

**The *Vibudhānanda* play
inserted in Śīlānka's novel *Caupannamahapurisacariya***

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The *Caupannamahāpurisacariya* is a prakrit novel dating from the ninth century, in which Śīlānka narrated the lives of the fifty-four Jain great men (viz. the twenty-four Tīrthankara, the twelve Cakravartin, the nine Vāsudeva and the nine Bālarāma). It is first and foremost known as one of the oldest specimen of the Jain universal history.

Another interesting feature of Śīlānka's work is the insertion of a whole play, the *Vibudhānanda*, in the story of Mahābala, one of the first Tīrthankara □ūabha's previous lives. In order to induce his master to become a Jain monk, Mahābala's minister Vimalamati stages in front of him a play ending by the death of the hero and the heroine. Disgusted with mundane life, Mahābala takes the religious initiation. Thus the *Vibudhānanda* has a decisive influence on the spiritual progress of the soul of □ṣabha, and is well integrated in the story as a whole. Nevertheless, it remains structurally distinct from the rest of the *Caupannamahāpurisacariya*, as it consists mainly in dialogues between the characters, with few stage directions, contrasting with the surrounding narration.

First, we can wonder why Śīlānka did not sum up the contents of the play in order to integrate it more closely in the pattern of the novel. Thus, in other Jain novels ranging from the eighth to the tenth century, as Uddyotana's *Kuvalayamālā* or Siddharṣi's *Upamitibhavaprapaṅcākathā*, play performances were alluded to, but the dramatic texts were not included by the authors in the stories. What kind of interaction between dramas and narratives in Jain literature does it denote? Can we deduce from the *Vibudhānanda* evidence that a novel as the *Caupannamahāpurisacariya* was intended for oral recitation, and that the storyteller could introduce in it the performance of a short play, whether by being helped by a troop of actors, or by assuming himself the different roles?

The *Vibudhānanda* is also interesting from a generic point of view. According to Warder, it is a unique sample of *uts□ṣṭikāika* tragic play described by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. It led us to wonder whether, for doctrinal reasons, the Buddhists and the Jains were more inclined than the Hindus to make use of dramatic genres showing the bad events occurring in human existence. For instance, did Śīlānka want the audience to undergo the same spiritual evolution than Mahābala, by representing in the *Vibudhānanda* to which extent worldly life could be unhappy?