that the author's works had influenced many personalities connected to the court.

Additionally, the Śakuntalā reliefs concurrently outline the principles of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which clearly state that dramas serve as a means to teach humans in various ways. The existence of these panels along with the inscriptions concerning performers may also be an indication that a theatre or *nāṭakaśālā* may have once existed within or near the temple, though further research through archaeological, historical and textual approaches, would be necessary to confirm this theory.

The iconography in the temples as a whole demonstrates the opulence and the heightened sophistication of the arts in the Cālukya court where highly skilled architects, craftsmen, musicians, dancers, actors and poets thrived under royal patronage producing works that reshaped the cultural landscape. Finally, I would argue that by having a portion of a famous Sanskrit play immortalised in the form of bas-reliefs, the builders of these temples sent a strong message that patronage of the arts was as important as patronage of religion in the effort to strengthen the kingdom's power and reputation in turbulent medieval India.

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