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To perform life and live theatre – fiction in popular performances

The theatre life in many Asian countries show a great variety of examples of the significance of theatre and dance for a public at large, in everyday life as well as in religious or secular festivals and holidays. A considerable amount of events keep the tradition of popular and folk theatre and dance alive, and the many different kinds of performances are of undeniable importance for the general public, especially in the countryside.

This paper intend to focus on the nature and importance of fiction in popular theatre and festival traditions in Japan, China, India and Bangladesh where the performing arts not only play a part as aesthetic experience or as entertainment. The performances are more often significant for a feeling of community or serving like a unifying event for certain groups in the social structure as well as for keeping people in touch with less palpable phenomena like life and death. Historical and mythological figures and roles are portrayed in theatre and dance, bringing mythological beings, gods and ancestors to life through inspiring and awakening the spectators' emotions and imaginations, hopes and desires.

The role and importance of fiction in social contexts is investigated through studies of travelling theatre groups who are highly appreciated by public at large, especially in the countryside and often related to folk festival traditions. The performing arts do create a platform linking reality and fantasy. Everyday life has no real place in performances of the travelling groups or in the dramatic art of popular theatre. Rather, these performances provide an entertaining but rarely documented breathing space where anything can happen.