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The Curiosity for the "Others"

Indian Dances and Oriental Costumes in Europe (1663—1821)

TIZIANA LEUCCI[1]

> Nothing can be imagined more graceful, nor more expressive, than the gestures and attitudes of those [Indian] dancing-girls, which may properly be called the eloquence of the body, in which indeed most of the Asiatics and inhabitants of the southern [sic] climates constitutionally excel, from a sensibility more exquisite than is the attribute of the more northern people. Giovanni-Andrea Gallini 1762[2]

> Under the guidance of expert masters begins [the bayadères'] training in vocal and instrumental music, dance, and whatever is convenient to stir up aesthetic pleasure and love of beauty in the soul of the prince and the other members of his court, including the art of seducing hearts, even the less sensitive ones. Maistre de La Tour 1784[3]

Introduction

The European curiosity for the dance and music of "exotic" countries (including India, China, Peru, Turkey, Persia, North Africa, as well as Islamic, Gypsy, and Jewish Spain) has a long history. In fact, there was a widespread interest in the "others" since at least the Renaissance era when "foreign" characters (often with masks) appeared in plays and ballets, and during festivals, carnivals, processions, jousts, and banquets at Italian, French and other European courts.[4] The "age of discovery" was followed by the age of imperialism and colonialism in which the contact with non-European cultures intensified. This had not only a profound impact on thought and fashion, but also on dances and ballets.

Throughout the 18th century "orientalist" themes were commonplace in operas and ballets. With an increasing awareness of non-European musical and choreographic traditions, "national dances" became part of the intermissions during operas and melodramas. By using "national" costumes, peculiar gestures, movements, rhythmic patterns, and scales, such dances were supposed to evoke distant places and foreign cultures. "Authenticity" was not always an issue, of course.

In this paper I will focus on those ballets and operas/ballets on Indian subject staged in Europe from the end of the 18th century till the beginning of the 19th century. In order to support my argument, I will report on a number of historical and iconographic sources that were not mentioned in my previous paper presented at the 2nd Rothenfels Dance Symposium in 2008.[5] I will show here how a fantasy world was often created, which had little to do with the "exotic" countries portrayed on the stage, musically and theatrically speaking. Finally, I will analyse the strong impact that some European travelers' accounts had on the creativity of librettists and choreographers in the first decades of the 19th century, thanks to their detailed description of the musical and dance traditions of the "Eastern Indies."

"Seductive Courtesans, Talented Artists & Faithful Lovers": The European Perception of Indian Dancers in Travel Accounts

The Indian temple and court dancer, commonly known by the generic Sanskrit terms *devadâsî* and *râjadâsî,*[6] made her official entry into the Western literary world at the end of the 13th century by way of Marco Polo's accounts of his travels in Asia. Since then, the majority of European travelers who visited India wrote quite extensively about the dancers, musicians, "priestesses," and "courtesans." In their own countries, the travelers' tales inspired quite a number of writers and artists to compose literary and musical works about them—such as poems, songs, novels, plays, ballets, and operas.

Although the corpus of European travel books is vast and heterogeneous, I have selected here some accounts that not only influenced the creation of the "Indian dancer" as a specific character for the Western stage, but also contributed a lot to the knowledge of those far away choreographic traditions. By analyzing them, I have tried to identify the perception and reception of India in Europe as filtered and magnified through the image of the local dancers and musicians. Depending on their sensitivity, attitude, cultural and religious background, travelers perceived the Indian artists in various ways. Some of them partly repeated what had been written by others—by confirming, disapproving or even by plagiarizing earlier accounts—whereas others opened new research perspectives and suggested new interpretations of their "customs" and "costumes" too. Despite their different approaches, all accounts are important for us as they kept the interest on those Asian artists constantly alive in Europe. They can tell us a great deal if carefully compared with the data gathered by recent ethnographic works,[7] like precious fragments enabling us to fill in the gaps in that complex mosaic of practices, beliefs, and rituals that make up our subject. Travelers also left detailed descriptions of some of the dances performed in the past in temples and royal courts that later on fell into disuse, representing a precious source of documentation and reference for musicologists and dance scholars.

I am aware that not all descriptions are accurate, and that some are either too scanty or too exaggerated, particularly when the intention of the writers was to amaze the readers. Yet, in spite of such limitations and occasional distortions, one cannot deny that a number of them are quite precise and show the knowledge and insight of their authors regarding the complex socio-religious and artistic institutions observed in Asia. For this reason I agree with G. Bouchon,[8] G. Deleury,[9] and J. Bor,[10] who made positive remarks regarding those European travelers who directly observed and wrote about Indian customs and costumes.

I have selected here some Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French accounts from the 17th to the beginning of 19th century in accordance with the theme of the 3rd Rothenfels Dance Symposium. My choice has been partly determined by the accessibility of such sources and by my limited knowledge of other European languages. I also would like to add here that a number of documents written in languages unknown to me still

await and deserve systematic analysis. Thus, this chapter does not pretend to fill the enormous gap, but just offers a broader view on the subject.[11]

Before concluding this introduction, I would like once more to focus on the etymology of the French word *bayadère,* Portuguese in origin (*baylhadeira* or *bailadeira*), meaning a "female dancer." This term was first used by 16th-century Portuguese travelers to refer to Indian dancers performing in temples and royal courts. Later on, the word entered into literary French in the 17th century through Dutch travel accounts.[12] Since then it has been absorbed into other European languages and adapted to define all types of Indian dancers, as well as the theatrical character of the same on the Western stage.[13]

In this paper I will demonstrate that the image of the *bayadère* was shaped by a slow process of mutual interaction between the writings of travelers, the literary works of poets, dramatists, and librettists, and the compositions of musicians and choreographers. All of them contributed a great deal to the construction of the *bayadère*'s theatrical features, which were cast mainly in cosmopolitan Paris, one of the major capitals of the theater. It was from the 17th century onwards that the greatest number of operas and ballets on Indian subjects were composed in Paris, before being staged in other countries. By the middle of the 19th century, the word *bayadère* had entered into colloquial and literary French and was synonymous not only for all Indian professional dancers, but also for any other "oriental dancing lady."[14] The same phenomenon can be observed in other European languages where the term referred to a kind of ideal pattern of "feminine seduction," not always devoid of paradoxes and mutual misunderstandings.

In order to trace the genesis of the character of the Indian temple and court dancer on the Western stage, I will start by analyzing the terminology used by the first travelers who described them. Marco Polo (1254—1324) referred to them by utilizing both the words *donzelle* (Italian: maidens) and *pulcelle* (from the French: young girls, virgins).[15] A century later, Nicolò de Conti (1395—1469) from Chioggia called them "*bellissime giovinette* [Italian: very beautiful young girls] who, seated on the processional chariot, sing many songs in honor of the idols."[16] The 16th-century Portuguese travelers, such as Domingos Paes, called them *baylhadeiras,* "dancing ladies."[17]

All early travelers admired their performances, and acknowledged that they were young, beautiful, accomplished dancers and singers. Though they were aware that *devadâsî* and *râjadâsî* were also courtesans, nobody seemed to judge them morally and condemn them for their profession. On the contrary, these travelers were quite intrigued and positively impressed by the women's wealth, prestige, and artistic skills. Moreover, being the only women in India to be highly cultivated, economic independent, and free to choose one or more lovers without any stigma being attached to it, European visitors in India were rather astonished by their boldness, literary knowledge, and refined manners. Only at the end of the 16th century, when in Europe the effects of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation seriously affected the previous attitude of

respect and tolerance regarding the celebrated Renaissance courtesans,[18] do we find the first examples of derogatory language referring to them.

The Venetian merchant and jeweller Gasparo Balbi (born c.1550), who went to India in 1579 and published his account in 1590, called them *puttane del pagodo, meretrici, donne del pagodo* (Italian for "pagoda whores, prostitutes, women of the pagoda"). Among European travelers, he is probably the first to react in such a scandalized manner and to express a moralistic judgement regarding the practice of their profession, particularly in a religious context. From his words we can also make out that the Renaissance values already belonged to an ethical and aesthetic universe now deeply changed, even in the refined Venetian Republic, once celebrated for its cultivated courtesans.[19]

> In this city [Nagapattinam[20]] there is a high processional golden chariot with eight wheels, on top of which is placed a huge golden statue […]. On this chariot are seated the priests […] and some *meretrici,* who are used to selling their body and whatever they get by doing so they give to their god; they are called *puttane del pagodo* and there are a large number of them who are brought up for this purpose. When they are born their father and mother offer them to the god out of devotion. Once they are grown up they not only make their living with their dishonest life, but they take particular care to educate the other girls who are regularly donated, not just anybody, but only by those who are considered to be the most devoted. […] In the city there is an infamous place where four hundred *meretrici* live, who believe they can reach heaven by giving part of their illicit gain to the above mentioned statue or *pagodo*. Here there are plenty of *meretrici;* in fact as soon girls are born, many of them are offered by their fathers to the deputies of such statues, who accept them on behalf of the *pagodo*; they feed them and when they are ready to start their life, they send their bodies as prey for the sin.[21]

Pietro della Valle: an ethnomusicologist *ante litteram*

In 1623, Pietro della Valle (1586—1652) wrote a detailed account of the dances and the accompanying music instruments during the festival processions in the Nayak kingdom of Ikkeri (in present Karnataka State of southern India). This Roman nobleman, himself a fine musician and a scholar,[22] traveled for twelve years in the East and was very impressed by the Indian dancers' artistic skills and magnificent costumes and ornaments. Being himself an artist, his remarks and observations on local music compositions and dances are particularly informative for us. Interestingly, he compared their vigorous movements and the holding of little sticks in the hands with those of the *Moresca,*[23] a Renaissance dance still popular in Europe at the time, and the ancient *Bibasis,* a warrior dance that was performed by young Spartan women. He underlined the affinities of polymorphism and polytheism between the Indian and the Greek-Roman pantheons, and the close similarity of religious ceremonies and ritual offerings to their deities. Thus he confirmed Marco Polo's and Domingo Paes' earlier statements that the effigies of Hindu gods were treated and served by the devotees as true living beings.[24] He also mentioned that the dancing ladies also performed for the local king (*râja*) during the latter's official visit to the temple.[25]

Della Valle called the temple dancers *ballatrici, pubbliche ballatrici,* and *meretrici* (Italian for "dancing women, public dancing women, prostitutes"), though he used the last term without moral judgement, as did Gasparo Balbi, by simply acknowledging their status. The following few paragraphs are taken from his long descriptions of their dances:

> On *November* the thirteenth […]. Before the *Palanchino* march'd a numerous company of Soldiers and other people, many Drums and Fifes, two strait long Trumpets and such brass Timbrels as are used in *Persia,* Bells and divers other Instruments, which sounded as loud as possible, and amongst them was a troop of Dancing-women adorn'd with Girdles, Rings upon their Legs, Neck-laces and other ornaments of Gold, and with certain Pectorals, or Breast-plates, almost round, in the fashion of a Shield and butting out with a sharp ridge before, embroyder'd with Gold and stuck either with Jewels, or some such things, which reflected the Sun-beams with marvelous splendor;[26] […] When they came to the Piazza the *Palanchino* stood still, and, the multitude having made a ring, the Dancing-women fell to dance after their manner; which was much like the Moris-dance [*Moresca*] of *Italy,* onely the *Dancers* sung as they danc'd, which seem'd much better. One of them who, perhaps, was the Mistress of the rest danc'd along by her self, with extravagant and high jumpings, but always looking towards the *Palanchino.* Sometimes she cower'd down with her haunches almost to the ground, sometimes, leaping up, she struck them with her feet backwards,[27] (as *Cœlius Rhodiginus*[28] relates of the ancient dance call'd *Bibasi*) continually singing and making several gestures with her Hands […].
>
> *November* the twentieth. […] Wherefore I went to the great Temple, where, as it is the principal, I thought to see the greatest and most solemn Ceremonies. […] On each side of the *Palanchino* went many rows of Women, either public Dancers, or *meretrici.*[29]

Like the majority of his predecessors, Pietro della Valle considered *devadâsî* accomplished singers and charming courtesans. He must have found their dances quite seductive, since he described them as "peculiar," "pleasant," and even "lascivious." The beauty of their hands gestures, their face expressions, as well as the wealth of their jewels and costumes impressed greatly. Eleven years after his death, in 1663, the portion of his *Travels* dealing with India was published in Venice by his sons. It was translated into French in 1664 and by 1665 into English, too. The work also "contain[s] accounts of his discussions with 'Hindoo' Brahmans about whether the Egyptians or Indians first came up with the concept of reincarnation, a dialogue with a woman who invited him to her upcoming *satî,* a description of the Indian Queen of Olaza, who was out on the embankments giving directions to her engineers, and many other bits of first-rate ethnography."[30] For all these detailed accounts and his fine and scholarly music and dance descriptions of the countries he visited in Asia (particularly India and Persia), Pietro della Valle is today considered a true ethnomusicologist *ante litteram.*[31]

The influential work of the Dutch-Calvinist missionary Abraham Rogerius—who lived from 1630 to 1640 in Pulicat, a coastal city located on the border of the present states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh—was published in Leiden in 1651 and translated into French in 1670 by Thomas la Grue.[32] It is important, since he explains why *devadâsî*—whom he, too, called "whores, known by all people to be such"—were present in the temples during rituals, whereas no *sudra,* untouchables, or any other

"polluting" beings were allowed to participate.[33] Rogerius says that he obtained the explanation from a temple priest named Padmanabhan, who apparently told him the story of the courtesan's love for the god disguised as one of her customers, who pretended to be dead, and for whom she sacrificed her life on the pyre. Later on, this became not only a major *topos* in many European operas and ballets, but also a kind of "foundation myth" for the religious institution of temple dancers.[34]

In a footnote in the French version of Rogerius's book, the translator adds that girls were dedicated to the temples in order to serve the gods with their dancing, which was believed to be highly appreciated by the deities, as Marco Polo had previously said. Moreover, their way of life enabled them to obtain religious merits and even salvation through their profession, as Gasparo Balbi had noted earlier.[35] The French translator also writes that their lovers were only upper caste men, since it was impossible for the others, including very rich Muslim and Christian noblemen, to be their patrons. Otherwise, everyone would consider the dancers to be shameless. Surprisingly, the tale briefly reported by Rogerius, in which for the first time the Indian custom of self-immolation of widows (*satî*) was associated with the dedication of dancing girls to the temple, later had a great impact among European writers and artists, as we shall see below.

The French in India or *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*

Following the Portuguese (1500), British (1600), and Dutch (1602), in 1664 the French were the latest Europeans to establish their own *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* during the reign of Louis XIV. They first arrived in Asia in 1666, contended for the commercial monopoly of Indian markets with other European countries, and later also asserted their colonial power in India.

Fifteen years after the French arrived in India a *ballet de cour* entitled *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* (The Triumph of Love) was performed on 21 January 1681 at the Royal Theater of Saint-Germain-en-Laye to celebrate the marriage of the son of King Louis XIV with Marie Christine of Bavaria. The music was composed by the Florentine Gianbattista Lulli (later to be known as Jean-Baptiste Lully), the libretto by P. Quinault, and the choreography by Pierre Beauchamp. The ballet was subsequently staged in Paris on 10 May. For this occasion Lully employed four professional dancing girls for the first time. Until then, the members of the aristocracy and the royal family, included the king, had been the only ballet dancers at the French court. Louis XIV (known as *Le Roi Soleil*) had earlier played the role of the Sun in *Le Ballet de la Nuit*. In such ballets the female roles were quite often taken by noblemen *en travesti,* wearing masks and ladies' costumes. Another novelty here was the existence of "Indian" roles in the list of the various characters. They were divided into *Indiens* ("Indian men") and *Indiennes* ("Indian ladies"). As usual at that time, the subject matter of *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* was taken from Greek

and Roman myths and heroic stories. The love goddess Venus calls on the graces, nymphs, and all the other divine and semi-divine beings to celebrate the glory of her son Cupid, the god of love, who could win over even the most reticent gods and heroes with his power. The ballet consists of twenty *entrées* (scenes), and Indian characters perform some solo, couple, and group dances in praise of the god of love, accompanied by the music and lyrics sung by the chorus. In the thirteenth scene, Ariadne enters the stage with her own procession of "Greek" dancers, and here she meets Bacchus. In this part of the ballet the items performed by the "Indian" characters alternate with those of the "Greek girls." Unfortunately, there are no other indications in the libretto regarding the type of dances presented that can help us ascertain the elements employed to suggest "Indianness." We should bear in mind that very little attention was paid at the time to the "realistic" aspect of Indian art (as far as the original model was known). This was also the case for the props and stage decoration. In analyzing the drawings of the costumes and scenographies, it is obvious that they generally follow the conventions and aesthetic taste of the period. There are perhaps five elements that might suggest an "Indian" touch in the props and costumes: first, the image of an idol in the procession; second and third, a drawing of one of the male Indian costumes shows a dancer with a dark complexion and, in the background, an allegory of the river Ganges, although it is impossible to say if the latter was reproduced in the scenery; fourth, the colorfully striped material, also known as "*bayadères'* fabrics," of some of the Indian women's dresses; and, lastly, the long veil worn by the female Indian characters. Particularly the veil, along with muslin and silk shawls, would later play a major role in all the dances performed by the ballerinas/*bayadères* in operas and ballets. Although the Indian characters only play secondary roles here, they made their official entry in an *ad hoc* "court ballet" created for the important occassion of the marriage of Louis XIV's son. The French audience had still to wait until the early 19th century in order to see Indian characters in main roles on the stage.

The second half of the 18th century witnessed the success of the *ballet heroique* titled *Aline, Reine de Golconda* (Aline, Queen of Golconda), first staged in Paris in 1766. M.-J. Sedaine wrote the libretto, which was inspired by Stanislas de Boufflers's book of the same name, published at The Hague in 1761. The ballet was then revived in 1782 with music composed by de Monsigny and choreographies by de Laval, Gardel, Vestris, and Noverre. The plot is about a love story between a young French couple, Aline and Saint-Phar. Due to a number of unfortunate events, the two lovers are separated. Aline is kidnapped by pirates and sold as a slave in the Indian city of Golconda. The king of Golconda, seeing her at the local market, immediately falls in love and marries her. Thus the charming Aline becomes, as the title of the ballet suggests, the "queen of Golconda." After the death of her husband, several Indian kings try to conquer the beautiful widow's heart and thus her kingdom as well. Even a member of her own court tries to usurp her power. Meanwhile, a French embassy arrives at Golconda. Aline, in her veiled attire, receives the French ambassador in the royal palace. She immediately recognizes the

foreign gentleman as her beloved Saint-Phar. Although charmed by the queen, Saint-Phar could not see her face, since it was covered by a veil in accordance with the local Indian custom. Only after Saint-Phar thwarts the plot and captures the culprit, Aline's court minister, are the two lovers finally reunited. The ballet ends in an apotheosis of love with the celebration of Aline and Saint-Phar's marriage. Unfortunately for us, in the librettos of the two versions do not provide any precise information regarding the Indian "flavor" of the dances performed at the royal court of Golconda. However, the sketches of the costumes seem to suggest that the clothes worn by the Indian characters incorporated some elements of the originals, particularly if compared to those adopted in the previous century, such as the "veil" for the female Indian roles, by the *ballet de cour Le triomphe de l'Amour*.

Giovanni Andrea Battista Gallini's "scientific" interest for the "national" dances of Europe, Asia, and Africa

Giovanni-Andrea Battista Gallini, (*b* Florence 1728; *d* London 1805) later known as Sir John Andrew Gallini, was an Italian dancer, choreographer, and impresario, who was made a "Knight of the Golden Spur" by the Pope, following a successful performance. Gallini trained in Paris with François Marcel and emigrated to England at an unknown date, although he had been performing at the *Académie Royale de Musique*.[36] By 17 December 1757 he was dancing at the Covent Garden Theatre in London. Between 1758 and 1766 he performed and served as director of dances at the King's Theatre, now Her Majesty's Theatre (the Opera House), except for an interval at Covent Garden in late 1763 and 1764. He ceased performing in public at the end of the 1766 season. On 3 March 1762, in a campaign to raise the intellectual respectability of dance, Gallini published *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing,* which was followed by *Critical Observations on the Art of Dancing* (1770).[37] The following paragraph is part of the chapter dedicated to the dances of Asia from the former, which is a compendium of second-hand information found in the travel literature of the time:

> They have also in Turkey, as well as in India and Persia, professed dancers especially of the female sex, under the name of dancing-girls, who are bred up, from childhood, to the profession; and they are always sent for to any entertainment, public or private, at feasts, wedding, ceremonies of circumcision, and, in short, to all occasions of festivity and joy. They execute their dances to a symphony of various instruments, extremely resembling the antient [ancient] ones, the *tympanum,* the *crotala,* the *cymbals,* and the like, as well as to songs, being a kind small dramatic compositions, or what may properly be called *ballads,* which is a true word for a song at once sung and danced: *ballare* signifying to dance; and *ballata,* a song, composed to be danced. It is probable that from these eastern kind of dances, which are undoubtedly very antient [ancient], came the name, among the Romans, of *balatrones*. Nothing can be imagined more graceful, nor more expressive, than the gestures and attitudes of those [Indian] dancing-girls, which may properly be called the eloquence of the body, in which indeed most of the Asiatics and inhabitants of the southern [sic] climates constitutionally

> excel, from a sensibility more exquisite than is the attribute of the more northern people; but a sensibility balanced by too many disadvantages to be envied them. […]
>
> In many parts of the East, at their weddings, in conducting the bride from her house to the bridegroom's, as in Persia especially, they make use of professional music and dancing. But in the religious ceremonies of the *Gentoos,*[38] when, at stated times, they draw the triumphal car, in which the image of the deity of the festival is carried, the procession is intermixed with troops of dancers of both sexes, who, proceed, in chorus, leaping, dancing, and falling into strange antics, as the procession moves along, of which they compose a part; these adapt their gestures and steps to the sounds of various instruments of music.
>
> Considering withal that the Romans, in their most solemn processions, as in that called *Pompa,* which I have before mentioned, in which not only the *Pirrhic* dance was professionally executed, but other dances, in masquerade, by men who, in their habits, by leaping and by feats of agility, represented *satirs,* the *Sileni,* and *Fauni,* and were attended by minstrels playing on the flute and guitar; besides which, there were *Salian* priests, and *Salian* virgins, who followed, in their order, and executed their respective religious dances; it may be a question whether not an unpleasing use might not be made, on the theatres, of processional dances properly introduced, and connected, especially in the burlesque way. In every country, and particularly in this, processions are esteemed an agreeable amusement to the eye; and certainly they must receive more life and animation from a proper intermixture of dances, than what a more solemn march can represent, where there is nothing to amuse but a long train of personages in various habits, walking in parade. I only mention this however as a hint not impossible to be improved, and reduced into practice.
>
> But even, where it might be improper or ridiculous to think of mixing dances with procession, though it were but in burlesque, which must, if at all, be preferable way of mixing them, the pleasure of those who delight in seeing processions and pageantry exhibited on the theatre, might be gratified, without any violence to propriety, by making them introductory to the dances of the grandest kind.[39]

Interestingly, like his predecessors Pietro della Valle and Thomas la Grue, Gallini too associated the contemporary Asian religious practices and ceremonies with those of ancient Roman. He likewise suggested that their dances might even have been the models for those of Rome, thus concurring with the beliefs of some Enlightenment intellectuals, such as Voltaire, who considered Asia the "cradle" not only of the European civilization, but also of those of the whole world.[40] Gallini's intention to list and systematize the various dances of the world mirror the author's personal curiosity and interest in the variety of contemporary choreographic traditions and the "encyclopaedic spirit" of his time. Noteworthy here is his anticipation of future speculation, elaborated throughout the 19th century, about the so called national dances[41] that were considered a reflex of the "natural and constitutional characters of each nation," informed by the specific climate, attitudes, socio-religious beliefs, etc. Later, a similar process in Europe spawned the idea of a sort of crystallization of each country's "national and cultural identity," which is reflected in its language, emotional reactions, social behavior, and, consequently, in its dances and any form of body language and artistic expression.

Several years later, in 1773, a book was published in Venice by the French author Ange Gaudar, who, in defending the French style of dancing and denigrating that of

Venice, sarcastically described the tendency of local dancing masters and choreographers to create "exotic" dances by giving preference to "Asian" and "African" characters and costumes, as opposed to the European ones.[42] Thanks to his polemics, we know that a large variety of supposed "Asian dances" were presented in Venice at that time and, consequently, that the "Oriental" fashion was quite dominant in the arts:

> Instead of having Chinese, Tartars, *Indians,* Moors, Africans, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, and Armenians jumping and kicking on the stage, they [the Venetians] should have the various nations of our continent dancing. Such ballets would at least be useful for showing the various garments of the people who live in our countries, and would contribute a great deal to making them known; since the costumes are always well suited to illustrate the characteristics [of the people].
>
> *Note.* The majority of local [Venetian] ballet masters study the ways in which Oriental people clothe themselves; but they do not know those of our nations, and would be very embarassed if one were to ask them about a Breton dance or any other.[43]

The French naturalist Pierre Sonnerat (1747?—1814) was sent by King Louis XVI on a scientific mission in Asia, and stayed in India from 1774 to 1781. In 1782, after arriving back in Paris, he published the first part of a book that includes a description of Indian dancers.[44] His book was translated into German and English, and was soon popular throughout Europe. Although it did not add much to previous accounts, it inspired a number of authors, including the great German poet J. W. von Goethe and the 19th-century Italian choreographer Salvatore Taglioni, who composed several heroic ballets on Indian themes.[45] Curiously enough, its reception in France was quite controversial.

During his travels on the island of Mauritius, Sonnerat met the French infantry officer Jacques Maissin (1720—1803), who had lived in southern India for several years. The officer gave Sonnerat a manuscript, hoping to have it published in France, in which he told of his experiences during his service in the southern Indian cities of Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli, and Chidambaram. But Sonnerat put it away and apparently forgot it. Maissin's manuscript was eventually published in 1975, and contains interesting details about the *devadâsî*'s dances and temple duties.[46]

Another valuable account of southern Indian dancers was provided by the French artillery commander Maistre de la Tour. He served Sultan Haidar Ali Khan, ruler of the Mysore kingdom (in present Karnataka State in southwestern India) and father of the famous Tippu Sultan, helping him fight against the British army. He lived at the royal court for three years and, when he went back to France, wrote a book dedicated to Haidar Ali Khan, entitled *Histoire d'Ayder-Ali-Khan,* which was published in Paris in 1784. Along with other travel accounts, his work provided inspiration for choreographers in France for the "Indian" settings of their plays. In an anthology of writings by French travelers, edited by Guy Deleury, we read:

> We cannot speak of performances, songs, and dances without mentioning the *bayadères* about whom Abbé Raynal has already offered a valuable portrayal in his *Histoire philosophique.*[47]

> At present the court of Ayder-Ali is one of the most famous in India, in particular for his royal troupe of dancing girls, which is certainly one of the most prestigious, not only for the splendor but also because the sultan, more than any other ruler, is very fond of *bayadères* […].
>
> *La Comédie* in the court is composed only of women. A woman director, who also acts as impresario, selects and purchases little girls of four- and five-years-of-age from among the most graceful; […] under the guidance of expert masters, they begin their training in vocal and instrumental music, dance, and whatever is appropriate to stimulate aesthetic pleasure and the love of beauty in the soul of the prince and the other members of his court, including the art of seducing hearts, even less sensitive ones. The young girls so instructed start to give public performances when they are about ten or eleven years old; generally, the features of their faces are the finest and the most delicate, with big black eyes, beautiful eyebrows, a small, vermilion mouth and bright teeth; dimpled cheeks, chin, and fingers; long, black, plaited hair reaching the ground. […] Their clothes are made of embroidered fabrics or golden brocades, richly decorated; they are covered by jewels from head to foot. […] In the *comédies* in which they play, the plot dominates; […] the melodies of the arias are joyful and pleasant, and the words sung by the solo voice often express the lamentations of lovelorn lovers […].
>
> The dancing girls are superior in their art to the actresses and singers, and we can also say that they would be highly appreciated and admired if they could perform on the stage of the *Opéra* in Paris: all dance and all play in those lovely girls; their features, eyes, arms, feet, every part of their body seems to move in order to charm; they are quite light, although their legs are very strong; they turn on a foot, and quickly stand up with amazing vigor the next moment. They are very precise in performing the steps and the rhythmic sequences in order to be able to accompany the other musical instruments with the sound of their anklebells, and because their gait is very elegant and their body fine and lively, all their movements are consequently extremely graceful.[48]

It is clear that the artistic skills and charming allure of Indian dancers greatly impressed Maistre de la Tour. He felt that they truly deserved to perform at the European "temple" of the dance of his time: the *Opéra* in Paris. Mindful of his advice, I attempted to see if his wishes had been fulfilled. I soon found out that it was not the Indian dancers who stood out on the stage of this famous Parisian theater, but their European collegues: the *ballerinas* who made a successful career by impersonating their Asian sisters, often in the tragic roles of self-immolating widows.

The *Satî*: Staging an Indian Female Tragedy

The deplorable situation of Indian widows and those who sacrificed themselves on the pyre of their deceased husbands (*satî*), a custom described by almost all Western travelers in India,[49] is a topic that appeared for the first time on the European stage in Pietro Metastasio's opera *Alessandro nell'Indie* (Alexander in the Indies). It was premiered in 1730 in Rome, with music composed by Leonardo Vinci, and tells the story of the Macedonian's (i.e., Alexander's) military campaign in India, and of his love for the Indian queen Cleofide.[50] Forty years later, the position of Indian widows and *satî* was the theme of the French drama *La Veuve du Malabar ou l'empire des coutumes* (The Malabar Widow or

the Empire of Customs) by Martin Antoine Lemierre, which was performed for the first time in Paris in 1770.[51] Even though this play does not directly refer to Indian dancers, it is important because the practice of *satî* was later associated with the character of the *bayadère* on the stage.

In 1789, year of the French Revolution, a smaller but still powerful revolution, took place in the European literary world with the English translation by the British scholar Sir William Jones of Kâlidâsa's Sanskrit drama *Sâkuntalâ*. It was subsequently published in various other European languages, and made people aware of the rich heritage of ancient Indian dramaturgy. The poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe read the German translation by Georg Forster (1791) and was very impressed by the lyrics. Soon the character of *Sâkuntalâ,* as well as the plot and the aesthetic rules of Indian drama, began to be appreciated by other Romantic writers and artists as new symbols of poetical freedom that were more congenial to their sensitivity and taste than the heavy and bombastic formalism of Classicism, which was dominant at that time in the arts and literature.[52]

After reading Kâlidâsa's drama and the travel accounts of Abraham Rogerius and Pierre Sonnerat, Goethe wrote a ballad in 1797 entitled *Der Gott und die Bajadere, Indische Legende* (The God and the Bayadère, Indian Legend). The following year, the poem was published in Schiller's *Musenalmanach*. Goethe took the term *bayadère* from Sonnerat's book and made a German word out of it: *Bajadere*. He borrowed the plot from Rogerius's tale.[53] The beautiful ballad ends with the morale: "The deity rejoices over the repentant sinners; with fiery arms, immortals lift lost children up to heaven."[54]

It is clear that behind the theme of the Indian courtesan we find the evangelical story of the "repentant" and "redeemed" Magdalene.[55] As in Rogerius's tale, a courtesan is taken here as an example of the most sincere affection. Goethe, too, associated the Indian dancer with the self-immolating *satî,* assuring the birth of the *Bajadere* as a true Romantic heroine. The ballad was set to music in 1798 by Carl Friedrich Zelter, followed by Franz Schubert in 1815, Daniel Aumer in 1830, Carl Loewe in 1835, and many others.[56] As we shall see, it was only in 1810 that Goethe's heroine made her first appearance on the stage in a leading role.

While Indian dancers were winning the hearts of poets and composers in Europe, in India itself a number of French, Dutch, and British officers were "going native" by adopting Indian customs and costumes, and by loving and patronizing Indian dancers and musicians. Among these were the French Colonel Antoine Polier and the Dutch scholar Jacob Haafner (I will deal with the latter shortly), who both became great connoisseurs and patrons of local Indian artists. Meanwhile, the Reverend Dr. Claud Buchanan, one of a number of intransigent travelers, was "disgusted" and "horrified" by the dancing-ladies. The following paragraphs illustrate his attitude, which was shared by other European priests and missionaries, like the well-known Abbé Jean-Antoine Dubois,[57] who plagiarized the work of another French missionary:[58]

> *Plain of Seulls, Juggernaut, 20th June 1806*. On Wednesday last the great day of the Rutt Jatra, Moloch was brought out of his Temple amidst the voices of thousands of his worshippers […]. When the Idol was placed on his throne, a shout was raised such as I can never hear again on earth. Not melody or joyful acclamation, but a yell of approbation. For Moloch receives no musical hosannas; but a hoarse roar from the men; and from the women an uttering which I cannot describe […]. I moved on in the procession close by the Car. A high priest of obscenity moved the wooden horse, and pronounced indecent stanzas to the multitude, who responded at intervals. "These songs, said me, are the delight of the god. His car will only move when he is pleased with the song." Soon after the car stopped […].
>
> After a few minutes it stopped again, when another aged priest stood up and with his indecent wand in his hand completed the variety of this disgusting exhibition. […] In Juggernaut temple nothing is to be seen of importance. […] The chief abomination within is perhaps the *Dancing women,* who twice in the day exhibit themselves before him. […] Juggernaut's abominations are obscenity and blood.
>
> *Tranquebar, 25th August 1806*. […] At the celebrated Pagoda of Chillumbum [Chidambaram] near Porto Novo, I was admitted (I don't know why) into the interior, while the priest made Pooja.[59] I never had such a clear revelation of this Idolatry before. The *Dancing girls* were present. The Judge of the place, M.R., had introduced me to the Brahmins the evening before in the outer Court. During the ceremony two immense bells were rung and drums were beat. My heart began to palpitate a little, from fear I believe, and I hastily retired.[60]

Reverend Buchanan's reactions are quite eloquent: temple rituals are obscene, lascivious and bloody, the temple "dancing girls" are the "chief abomination," and accordingly, the Indian god Jagannath is a true Babylonian "Moloch," sanguinary and half demoniac. His remarks synthesize some of the major arguments used later on by colonial writers, and Western and Indian moral and social reformers in order to recast Hinduism and legally abolish the *devadâsî* system in colonial and post-colonial India.[61]

Vestal Virgins, Seductive Dancers and Faithful Courtesans: The Romantic *Bayadères* of the Paris Opéra.

Back in Europe, the opera *La Vestale (*The Vestal) was premiered in Paris in 1807, with music composed by Gaspare Spontini, and a libretto by Etienne de Jouy (1764—1846). Posted in India from 1786 to 1790 as an official of the French army, De Jouy attended a number of performances by local Indian dancers. Impressed by their beauty and artistic skill, and with these *devadâsî* in mind, whom he saw as sharing a number of functions with ancient Roman vestals priestesses,[62] he wrote the lyrics for *La Vestale*.[63] In this opera we again find the lustful, perfidious, and cunning character of the chief priest, portrayed here similarly to the Brahmins in Bernier's *Voyages De François Bernier* or in Lemierre's drama *La Veuve du Malabar*.[64] The character of the chief priest, whose theatrical features had by now become "fixed," maintained this negative image in many French stage productions on Indian themes during the entire 19th century.

Three years later Etienne de Jouy wrote the libretto for another opera, this time devoted entirely to Indian dancers, and entitled *Les Bayadères*. With the music composed by Charles-Simon Catel, it was performed for the first time in Paris on 8 August 1810, with Napoleon Bonaparte in attendance. Interestingly, Etienne de Jouy not only selected the *bayadères* as the main characters for his opera (whose performers included the Opéra's singers and ballet dancers), but also felt it necessary to write a long introduction about them at the beginning of the libretto, to inform the public about the importance of this institution in Indian society:

> For the Indian name *Devedassis, Devaliales,* the French have substituted *Bayadères,* a corruption of the term *Ballaidera* [female dancers] that the Portuguese employed to define this large community of young girls consecrated both to the cult of gods and to voluptuousness. […]
>
> The young girl chosen by her parents to be dedicated to the pagodas must be presented to the *guru* [chief Brahmin] before she comes of age; beauty is an essential requirement for which no other consideration of birth or wealth can ever substituted. […] Once the girl is accepted, the Brahmins and the dance and music masters look after her education.
>
> Historians and travelers have spoken of them in different ways; exalted by some, they have been judged very strictly by others. While the former saw them as women of stunning beauty, surrounded by the prestige of their luxury and talent, the others considered them mere courtesans, more or less pretty, who dance at public and private festivals for money, and nothing that could justify the enthusiasm of their admirers.
>
> In spite of the difference between these two pictures of the same topic, both are equally right, though they have not been taken from the same point of view. We will understand better if we take as an example two Indian travelers in France; (let us say that) the first one has visited only the little seaport where he has disembarked and no other place, whereas the second one has spent a few months in Paris. Once back in their country, if they are requested to talk about our theaters, the talent of our actresses, or the esteem in which these ladies are held, they will talk about the same topic in a very different way, both telling the truth. Such is the reason behind those travelers' apparently so contradictory accounts regarding the *Bayadères*. […]
>
> Their dance is essentially a pantomime. […] Regarding their way of portraying the passions of desire and the transports of love, we can perhaps reproach them with what our actresses rarely deserve to receive as a remark: the capacity to delve so deeply into their roles and to mime nature so closely. […]
>
> The *Bayadères* enjoy such honorific privileges that in other countries would hardly be accorded to them due to the unevenness of their customs. In many regions of Hindustan, particularly in Bengal, only the superior Brahmins and the *Devadassis* can approach the prince and sit in his presence; during public ceremonies they always occupy the first ranks, and any insult addressed to them is punished as strictly as those addressed to the Brahmins. Like them, the *Bayadères* are vegetarians, and are compelled, night and day, to recite prayers and to carry out ablutions, and nothing can exempt them from performing such duties.
>
> Depending on their wealth, all the temples maintain a more or less considerable number of *Bayadères;* the biggest temples, like those of Jagannath or that of Chidambaram, can have up to 150 of them, who are very beautiful and whose ornaments are extremely valuable. […] During religious ceremonies, they dance in front of the images of the gods that are carried in a procession, and sing sacred hymns in their honor.[65]

Although De Jouy begins by relating the story of the god and the *bayadère* along the lines of Rogerius and Goethe, he adds some new, personal variations to the tale. In his

version, the god, who came to earth as a king, enjoyed the pleasures of *Eros* and at the same time was just and honest toward his subjects. Advised by his ministers to get married, he finally agreed to look for a wife. But how could he find a sincere woman who truly loved him? Here, the god devised a strategy: he pretended to fall seriously ill. Knowing of his imminent death, only one among his thousands of concubines (who remained silent, since the throne and the nuptial bed were too close to the funeral pyre) agreed to become his wife. She was a young *bayadère* deeply in love with him, the only one ready to follow him in death by committing *satî*. The king, as expected, died after the marriage, and when the girl jumped into the fire he manifested his divine nature. Touched and pleased by her devotion, he took her with him to heaven. Etienne de Jouy noted in the libretto that this was the reason why from that time onward, in honor of the memory of the sacrifice of his beloved and faithful *bayadère*, the god ordered that *devadâsî* should be the only privileged women permitted to be close attendants of the gods in the temples.[66] Here too, as in Rogerius's book, the tale is presented as a sort of "foundation myth" for the institution of the *devadâsî*.

Thus, in the scenario of this opera, which is set on the banks of the Ganges, we again find the faithful love of a *bayadère* being tested—in this case not by a god or a "divine *râja,*" as in the tale quoted by De Jouy in his introduction, but by a "human" king. Here the characters and the story maintain a "human dimension" throughout the opera, without celestial intervention or miracles. On the contrary, allusions to specific political and military events, like the invasion of the city of Benares by the Maratha army, maintain the historical dimension in the action. The *bayadère* Laméa and King Demaly are both in love, but she refuses to marry him because she belongs to the temple and must remain faithful to her presiding god. Although the character of the Roman heroine of De Jouy's previous opera, *La Vestale,* seems to influence Laméa's decision to remain faithful to her deity, her role as courtesan is never denied here. She and her fellow *bayadères* are portrayed as "beautiful priestesses of love and pleasure," and she uses all her charms to entice Holkar—the chief of the Maratha army, who is attracted by her beauty—in order to disarm him and his soldiers. By doing so, she saves the king and the people from the Maratha invaders. Afterwards, in spite of her deep love for the king, she still refuses to become his bride. Saddened by her refusal, Demaly desires to put her affection to the test, and makes her believe that he is soon to die. Only after hearing the horrible news does she accept his proposal of marriage. The wedding ceremony and and that of the coronation of the queen are performed near the king's pyre, which is being prepared for his cremation, and followed by the preliminary rituals of the *satî*. In the libretto the description of this scene is very touching, and on the stage its effect must have been quite dramatic and impressive. When Laméa is about to sacrifice herself, Demaly stops her by revealing the truth. The couple is finally united, to the joy of all the people. The play ends with a magnificent feast to celebrate the marriage of King Demaly and the faithful *bayadère,* now "Queen Laméa."

Emphasized in the entire opera is Laméa's fidelity. First she remains faithful to the god by refusing to marry her beloved Demaly; after this she is faithful to Demaly by refusing Holkar's advances, and remains faithful to both god and king by accepting Demaly's marriage proposal only after learning of his imminent death. Finally, as a good Indian wife (Sanskrit: *pativratâ*), she does not hesitate to follow him in death (*satî*). The character of Laméa is celebrated here for her "integrity" as a truthful woman in all her roles: as a priestess, a courtesan, a wife, and a queen.

In this opera, as in Rogerius' tale and Goethe's ballad, we again see the two extreme aspects of Indian femininity—as they were commonly perceived in the West—joined together, aspects which intrigued and at the same time shocked and fascinated European minds: the seductive dancer and the devoted, self-sacrificing wife. Both were indeed good subjects for the stage at that time, being highly romantic as well as dramatic.[67]

Although at first glance the sketches of the costumes and ornaments of this opera seem to follow the fashion and theatrical conventions of the time, a closer look reveals a certain attention to the reproduction of the original Indian models, albeit "adapted" to European taste. One also gets the same impression from the scenery and the stage props. In the music, however, no effort was made to integrate even a hint of Indian melodies.

Jacob Haafner's and Mamia's Romance in India: a True Romantic and Tragic Love Story

The Dutch traveler and scholar Jacob Gottfried Haafner (*b* Halle, 1754; *d* Amsterdam, 1809) lived in India and Sri Lanka for more than thirteen years (1773—1786). Haafner was not only fluent in various European languages, but he was so enamored of the cultures of India and Sri Lanka that he became proficient in several Indian languages as well. Having returned to his native country, he wrote five travel journals in Dutch that contain some of the most passionate autobiographical accounts and detailed descriptions of the regions he visited. From both a historical and literary perspective, they certainly number among the most accurate reports we have from that time in terms of local socio-religious customs and beliefs, and even today they represent a valuable source of information for historians and anthropologists. In 1811, a year after the first performance of De Jouy's *Les Bayadères*, the French translation of Jacob Haafner's lively journey along India's eastern coast was published in Paris. With its denouncement of British military attacks and colonial imperialism in India, Haafner's work immediately won the sympathy of the French public. It should be remembered that just few decades earlier, in 1757, the French army had lost a war against the British in Bengal, forever losing control of the commercial and political power in India. This book, which includes a long chapter on *devadâsî,* soon had a big impact in France and Italy where it became a major source of reference for any future historical and theatrical work related to Indian dancers:[68]

> Their Dances are very different from ours. Some of them consist of supple and fast movements of the limbs, which are regulated and gracious, however; others again of light and ingenious jumps and steps. They are excellent mime artists. With an amazing precision of attitude and gestures, while singing and dancing, they can portray a love story or any other theme, even a fight; and their art in expressing emotions has been developed to such a height that our dancers and actresses on the stage […] would compare poorly to an Indian dancer. The young *devedaschie* (*devadâsî*), with their face veiled, stand together in a group ready to dance […]. At once they uncover their faces and drop their veil. Now they come forward, and line up in rows; with an amazing agility and skill they whirl around each other or dance in groups or in pairs; their eyes, arms and hands, and even their fingers, all their limbs move with a wonderful expression, gracefulness and art, while the *cilampukaram,*[69] playing the cymbals and following them closely on their heels, encourages them with his voice and gestures, and the *tays,* or aged dancers, keep time with their hands and sing. Especially in private or special gatherings they exhibit all their art and abilities. The lovely scent of perfumes and flowers, the tempting charms which they expose to the audience in a skilful way, the singing and music, everything blends to arouse the passions and fill the heart with delightful emotions.[70]

During his long stay in India, Haafner fell deeply in love—which was very much requited—with a talented young dancer by the name of Mamia, who saved him in a shipwreck. Unfortunately, she was seriously injured during the accident and died soon thereafter. Following this sad event, Jacob, distressed and totally heartbroken, left India and returned to Holland. It is quite certain that the memory of the beautiful and faithful Mamia inspired Haafner to dedicate a full chapter of his book to the artistic skills of the Indian dancers and courtesans, whom he greatly admired and patronized. To the present day, this chapter remains one of the most accurate historical descriptions we have of them.

Gaetano Gioja's Indian ballets: *I riti indiani* and *Acbar Gran Mogol*

The tragic love story of Jacob Haafner and his beloved Mamia soon inspired the composition of a number of romantic ballets. The Italian dancer and choreographer Gaetano Gioja (Naples 1768—1826) probably read the French version of Haafner's book, and a mere three years after its publication he created and directed a five-act "pantomimic heroic ballet" entitled *I riti indiani* (The Indian Rites). It was premiered in Milan's Teatro alla Scala in 1814, with music composed by *Maestro* Ferdi.[71] Gioja was perhaps the first choreographer in Italy to introduce an Indian dancer as a main figure in a ballet, although this may have occurred even earlier, when Goija choreographed another ballet, *I sacrifici indiani* (The Indian Sacrificies), in 1806. Unfortunately, I have so far not been able to trace the libretto of this ballet. For this reason, I am not sure whether the "Indians" mentioned in the title belonged to the "Eastern (Asia) or "Western" Indies (America), especially since it was not uncommon for them to be "interchangeable" at that time. *I riti indiani* tells of the love and secret marriage of a young Dutch gentleman, by the name of Amel, and a beautiful Indian temple dancer, Bezai. Both are the victims of the perfidious plans of the jealous local king, the Zamorin, who desires that the dancer become his mistress. After a number of tragic events that

separate the lovers and almost lead to them losing their lives, the couple is happily reunited. Thus the ballet, by diverging from the real story of Jacob Haafner and Mamia, ends with a true "triumph of the love" and of justice as well. The characters of the Indian dancers are not yet specified here as *bayadères,* but as *Vergini iniziate* (Initiated Virgins), who live in the temples, are dedicated to the cult of the local deities, and dance and sing in their honor.

In 1821 Gioja composed a *ballo tragic* in five acts, once again on an Indian theme, titled *Acbar Gran Mogol* (Akbar, the Great Moghul) after the celebrated Moghul emperor of India, Jalal-ud-Din Muhammad Akbar (1542—1605), who was also known as "Akbar the Great." The ballet was first staged at the Teatro della Comune in Bologna, and the list of characters includes *balliadere.*[72] The plot is based on the historical event of Akbar's attack on the Rajput city of Chittor in the region of Rajasthan. The *Râja* of Chittoor, realizing the inadequacy of his army in view of Acbar's mighty legions and elephants, orders the Great Brahmin priest to sacrifice his daughter, Princess Padmana, to spare her the humiliation of becoming the enemy's prisoner after her father's imminent defeat. But the beautiful princess has already fallen in love with the young, strong Moghul emperor. After a number of adventures, the High Priest (portrayed here as a merciful man), touched by the lovers' sincere feelings, refuses to kill the young lady. The ballet ends with her father's tragic death as the adamant and proud *Râja* of Chittor who, faithful to his code of honor, commits suicide by falling on his own spear.

In the same year, 1821, *Le Paria* (The Pariah), a tragedy by the French playwright Casimir Delavigne, was staged in Paris at the Odeon Theatre. One of the main characters is a young *devadâsî,* who is not referred to here as a *bayadère* but as a "priestess of a Benares temple." The play was quite successful, not only in France. A ballet version called *Il Paria* was performed in 1827 at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, with music composed by Paolo Brambilla and choreography by Salvatore Taglioni. Along with the "priestesses," we find *bagliaderes* in the libretto. A year later, again in Italy, an opera version of Delavigne's *Il Paria* was premiered for which the music was composed by Gaetano Donizetti and the libretto written by Domenico Gilardoni. Here, too, *baliaderes* are listed among the various roles.

It was to take several years before the character of the *bayadère* was to shine in the Opéra of Paris as one of the most tragic romantic heroines. This finally took place in 1830, when the legendary Italo-Swedish *ballerina* Maria Taglioni interpreted the leading role of the Indian dancer Zoloé in the *opéra-ballet Le Dieu et la bayadère ou la courtesane amoreuse* (The God and the Bayadère or the Courtesan of Love). Eugéne Scribe wrote the libretto, which is inspired by the Goethe's touching ballade of the same name. The music was composed by Daniel Auber, and the choreography by Filippo Taglioni, Maria's father. Her moving interpretation of the Indian dancer, and the character of the *bayadère* itself, triumphed thoughout the 19th century, not only on the prestigious Parisian stage, but all over Europe and America. But that is another long and most fascinating chapter in the history of dance.

Conclusion

By tracing the establishment of the *bayadère* character on the European stage, I have attempted to chronologically follow its genesis in Western literary and theatrical traditions. Since the time of Marco Polo, Indian dancers, with their peculiar customs, refined costumes, and jewels, attracted the attention of most European visitors to India. Back in their own countries, these travelers wrote and published accounts that inspired poets, philosophers, writers, dramatists, musicians, and choreographers, who in turn contributed to the casting of the Indian temple dancer as a literary and theatrical character. The interaction between travelers' memoirs and artistic creation has been a constant throughout the centuries up to the present day, even though this paper could only include a very few of the theatrical works produced from the end of 17th to the beginning of the 19th century.

Conceived as a kind of "counterpart" to the authentic Indian dancers, the *bayadère* acted as a catalyst in European culture and imagination, forcing Western observers and readers not only to reflect upon unfamiliar Indian customs such as widow sacrifice and temple courtesans, but also their own cultural and religious history. This is why a number of European authors, such as Pietro Della Valle, Thomas La Grue (the French translator of Abraham Rogerius's work), Giovanni Andrea Battista Gallini, Etienne de Jouy, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, compared the Indian dancer either to the Greek hetaera courtesan, the Roman vestal, the Salian priestess, or Mary Magdalene.

In spite of linguistic and cultural barriers, those who attended the dancers' performances in India commented about their artistic skills and evocative renderings of poems and songs. They admired their mastery of eye motions, facial expressions, sensual gestures, and dance movements, as well as their costumes and ornaments. Many observers realized the complexity of such "seductive arts," which were full of subtility and highly codified. Their reports allowed the imaginations of their contemporaries to run freely. The result of such interaction was the stage character of the *bayadère*. This is why I maintain that the *devadâsî-bayadère* is a complex "ethno-historical" entity belonging to an artistic heritage shared by both India and the West.

The seductive Indian courtesan was described and celebrated by the travelers as a cultivated, bold, powerful, and rich lady, who could dispose of her own wealth, and whose art and favors were highly esteemed by kings, noblemen, religious authorities, and scholars. Yet, in spite of her prestige and knowledge, she did not fit into the Christian and bourgeois moral code of 18th- and 19th-century European society. In order to make her acceptable, it was necessary for her to undergo a major metamorphosis: first she had to "repent" and then, after renouncing her identity and profession and sacrificing her life in the name of love, she could finally be "redeemed." Only after such a taming and "purifying" process could she rise to the rank of a virtuous and self-immolating heroine, who was docile and "morally" acceptable.

By relating the skills of the Indian dancing girls, 18th-century authors, such as the choreographer and dance historian Giovanni Andrea Gallini, anticipated some of the speculations about the "national characters" of the "national dances" of later periods. We have also seen, as in the case of Jacob Haafner and his beloved Mamia, how their romantic and tragic love stories touched the hearts of coreographers and writers, such as Gaetano Gioja in Italy and, later on in France, Théophile Gautier.[73]

Finally, either through attraction, fascination, or scandal, the Indian dancers—whose power of seduction depended on their mastery of an art embellished by erotic allusions, poetic metaphors, and subtle evocations—could hardly be ignored. As Abbé Dubois, one of the oft-quoted prudish writers on Indian dancers, himself recognized: the goal of any act of seduction was to stimulate the imagination of the observers, becoming a "crystallized"[74] figure in their minds, even at the cost of a mutual misunderstanding.

Notes

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2 GALLINI: *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing*, chapter "A Summary Account of Various Kinds of Dances in Different Parts of the World. (Asia)," pp. 195—197.

3 LA TOUR: *Histoire d'Ayder-Ali-Khan*. Quoted in DELEURY: *Les Indes florissantes*, p. 754.

4 SAVARESE: *Teatro e spettacolo*, pp. xxiiif.

5 LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*.

6 *Devadâsî*: from the Sanskrit words *deva*, i.e., "deity," and *dâsî*, i.e., "female attendant, servant," thus "the deity attendant." Generic term denoting a community of temple women and courtesans with various ritualistic and artistic tasks both in the Indian shrines and royal courts. In southern India, their dance and music masters were called *nattuvanâr*. *Rajadâsî* (the king's attendants) were generally called court dancers. Each region of India had its own specific way of naming them. See MARGLIN: *Wives of the God-King*; KERSENBOOM-STORY: *Nityasumangali,* and *The Traditional Repertoire*; LEUCCI: *La tradition des Devadâsî; Devadâsî e Bayadères*.

7 SRINIVASAN: *The Hindu Temple-Dancer;* MARGLIN: *Wives of the God-King;* KERSENBOOM-STORY: *Nityasumangali,* and *The Traditional Repertoire,* in their ethnographic monographies.

8 BOUCHON: *L'image de l'Inde dans l'Europe de la Renaissance,* p. 84.

9 DELEURY: *Les Indes florissantes,* p. xi.

10 BOR: *Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères* 2010, p. 14.

11 For a rich documentation on this topic, see PENZER: *Poison-Damsels;* MEER/BOR: *De roep van de kokila;* BOR: *The Voice of the Sarangi; The Rise of Ethnomusicology; Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères* 2007/2010*; On the Dancers or Devadasis;* and forthcoming; LEUCCI: *La tradition des Devadâsî; Devadâsî e Bayadères; From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goeth,* and forthcoming.

12 The term *baylhadera* was introduced in France by the French translation of the book by the 16th-century Dutch traveler Jan Huygen van LINSCHOTEN: *Histoire de la navigation*.

13 We find the German *Bajadere*, English *bayadere*, Italian *baiadèra*, *bajadera*, *balliadera*, *bagliadera*, Spanish *bayadera,* and Russian *bayaderka*.

14 See LAROUSSE: *Grand dictionnaire universel*, vol. 2; FLAUBERT: *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*.

15 The original manuscript of Marco Polo's travels, now lost, was written by Rustichello da Pisa in both French and Italian. This is why in later versions, reconstructed from copies of the original, we find many French words and expressions.

16 RAMUSIO: *Navigazioni e viaggi,* vol. 2, p. 815.

17 See D. Paes's account written around 1520—1522 in SEWELL: *The Vijayanagar Empire*. Quoted in LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* p. 116.

18 What famous courtesans of the European Renaissance, such as the Italian Tullia d'Aragona (1510?—1556), Gaspara Stampa (1523—1554), and Veronica Franco (1546—1591), had in common with Indian temple and court dancers was that all were very cultivated ladies, poetesses, musicians, and dancers whose qualities and company were highly demanded and appreciated by kings and noblemen, as well by the members of literary and artistic circles. Except for the ritualistic functions of Indian courtesans, there were quite a number of similarities between them. See FELDMAN/GORDON: *The Courtesan's Arts*.

19 LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 36—40.

20 Coastal city of present Tamil Nadu State in southern East India.

21 Quoted in PINTO: *Il nuovo Ramusio,* pp. 158f.

22 Apart from his activities as an ethnographer *ante litteram,* "Della Valle was also a composer and a writer of theoretical treatises on music. He composed several dialogues (actually brief oratorios) on biblical subjects. His only preserved work is an oratorio composed for l'Oratorio del Croficisso di S. Marcello, where he experiments with musical modes and scales inspired by ancient Greek music theory. For this purpose, he developed new instruments, such as a 'violone panharmonico' and a 'cembalo triharmonico.' Notwithstanding his interest in ancient musical practices, in his theoretical writings on music (e.g. *Della musica dell'età nostra che non è punto inferiore, anzi è migliore di quella dell'età passata,* Rome 1640, and *Note […] sopra la musica antica e moderna, indirizzato al Sig.r Nicolò Farfaro,* 1640/41), he praises the modern music culture in contemporary Rome and defended the modern music of his time against criticism from among others Nicolò Farfaro. Pietro Della Valle also wrote texts and librettos for several musical spectacles, such as *Il carro di fedeltà d'Amore,* (music by his teacher of harpsichord Paolo Quagliati, performed in Rome in 1606 and printed in 1611), and *La valle rinverdita* (written in celebration of the birth of his first child in 1629 – music lost). *Il Carro di Fideltà d'amore* (music by Paolo Quagliati), Robletti, Roma, 1611, the *Funeral Oration on his Wife Maani*, whose remains he brought with him to Rome and buried there (1627), *Account of Shah Abbas* (1628), *Discorso sulla musica dell'età nostra*, Roma, 1640, and the *Travels in Persia* (2 parts) published by his sons in 1658, and the third part (India) in 1663." Wikipaedia, s.v. "Pietro della Valle".

23 SACHS: *Storia della Danza,* pp. 367—372. "The *moresca* [*Morris-dance*] is the most mentioned dance in the literature of the fifteenth century. Whenever dancing, carnivals, or ballets are described the texts say that people danced the *moresca*, wheareas other dances as *basse danse*, *saltarello* or *piva* are rarely mentioned." Ibid., pp. 367f. See also SPARTI: *An 18th Century Venetian Moresca*.

24 LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 20—25, 32—36; *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* p. 116.

25 LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 40—45.

26 For the symbolism of *devadâsî*'s temple-jewels, see LEUCCI: *Uno scrigno per la danza*.

27 Pietro della Valle describes here, quite correctly, the technique of a typical sequence of dance movements.

28 A learned Venetian gentleman (1450—1525).

29 GREY: *The Travels of Pietro della Valle in India,* vol. 2, pp. 267—280.

30 Wikipaedia, s.v. "Pietro della Valle."

31 See BOR: *The Rise of Ethnomusicology*.

32 The full title of the French version is ROGERIUS: *Le Théâtre de l'Idolâtrie*.

33 Ibid., pp. 219—221.

34 LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* p. 117.

35 In ROGERIUS: *Le Théâtre de l'Idolâtrie,* the name of Gasparo Balbi is mentioned.

36 The ancient name of the *Opéra de Paris* at that time.

37 Wikipaedia, s.v. "Giovanni Andrea Battista Gallini."

38 Called also "Gentils," at that time those terms were employed to define all the Indian inhabitants not converted to Islam or Christianity.

39 GALLINI: *A Treatise on the Art of Dancing*, pp. 196—201, chapter dedicated to the dances of Asia.

40 See HALBFASS: *India and Europe*, p. 46. Quoted in LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* p. 125.

41 See ARKIN/ SMITH: *National Dance in the Romantic Ballet.*

42 See CARBONI: *Venise et l'Orient.*

43 *De Venise Remarques,* 1773, p. 82 (my translation). See GOUDAR: *Osservazioni;* LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 68f.

44 See SONNERAT: *Voyage aux Indes Orientales et à la Chine*, vol. 1.

45 Leucci forthcoming.

46 See REGNIER: *Un manuscrit français du XVIII siècle*; LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 87—90.

47 Concerning Abbé Guillaume Raynal's paragraph on the *bayadères,* see LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* p. 125.

48 Quoted in DELEURY: *Les Indes florissantes*, pp. 753—755.

49 See PIRETTI SANTANGELO: *Satî*; WEINBERGER-THOMAS: *Cendre d'immortalité*; CHAKRAVARTI/ PREETI: *Shadow Lives.*

50 LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 62—71.

51 See ASSAYAG: *L'Inde fabuleuse,* pp. 43—47; LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 75—81; *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* pp. 123—125.

52 See SAVARESE: *Teatro e spettacolo*, pp. 145—238; and THAPAR: *Sacuntalâ.*

53 See LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* pp. 127f.

54 "Es freut sich die Gottheit der reuigen Sunder; / Unsterbliche heben verlorene Kinder / Mit feurigen Armen zum Himmel empor." J. W. von Goethe.

55 CROCE: *Goethe con una scelta delle liriche nuovamente tradotte.*

56 BASSO: *Dizionario enciclopedico universale della musica e dei musicisti. I titoli e i personaggi*, vol. 1, p. 62.

57 "Nevertheless, to the discredit of Europeans it must be confessed that the quiet seductions which Hindu prostitutes know how to exercise with so much skill resemble in no way the disgraceful methods of the wretched beings who give themselves up to a similar profession in Europe, and whose indecent behaviour, cynical impudence, obscene and filthy words of invitation are enough to make any sensible man who is not utterly depraved shrink from them with horror. Of all the woman in India it is the courtesans, and especially those attached to the temples, who are the most decently clothed. Indeed they are particularly careful not to expose any part of the body. I do not deny, however, that this is merely a refinement of seduction. Experience has no doubt taught them that for a woman to display her charms damps sensual ardour instead of exciting it, and that the imagination is more easily captivated than the eye. God forbid, however, that any one should believe me to wish to say a word in defense of the comparative modesty and reserve of the dancing-girls of India!" Abbé Jean-Antoine Dubois (1825). Quoted in BEAUCHAMP: *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, pp. 586f.

58 See MURR: *Nicolas Jacques Desvaulx (1745—1823).*

59 The *pûjâ*, is an Indian religious ceremony accompanied by ritualistic offerings (oil lamps, flowers, incense, burning camphor, various liquids, etc.) as well as by prayers, chantings, songs, music, and dance.

60 BUCHANAN: *Letters,* pp. 17—35. A microfilm of Buchanan's letters is held in the Library of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (MSH), Paris.

61 See JORDAN: *From Sacred Servant to Profane Prostitute*.

62 About the affinity perceived by European authors between the Indian *devadâsî* and Roman *vestales* see LEUCCI: *Vestales indiennes*.

63 *Les Bayadères* (JOUY/CATEL), p. 12.

64 See LEUCCI: *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,* pp. 119—125.

65 *Les Bayadères* (JOUY/CATEL), pp. 5–12.

66 Ibid., p. 5. The historical introduction about the *bayadères* appears in all the editions of the libretto I have consulted, and that correspond to the various performances of the opera in Paris from 1810 to 1828.

67 The plot of *Les Bayadères* was plagiarized some decades later by the Italian choreographer B. Vestris. His ballet, entitled *Il Raja e le bajadere*, was performed in 1843 at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, with the music composed by Mussi and Schira.

68 See LEUCCI: *Devadâsî e Bayadères,* pp. 113—120; BOR: *Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères* 2010, pp. 20—25, and forthcoming.

69 The dance master who directed and guided the dancers by playing the cymbals that, along with the drummer's beats, marked the complex rythmical patterns accompanying the dancers' intricate footwork.

70 HAAFNER: *Voyages,* p. 125. I would like to thank Prof. Joep Bor for permission to quote his English translation of Haafner.

71 The dancers who participated to the first performance of *I Ritti Indiani* were: Andrea Deshayes, Antonietta Mllier, Giovanni Coralli, Teresa Coralli, Filippo Bertini, Antonia Torelli, Cecilia Chabert, Giuseppa Pacini, Giuditta Soldati, Francesco Zaverio Merante, Carlo Girard, Stefano Bhalotte, Carlo Giannini, Giuseppa Angelini, Margherita Bianchi, Maria Combi, Benedett Castiglioni, Giovanni Grassi, Giuseppe Vellutini, Giovanni Bianchi, Eligio Cuneo, Luigi Costa, Celestiva Viganò, Gaetano Gherini, and Marietta Bresciani, as well as the *corps de ballet*.

72 GIOJA: *Acbar gran Mogol*. Ballerini (dancers): Giuseppe Aldrovandi, Francesco Baldanza, Giuditta Baratozzi, Antonio Bellocci, Costanza Bellocci, Francesco, Giacomo Brianza, Anna Budoni, Maria Budoni, Maria Carboni, Giuseppa Castelli, Luigia Catenacci, Anna Colombieri, and Maria Colombieri.

73 See LEUCCI: *Théophile Gautier*.

74 The term "crystallization" as a process of "sublimation" in the imagination of a desired being was used by the French author STENDHAL in his essay *De l'Amour* (1822).