the appellative use of the word, or the notion of an old teacher of the dramatic art bearing that name. There still exists an extensive work, in epic verse, on rhetoric and dramaturgy, entitled *Nä ya-éästra,@@*1 and ascribed to Bharata. Though this is probably the oldest theoretic work on the subject that has come down to us, it can hardly be referred to an earlier period than several centuries after the Christian era. Not improbably, however, this work, which presupposes a fully developed scenic art, had an origin similar to that of some of the metrical law- books, which are generally supposed to be popular and improved editions of older sütra-works. We know that such treatises existed at the time of Panini, as he mentions two authors of *Nata-sütras,* or “ rules for actors, ” viz. Silãlin and Krisasva. Now, the words *nata* and *nälya*—as well as n*ataka,* the common term for “ drama ” —being derived (like the modern vernacular “ Nautch"=*nritya*) from the root *nat* (*nrt*) “ to dance, ” seem to point to a pantomimic or choral origin of the dramatic art. It might appear doubtful, therefore, in the absence of any clearer definition in Päpini’s grammar, whether the “ actors’ rules ” he mentions did not refer to mere pantomimic perform­ances. Fortunately, however, Patanjali,. in his “ great com­mentary,” speaks of the actor as singing, and of people going “ to hear the actor.” Nay, he even mentions two subjects, taken from the cycle of Vishnu legends—viz. the slaying of Kamsa (by Krishna) and the binding of Bali (by Vishnu)—which were represented on the stage both by mimic action and declamation. Judging from these allusions, theatrical entertainments in those days seem to have been very much on a level with the old religious spectacles or mysteries of Europe, though there may already have been some simple kinds of secular plays which Patanjali had no occasion to mention. It is not, however, till some five or six centuries later that we meet with the first real dramas, which mark at the same time the very culminating point of Indian dramatic composition. In this, as in other departments of literature, the earlier works have had to make way for later and more perfect productions; and no trace now remains of the intermediate phases of development. Thus we know of at least five predecessors of Kãlidãsa from whom nothing but a few quotations have been preserved.

Here, however, the problem presents itself as to whether the existing dramatic literature has naturally grown out of such popular religious performances as are alluded to by Patanjali, or whether some foreign influence has intervened at some time or other and given a different direction to dramatic composition. The question has been argued both for and against the probability of Greek influence; but it must still be considered as *subjudice;* the latest investigator, M. Sylvain Lévi, having given a decided opinion against outside influence. There are doubtless some curious points of resemblance between the Indian drama and the Modern Attic (and Roman) comedy, viz. the prologue, the occasional occurrence of a token of recognition, and a certain correspondence of characteristic stage figures—especially the Vidüshaka, or jocose companion of the hero, presenting a certain analogy to the servus of the Roman stage, as does the Vita, the hero’s dissolute, though accomplished, boon-companion, of some plays, to the Roman parasite—for which the assumption of some acquaintance with the Greek comedy on the part of the earlier Hindu writers would afford a ready explanation. On the other hand, the differences between the Indian and Greek plays are perhaps even greater than their coincidences, which, moreover, are scarcely close enough to warrant our calling in question the originality of the Hindus in this respect. Certain, however, it is that, if the Indian poets were indebted to Greek playwrights for the first impulse in dramatic composition, in the higher sense, they have known admirably how to adapt the Hellenic muse to the national genius, and have produced a dramatic literature worthy to be ranked side by side with both the classical and our own romantic drama. It is to the latter especially that the general character of the Indian play presents a striking resemblance, much more so than to the classical drama. The Hindu dramatist has little regard for the “ unities ” of the

classical stage, though he is hardly ever guilty of extravagance in his disregard of them. Unlike the Greek dramatic theory, it is an invariable rule of Indian dramaturgy, that every play, however much of the tragic element it may contain, must have a happy ending. The dialogue is invariably carried on in prose, plentifully interspersed with those neatly turned lyrical stanzas in which the Indian poet delights to depict some natural scene, or some temporary physical or mental condition. The most striking feature of the Hindu play, however, is the mixed nature of its language. While the hero and leading male characters speak Sanskrit, women and inferior male characters use various Prakrit dialects. As regards these dialectic varieties, it can hardly be doubted that at the time when they were first employed in this way they were local vernacular dialects; but in the course of the development of the scenic art they became permanently fixed for special dramatic purposes, just as the Sanskrit had, long before that time, become fixed for general literary purposes. Thus it would happen that these Prakrit dialects, having once become stationary, soon diverged from the spoken vernaculars, until the difference between them was as great as between the Sanskrit and the Prakrits. As regards the general character of the dramatic Prakrits, they are somewhat more removed from the Sanskrit type than the Päli, the language of the Buddhist canon, which again is in a rather more advanced state than the language of the Asoka inscriptions (c. 250 b.c.). And, as the Buddhist sacred books were committed to writing about 80 b.c., the state of their language is attested for that period at latest; while the grammatical fixation of the scenic Präkrits has probably to be referred to the early centuries of the Christian era.

The existing dramatic literature is not very extensive. The number of plays of all kinds of any literary value will scarcely amount to fifty. The reason for this paucity of dramatic productions doubtless is that they appealed to the tastes of only a limited class of highly cultivated persons, and were in consequence but seldom acted. As regards the theatrical entertainments of the common people, their standard seems never to have risen much above the level of the religious spectacles mentioned by Patanjali. Such at least is evidently the case as regards the modern Bengali *jãträs* (Skt. yãtrãs)—described by Wilson as exhibitions of some incidents in the youthful life of Krishna, maintained in extempore dialogue, interspersed with popular songs—as well as the similar *rasas* of the western provinces, and the rough and ready performances of the *bhanrs,* or professional buffoons. Of the religious drama Sanskrit literature offers but one example, viz. the famous *Gita- goυindai@@*2 composed by Jayadeva in the 12th century. It is rather a mytho-lyrical poem, which, however, in the opinion of Lassen, may be considered as a modern and refined specimen of the early form of dramatic composition. The subject of the poem is as follows: Krishna, while leading a cowherd’s life in Vrindavana, is in love with Rãdhfi, the milkmaid, but has been faithless to her for a while. Presently, however, he returns to her “ whose image has all the while lingered in his breast,” and after much earnest entreaty obtains her forgiveness. The emotions appropriate to these situations are expressed by the two lovers and a friend of Rãdhã in melodious and passionate, if voluptuous, stanzas of great poetic beauty. Like the Song of Solomon, the Gïtagovinda, more- over, is supposed by the Hindu commentators to admit of a mystic interpretation; for, “ as Krishna, faithless for a time, discovers the vanity of all other loves, and returns with sorrow and longing to his own darling Rãdhä, so the human soul, after a brief and frantic attachment to objects of sense, burns to return to the God from whence it came ” (Griffith).

The *Mrichchhakatikä,@@*3or “ little clay cart,” has been usually placed at the head of the existing dramas; but, though a certain clumsiness of construction might seem to justify this distinction, the question of its relative antiquity remains far from being definitively settled. Indeed, the fact that neither Kãlidãsa, who mentions three predecessors of his, or Bãna, in reviewing his literary precursors, makes any allusion to the author of this play, as well as other points, seem rather to tell against the latter’s priority. But seeing that Vãmana quotes from the Mrichchhakatikã, this play must at any rate have been in existence in the latter part of the 8th century. According to several stanzas in the prologue, the play was com posed by a king Südraka, who is there stated to have, through Siva’s

@@@1 Ed., in *Kãvyamãlâ* (Bombay, 1894); by Grosset (Lyons, 1897).

i @@@2 Edited, with a Latin translation, by C. Lassen ; English translation by E. Arnold.

@@@3 Edited by F. Stenzler; with commentary, by K. P. Parab (Bombay), and several times at Calcutta; translated by H. H. Wilson ; also into English prose and verse by A. W. Ryder (*Harvard Or. Ser.,* 1905); German by O. v. Böhtlingk and L. Fritze; French by P. Regnaud.