

**READING THE STAGE: INTERROGATING CONTEMPORARY
URBAN THEATRE IN INDIA**

by

SANJAY KUMAR

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Submitted

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To Amrita, for life....

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**Reading the Stage: Interrogating Contemporary Urban Theatre in India**” being submitted by Mr. **Sanjay Kumar** to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy** is a record of bonafide record of research work carried out by him under our guidance and supervision in conformity with the rules and regulations of Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. The thesis work, in our opinion, has reached the requisite standard fulfilling the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This thesis has not been submitted in part or full, to any other university or institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

(Dr. Angelie Multani)
Assistant Professor

(Dr. Sanil. V)
Professor

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

New Delhi – 110016

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Abstract

This study analyses the representations of modern urban life in modern Indian urban theatre. The focus of the study is the relations between theatrical spaces and modern urban spaces which can be read from the representations in the dramatic texts chosen for this research. These texts are Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan (TDOTS)* and *Broken Images (BI)*; Mahesh Dattani's *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai (ONAMNIM)*, *Dance Like A Man (DLAM)*; Satish Alekar's *Begum Barve (BB)* and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*.

The Indian urban theatre is studied through the elements of theatricality represented in the plays such as the use of spaces, relationship between actor and spectator and the act of spectatorship which connects the modern urban world and the world of the stage. The modern urban theatre represents the city through its theatricality and the urban world and urban selfhood are constructed through a theatrical representation of spaces and their transformations. Urban selfhood can be understood in the dramatic representations of individual and social spaces in the urban world.

The study is located in the period of post-independence Indian drama since there was a conscious movement during this period to evaluate the place of tradition within theatre and modern urban life. Moreover, the playwrights chosen for this study have all engaged with different aspects of modern urban experience in India through their works belonging to different stages of development of modern Indian urban life.

The thesis is divided into two broad divisions: theoretical discussion and a textual analysis based on the theoretical framework. The study draws on Henri Lefebvre's theory

of the production of spaces and tries to understand modern Indian urban experience through the concept of modern Indian urban selfhood suggested by Ashis Nandy. In reading the representations in modern Indian urban theatre, the study draws on the influences of Bertolt Brecht, Artaud and other European thinkers of theatre on modern Indian playwrights in the post-independence period. The first two chapters analyse the usage of the terms urban, theatre and theatricality in this study. Chapter One also discusses the specific issues of modern urban experience and selfhood and its relation with Indian urban theatre. Chapter Two deals with the concept of theatricality in detail and explains its usage in this study. Theatricality is explained as a part of both theatrical representation and the modern urban life.

The next three chapters are a detailed textual analysis of the eight dramatic texts chosen for my study. In these chapters the different aspects of modern urban life like spaces, selfhood, identity and the use of theatrical devices like the image are studied through a close reading of the texts. Chapter Three looks at the construction of urban spaces in modern Indian theatre by a reading of the plays of Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan Chapter Four analyses the conflict between tradition and modernity in Indian theatre and its reflection on the idea of the city as a product of modernity. Chapter Five focuses on the different aspects of the urban self as represented through contemporary Indian theatre, especially in the formation of urban self-identities. The thesis ends with a set of conclusions drawn from this study and some pointers for further research in this study.

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