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Summary

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Summary

The monograph, based on the dissertation thesis entitled *Hastabhinaya. Hand gestures in traditional theatre art of India*, deals with traditional Indian acting style, particularly with hand gestures. Its focus lies in a specific form of actor-spectator communication – the communication carried out with by means of mudras, or symbolic hand positions. The aim of the book consists in defining the principles of this mode of communication within performance activities of India. The book also verifies the proposition that mudras create autonomous language system by which every single thought or emotion can be expressed.

The research is based on ancient and also contemporary theatre literature in Sanskrit, English or French, most of all on poetics and acting manuals, and on contemporary practice of traditional theatre or dance in India. The most important sources of the research were the kootiyattam and kathakali theatre.

The language of mudras is treated as a specific way of communication – a communication that is determined by the fact that it is used in theatre. The subject of mudras in theatre is analysed from the linguistic point of view as well. The author also considers the fact that the actor–spectator communication by means of mudras is a very important part of complex acting/dancing style and expression. The author tries to explain the basis of the type of utterance carried out by means of mudras, and its connection with the rasa theory.

The aim of the thesis is to characterize the principles of the communication by mudras in theatre. Based on the assumption that the system of mudras is a language competent to express different things, thoughts and emotions, the present work tries to characterize language of mudras as a very specific kind of artistic or specifically theatrical communication. The analysis is based on comparison of linguistic and aesthetic qualities of the system of hand gestures. The linguistic parameters served as a means to determine whether it is really a language-system, and the aesthetic quality of this kind of communication helped to explain the specific way of employment of this type of gestures. A semiotic approach is also applied in this context.

Another crucial aspect of this book is the way in which it considers the relation of hastabhinaya, acting by hand-gestures, and abhinaya, acting in general – i.e. the principles of acting by hand-gestures in connection with acting by other components – parts of actor's body, voice, emotions etc.

Keywords

Indian theatre; abhinaya; hand-gestures; mudra; hasta; kootiyattam; kathakali; Natya-sastra; Hastalaksanadeepika; Gópál Vénu; intercultural theatre; semiotics