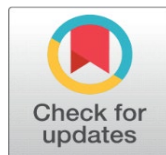
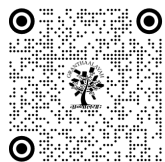


ECOLOGY ON STAGE: A STUDY OF INDIAN CLASSICAL DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

The paper draws on performative ecology based on complex distinction between theatre, environment and ecology (a form of thinking/ mode of value of interconnectedness and interdependence) by revisiting the Indian classical drama, further, exploring landscape, nature and space in Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. The research is qualitative in nature and is based on textual analysis of the primary data. The research approach uses eco-critical framework which interprets the ecological dimensions found in the primary text. The Indian classical text "*Abhijnana Shakuntalam*" is taken for study to understand the notion of ecology in the drama. The constructive relation of human and ecology in performative aspect, intermeshing emotions and thought construction of Shakuntala and Dushyanta, apolitical nature, structuring of identities suggests positive ecological lessons and the impact of ecosystem and landscape on human beings. Stage refers to the performance enacted in theatre that gives illustration of green sensibilities. The main research questions are: "what is the impact of environment on human mind?" and "how Indian classical drama engages with the topologies of ecology through performance on theatrical stage?"

Keywords: Ecology, Landscape, Classical Drama, Performance, Theatre

1. INTRODUCTION

The constructive re-categorization, performative space reformulates the idea of ecological and environmental aesthetics and its necessity in theatre. Theatre has a curative component that draws light on ecological awareness. Modern theatres while focusing on urban ecology brings forth the reasons of destruction in socio-cultural relations thus pointing towards the need of ecosphere that can shape the theatrical space. The paradigm shift from ecological to artificial and the distancing from the environment raises the essentiality and the need of ecological landscapes and constructive spaces. By analysing the classical drama, the paper intends to look into the nuances found in Kalidasa's text that explains 'Why Earth and Nature Matter?' in contemporary age.

Performance does not exist in vacuum and is influenced by the world of socio-ecological systems and relationships. Giannachi and Stewart in "Performing Nature"

(2005, 20) while foregrounding the interface of ecology and arts establishes that there are aesthetically inspiring and politically challenging works focusing on ecologically oriented art that interrogates the connection between human beings and nature. The performance of historical, mythical or purely fictional events gives a representation of the cultural space and environment where landscape or nature or ecology is portrayed in relation to lives lived. Ecology becomes is a model for cultural observation as well it can act as model for eco-system.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative in nature and is based on the textual analysis of the primary work. The theoretical framework used is “Eco-Criticism” and its application in Indian drama. The secondary data collection for study material is done through journals, books, e-sources and databases.

2.1. THEATRICAL SPACE AND ECOLOGY

The transformation of theatrical space into new environment that stands for cities instead of forest, countryside, nature and its relationship between the non-human and the human projects justifies the need and requirement of interdependence. Performances, thus, represent the voice for eco-system/ecology/environment. Through the narratives of destruction and clash of civilization that separates human and the natural world there is also exploration of stage as space of nature. The discourse of the research is on performative ecology or eco-system that looks into theatre, environment and ecology their interconnectedness and interdependence and a re-looking into the Indian classical dramatic text Kalidasa’s *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* exploring landscape, nature and its impact on human emotions and consciousness with a therapeutic purpose stressing on the ecological models.

2.2. GREENING THE THEATRE

Eco-criticism, a theory accepted worldwide, is also known as: environmentalism, Green Studies and Eco-criticism and came into force in 1980. William Rucktheatert’s essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978 designates the critical writings that explores the relation between literature, the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the damage being wrought on the environment by human activities (Abrams 98). Leopold’s “*A Sand County Almanac*” (1949) also drew attention to the degradation of environment and Rachel Carson’s “*Silent Spring*” (1962) acted as a catalyst in bringing forth to the world the impact of pesticides on wildlife. While the other movements in criticism were directed towards social and political justice, eco-critics focused on ultimate survival of human life in congruence with nature. Ecology underlines the environmental connections describing patterns in nature and how organisms interact with the geographical settings.

The ecology of theatre and performance refigures the relationship between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’, and ecology is defined as the organic and non -organic factors of ecosystems defining interrelationships between organisms and environments (Kershaw, 2007, 15). Kershaw remarks that theatre ecology is how the theatre behaves as ecosystem (16). The words in a dramatic text, music, visual images or imagery creation gives meaning to the dramatic text which further embodies the need of green theatre or green drama.

The seven-act classical drama starts with four acts in hermitage, two in palace and the last one takes place in mountains. The effective role of environment as displayed by Kalidasa includes natural beauties leading to constructive relation of human and ecology in performative aspect. The well-knitted emotions and sentiments of Shakuntala, her transformation, the apolitical aspects of nature structures various identities of people in the asrama (hermitage) of Kanva rishi (saint) whereas King's palace projects Sloterclyk's ideas that draws on positive ecological lessons for theatre. The performance on warfare or disintegration of subject as in Brecht's "Mother Courage and her Children" or Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" disclosed the complexity, destructive and toxic nature of environment whereas Kalidasa's classical drama establishes the lessened possibility of disequilibrium and radical transformation. The re-examination of pastoral, wilderness, nature, sublimity that analogues with Rousseau's famous articulation of 'going back to nature' and living in harmony or reviving the romantics through Kalidasa's dramaturgy contemplates on Indian theatre and its connection with eco-system.

2.3. INDIAN CLASSICAL DRAMA (KALIDASA'S ABHIJNANA SHAKUNTALAM)

Kalidasa, a Sanskrit dramatist is the author of Abhijnana Shakuntalam (The Recognition of Shakuntala) and the play was translated into English by William Jones as The Fatal Ring in 1790. Abhijnana Shakuntalam is a classical drama, the story taken from the epic Mahabharata portrays romance, anguish, tragedy and the gradual growth of Shakuntala amidst the landscape and ecology of the hermitage of Kanva Rishi gives an insight into the understanding of environmental and its connection to human thoughts and relationships. The epic narrative of Kalidasa dates back to fourth century A.D. and is intermixed with dialogues and plot, romantic love and the setting of courtly background. There is love, separation and union and the Shringar rasa, Virah rasa are prominent in the drama. The play establishes nature as a healing force and the beauty of Shakuntala i.e., beauty of mind and body enhances with the natural surroundings. Humboldt remarks the impact of nature on the mind of lovers. There is tenderness in the expression of feelings and richness of creative fancy that assigned Kalidasa to be great poet and dramatist (Williams 1885, x). The description of Himalayas, animals, beauty, trees, lakes and natural environment adds to the positive impact of ecology and eco-system on human beings. Dushyant, the King when he moves out of his palace into the natural milieu and finds a change of heart, falls in love with Shakuntala and marries her in Gandharva tradition, giving her a royal ring. The seven act drama projects Shakuntala's as "Nature's Daughter". Thus, nature has a healing effect on human beings and Kalidasa's classical drama gives a description of prakriti (nature) in eight forms: water, fire, sun moon, earth, air, mountains, and wild animals. The dramatist's voice on preserving the natural being is reflected: "O King the deer belongs to the Hermitage and must not be killed" (Ryder, 1995, 6).

Kalidasa further distinguishes between the women of palace and country side: "The City maids, for all their pains seem not so sweet and good our garden blossoms yield to these flower -children of the wood" (Ryder 1995, 8). The women of city and women dwelling in prakriti (nature) have been contrasted by Kalidasa. The restructuring of society, the ecological principles and women emphasize on the idea of space and landscape as a force that structures the difference between the urban and the rural where the rural is innocent and pure because of their dwelling amidst natural environment. All the acts except the fifth act settles for man in agreement

with nature. Shakuntala's emotions and her every act lay emphasis on purity of mind and spirit which is a product of conducive and natural environment. The separation of Dushyant and Shakuntala hints at degradation of life in palace as Dushyant forgets her as soon as he goes to his palace displaying the impact of urbanity whereas Shakuntala becomes the symbol of patience and forgiveness which very much is the attribute of nature. Landscape (natural landscape) in *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* becomes the vital necessity of natural environment, human values where emotions and experience unite into perceiver's personal landscape shaping his/her personality. It is the unifying frame in case of environmental theatre and environmental scenography. Kalidasa's dramaturgy focuses on worshipping of wilderness or wild, consequently, inspiring the modern dramatist with the natural landscape that is contributive to new function of landscape in greening the environment. This is done through theatrical representation. Ancient and natural landscape provides a compositional relationship between natural environment and performance, giving a green stage environment where the characters draw their identity from these natural landscapes as Shakuntala very much derives her identity from these natural dwellings.

The collapse of nature and ecology in the drama takes place when King Dushyant is in his palace. King Dushyant's connection with the non-human world when he is in Kanva Rishi's (saint) ashram (hermitage) lay emphasis on human beings placed on the selective forces of nature that act on and influences man, as it acts on the non-human world. Elinor Fuchs and Bonnie Marranca remarks that theatre's ecological contribution is not found in eco-critical message but rather in the possibilities seen in theatrical medium (as cited in "Introduction" Lavery, 2008). The environmental reconstruction or rather deconstruction can be reflected while understanding how Indian classical theatre works as medium for the projection of environment e.g. the green landscape in *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, *Malvikaagnimitram*. The projection of the natural world in *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* can be seen in these lines: "Here are hermits who dwell in forests at the foot of Himalayas" (Kalidasa, 1999, 53). The landscape of the forest fuels the mind of the hermits by adding peace and purity to their character. This green landscape becomes the constructive space for human minds.

The fullness of space, the endless ways in which space can be transformed, articulated, animated - that is the basis for environmental design (Schechner, 1973, 1). This design is prominent in Indian classical drama. Kalidasa uses human motives, aesthetic values and its interconnectedness with nature - A mid day plunge will temper heat, the breeze is rich with forest flowers (Kalidasa, 1999, 4). The cognitive adaptation and theatrical representation elucidate the formation of human mind in the non-human (ashram) world very different from human world (palace). Thus, *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* 'develops an ecological poetics' (Mazenno and Morrison, 2007, 2).

The word "Ecology" is generally understood as "the interrelation of organism and environment ranging from simple to complex". On the other hand, in the context of theatrical- ecology "eco-systems are reflected in theatre". Many images in the Kalidasa's drama add to the recuperative power and an evolving outlook in nature. The imaginative responses to the natural world become representative of the relation that existed between Dushyant and Shakuntala. The wildness and isolation of the landscape here becomes the constituent element in the character of Shakuntala adding to sublimity and projecting a combination of nature and human nature. King Dushyant heart purifies as soon as he enters into the ecological world while hunting

the deer which is contrary to the courtly life of his palace where the change of heart occurs as he distances from the natural environment.

The Modern theatre, on the other hand, looks into the complex ecology, cultural and social distortions taking place in society and the critical framing and imaginative expressions used by the writer contributes to toxic depiction of the environment. The catastrophic destruction of humans due to isolation and alienation is the product of human environment and culture. Ionesco's "Hunger" tries to locate the concept of survival and move beyond toxic environment. These questions try to make us think about our relationship with the planet and the suffocating environment that is created because of alienation and isolation prominent in the current century. This occurs due to huge void occurring between man and nature. Rosi Braidotti in "The Posthuman" (2013) puts forth the notions of selfhood whether it theological or philosophical producing destructive behaviour patterns. The authors remarks that the quest to exist as a unitary subject has eradicate the autonomy of the non-human world (Lavery and Finburgh, 2015, 182).

There is a need to formulate an alternative view within the texts / dramas / theatres that provides ethical and advantageous relationships with green earth. The catastrophic accumulation and complex realities have narrowed down our aesthetic and social activities and the change in climatic conditions or landscape can have a disastrous effect on theatre and theatrical performances. Una Chaudhari in "There must be a Lot of Fish in that Lake: Towards an Ecological Theatre" remarks that theatre's humanist origins make it anti-ecological (May, 2005, 84) that is prominent in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" or Brecht's "Mother Courage and her Children" which portrays unfertile post-apocalyptic landscape, thus missing out the genre of landscape and ecological writings. The space and landscape in Kalidasa's Drama have an affiliation more to ecological constructions as the very space makes Shakuntala bear and cope up with the sense of loss and separation. The spatial entities like cities, countryside etc is a production of human life and power relations but it also is an active container of organic entities and ecological orders. Representation of Space, Landscape, ecological system in drama and its impact on humanity contributes to the social and natural makeup of the society. Mac Cioc's expression "Eco-biographies" helps in getting an understanding of "place specific histories the natural environment has to offer" (Bont and Lachmund, 2017, 6) placing an emphasis on the histories of natural environment in theatre and its healing capacity.

3. FINDINGS

Performative Culture Matters: Why performance matters, is an important question that entails contemplation, debates and discussions? Martin Esslin in "The Theatre of Absurd" (1962) laid stress on the absurdity and meaningless of life and its relevance which is catastrophic for human conditions. Theatre of absurd articulates important ecological shifts in human perception (Lavery and Finburgh 2015, 1). The theatre for development or alternative theatre or eco-theatre helps to maintain healthy relationships with our environment thus making our mind healthy that might otherwise cause unbalance of the ecosystem. The Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations...If no remedy is found there will be ecological disequilibrium...the human modes of life, individual or collective are deteriorating (Guattari, 2000, 27). The Modern Indian theatre is devoid of such landscape. The landscape aesthetics, nature imagery, romanticism which has been the basis of ecocritical concerns challenges the modernity's dislocation of natural imagery different from materialistic ecology. The maps of human history, its impact

and interface with the natural environment is reflected in literature and theatrical performances, the intricate structures in Modern Dramas like Eugene O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape" or Brecht's "Drums in the Night" have their settings in city topography that also project about inner alienation and exclusion whereas Kalidasa does not let his protagonist (Shakuntala) isolate despite not being recognised by Dushyant because the natural environment of the Hermitage reveals the cathartic power of nature as a healing force. The complexities, space, landscape and socio-psychological constructs in contrast to the outer space lacks sentiments in the modern theatrical practices. Theatre ecology can conceptualize the dialogue between local and global giving an alternative model recreating a constructive space and environment. Kalidasa's drama "Abhijnana Shakuntalam", commonly known as Sakuntala and was translated into German, French, Danish and Italian. As the narrative progresses in the play, the protagonist's psychological growth and its inter-connection with the nature becomes evident. King Dushyant's mind undergoes through an experiential human-nature connection that reconstructs his thought process causing a shift towards true understanding of human sentiments. Also, the natural world brings the ecological equilibrium with the unification of Shakuntala and Dushyant. Humans in Kalidasa's drama learn to deal with complex and temporal relationships giving a concrete image of environmental conception thus coming to terms with the wilderness. The alternate and opposition of the two geographical locations illustrate, fuses and integrates the human mind with the active organic universe. Nature influences the mind and penetrates into the senses. The emotional narrative of human relationships and creative modes of engagement like theatre fosters ecological perspectives. The drama reinterprets and reframes landscape and environment from an aesthetic and sublime position thus generating imaginative responses towards environment. Dushyant's consciousness becomes individualized, dis-unified in the palace whereas Shakuntala's consciousness is unified thus linking truth of the natural world with her personality.

4. CONCLUSION

Kalidasa's drama oscillates between the understanding of the peripheral world that formed his consciousness, and liberated his imagination from materiality of the 'soul'. The cavernous recognition of nature's 'otherness' is an important perception that shaped human responses by making theatrical text function as an environmental imagination thus developing the idea of mutual connectedness and interdependency between biotic and abiotic. It foregrounds the concept of nature and human consciousness and provides alternative visions inherent in ecology emphasising on the indelible relation between humans and nature. Thus, nature becomes a source of ecological consciousness and the spectator is compelled to undergo altered view of the attractiveness of nature that purifies the mind of the protagonists. Thus, Indian classical theatre and the ecology explains the dramaturgical distribution between organic and the inorganic and can be a model for postmodern performative space.

Thus, Kalidasa's "Abhijnana Shakuntalam" is a crystal-clear example of nature and its healing therapeutic effect that ultimately builds constructive relationship between people and place. It is an eco- drama where representation of place against the backdrop of stage governs the human actions. The constructive ending of play with the ultimate reunion of Dushyant and Shakuntala raises the consciousness ecological vision and the need for eco-theatre and eco- drama. The complex question like identity, culture, ideology finds place in dramaturgy but there is a need to go

into the roots and transform the Drama not into 'Who am I' but 'Theatre, Nature and I'.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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