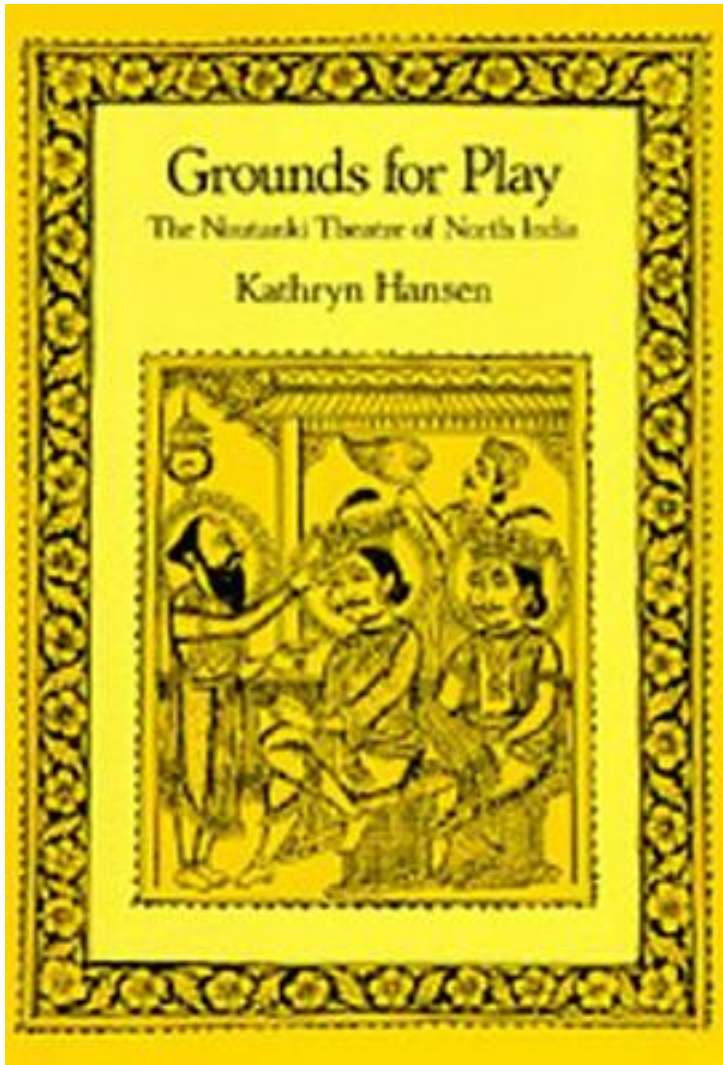


Grounds for Play



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出版者:

出版时间:1991-12

装帧:

isbn:9780520072732

The nautanki performances of northern India entertain their audiences with often ribald and profane stories. Rooted in the peasant society of pre-modern India, this theater vibrates with lively dancing, pulsating drumbeats, and full-throated singing. In *Grounds for Play*, Kathryn Hansen draws on field research to describe the different elements of nautanki performance: music, dance, poetry, popular story lines, and written texts. She traces the social history of the form and explores the play of meanings within nautanki narratives, focusing on the ways important social issues such as political authority, community identity, and gender differences are represented in these narratives. Unlike other styles of Indian theater, the nautanki does not draw on the pan-Indian religious epics such as the Ramayana or the Mahabharata for its subjects. Indeed, their storylines tend to center on the vicissitudes of stranded heroines in the throes of melodramatic romance. Whereas nautanki performers were once much in demand, live performances now are rare and nautanki increasingly reaches its audiences through electronic media--records, cassettes, films, television. In spite of this change, the theater form still functions as an effective conduit in the cultural flow that connects urban centers and the hinterland in an ongoing process of exchange.

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