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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COUNTERING FUNDAMENTALISM THROUGH MULTI-LOGISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY PERSPECTIVE AS A SOCIO-POLITICAL METAPHOR

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Abstract

Fundamentalism is not only a theoretical concept; it practically applies to all approaches that restrict mutuality and dialogue. The present article is an attempt to analyse one of the plays of Jana Sanskriti, an Indian theatrical organization, that promotes communication to counter monologue. The article investigates how this play, titled *Perspective*, questions our 'perspectives' regarding our concepts of political culture and religion. The study also elaborates on how the play counters fundamentalism through a multi-logic approach. It suggests that dogmatic institutionalisation is the root cause of all political aggression, and a belief in humanitarian values can lead us towards a better society. The study explores Jana Sanskriti further to illustrate that not only are the themes of the plays multiple opinionated, but the entire methodology of Jana Sanskriti works on the multi-logic approach.

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Introduction: -

Perspective ('Drishtikon' in Bangla) is a revolutionary play composed by the theatrical organization Jana Sanskriti. Conceptualized by Sanjoy Ganguly, Jana Sanskriti follows the principles and techniques of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Located in a remote village named Madhyamgram in West Bengal, Jana Sanskriti has been practicing theatre since 1985. Being an applied theatre form, the plays are dynamic and flexible, and do not rely on a static text script. However, Sanjoy Ganguly took the initiative to document some of the plays in Bengali, and later, translated five of the plays into English and collected them in the book *Where We Stand: Five Plays from the Repertoire of Jana Sanskriti* (2010). The concerned play in this article, *Perspective*, is the last play in the collection, which sums up the essence of Jana Sanskriti's ideology of dialogism.

Literature Review and Research Gap:

The current article has primarily referred to the works of Sanjoy Ganguly. As the study involves a primary text play, the book *Where We Stand: Five Plays from the Repertoire of Jana Sanskriti* (2010) is indispensable. It is the single available book that documents the five major text plays along with small notes shared by Sanjoy Ganguly himself. Two further works of Ganguly, viz., *Jana Sanskriti: Forum Theatre and Democracy in India* (2010) and *From Boal to Jana Sanskriti: Practice and Principles* (2017) are also remarkably significant for understanding the methodology of Jana Sanskriti. Other than these, very few secondary scholarly works are available on Jana Sanskriti. One of them is the book *Forum Theatre in Bengal* (2015), authored by Dr. Jahir Abbas, whose objective lies in studying Jana

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Sanskriti as an Indian forum theatre. Another significant contribution is Sandra Mills' article "Theatre for Transformation and Empowerment: A Case Study of JanaSanskriti" (2009), which studies the potential of Jana Sanskriti in empowering the non-empowered section of society. The only other secondary source on this area is DiaDa Costa's book *Development Dramas: Reimagining Rural Political Action in Eastern India* (2010), which revolves around the concepts of development and political theatre. Thus, as evident from the literature survey, there have been a few studies on Jana Sanskriti as a socio-political theatre form. However, not even a single work is available on the analysis of the play-texts of Jana Sanskriti. Furthermore, the study of societal oppression and the inherent presence of dialogic characteristics in the plays are also not yet explored. This study attempts a comprehensive analysis of the play *Perspective* and its impact on countering monologic oppression.

Structure and Methodology:

This article begins with introducing the ideology of dialogue and recounts how Ganguly conceptualizes it through his experiences. The study then provides a brief overview of the plot of the play *Perspective*. Subsequently, it proceeds towards a detailed thematic analysis of the play scene-wise. Additionally, the article provides a structural analysis of the play to illustrate how dialogic and multi-logic ideologies work both thematically and structurally. In conclusion, this study distinctly articulates its argument by elaborating on how multi-logic counters fundamentalism. Finally, this study highlights its unique contribution, and provides a few suggestions on further scope for research in this area. This article employs analytical and comparative methodologies to explore the play text. It provides a theoretical analysis examining plot construction, characterization, discussion of ideologies, and the concept of fundamentalism. The study then addresses the play's relevance to the contemporary political landscape. It refers to performance and developmental theories to validate its argument.

Conceptualization of the ideology:

The dialogic ideology is a consequence of Sanjoy Ganguly's experience as a party worker. While working in a workers' party, Ganguly realizes that the leaders who represent the workers, are ironically, far removed from the workers themselves (Ganguly, Jana, 12-13). The party leaders are driven merely by their selfish ends and are least bothered or concerned about the people. Ganguly observes the monologic relation between the workers and the Unions, where the leaders of the Unions take all the crucial decisions and give instructions to the workers rather than discussing and taking suggestions from them. This gives rise to the concept of creating a dialogic platform where the workers, their opinions and their suggestions would be considered and respected. This realization of Ganguly led to the formation of Jana Sanskriti as a theatrical form that promotes discussion and interaction between the actors and the audience. All the performances of Jana Sanskriti rely on texts that are dialogic, and involve a number of opinions and perspectives.

Plot of the play:

The play *Perspective* consists of four scenes, depicting and criticising our peremptory perspectives through four distinct lenses. The First Scene outlines the current political picture, where the leaders of the political parties have completely abandoned their former revolutionary ideals in favour of exploiting their current political positions. The Second Scene introduces us to the character 'Ranjan', symbolizing the conscious being that exists within all of us. This scene also gives a call for realizing and stimulating our inner consciousness, which lays either unrecognised or suppressed. The next scene skilfully brings out four characters, representing four sections of people who are patronised by the political parties, and thus defend the party blindly, killing their own conscience. The fourth and the last scene dwells on an in-depth discussion on how politics and religion are interrelated, and how humanity and inclusivity can lead us towards a better political culture.

Thematic Analysis of the Play:

The play begins with a chorus that is very relevant to the current political culture:

Don't think about people

Don't think about nation

Think only of yourself

.....

Money and Power are my main aims

Regardless of the means

Political terrorism

A new form of protest

Leadership worth worship has said so

Songs for the party, not people
That's what we call love for the party (Ganguly, *Where*,151)

The very opening lines thus set the tone and aptly sum up the current political scenario. It lays bare the attitude of the politicians towards common people. They are not concerned about the people or the nation; they are simply driven by money and power, which are easily attainable by blindly serving the party's needs. Thus, they 'worship' the party and 'terrorise' the people conveniently. However, interestingly, the responsibility for this despotic scenario is not thrust only on the leaders, as a woman character points out, "We are the ones who gave them the seat and clothes of power." (152) The submission and weakness of the people are further evinced by one of the characters as "We are without consciousness, without intelligence. You call us the people." (153) The representatives of the people manipulate their opinions, take their votes, and then mock the people's intelligence and consciousness. The scene thus questions the lack of consciousness of not only the political leaders but also of the common masses who surrender unquestioningly to such leaders.

The second scene is an in-depth discussion between different symbolic characters, representing our country (Mother), conscious beings (Ranjan), and politically patronised professionals such as police, bureaucrats, and academicians working in government institutions. This scene emphasizes that it is not the lack of understanding of the people, nor their lack of will. However, the real problem lies in the lack of a platform to express their opinions. As Ranjan says, "They do understand. But the problem is: Where is the space to express their understanding? Where is the opportunity?" (158) And this lack of space for expression is intentionally created by the current political culture to keep the people deaf and dumb to realities. As soon as the people start talking to each other and gather courage to discover their inner consciousness, the leader and its blind followers arrive and exercise control over them both ideologically and forcibly.

The third scene is a very relevant deliberation on the ideas of social revolution and the paths to attain it. It is an attack on fundamentalism and extremism of any kind, be it ultra-Left or ultra-Right. Whenever an ideology becomes institutionalised, it tends to be dogmatic. As Ranjan remarks, "Religious fundamentalists are taking on an aggressive path today which is basically hatred. Their religion cannot be responsible for that. Just as Marxist thought cannot be responsible for everything that Marxists do, and Gandhian thought is not responsible for everything that Gandhians do." (168) Thus, the difference between an ideology and the institutionalization of that ideology needs to be understood. It is also suggested here, that if institutionalization is removed from politics and religion, both would complement each other, as aptly put by Ranjan, "Real religion is bound to support progressive politics." (170) Here, the meaning of religion is defined as the possession of the qualities of "sensitivity, conscience, to be able to love, truthfulness, the strength to fail, to see yourself in someone else, accountability, determination..." (171) Thus, real religion promotes humanity, while the institutional banners and political agendas assign different meanings and values to them.

The last scene clearly concludes Ganguly's non-institutional political approach. Ranjan remarks, "I am dying to know the name of your party, but let that be. I can do without it. Even though you're different in name, in deeds you are more or less all the same." (174) It highlights that all the political parties, irrespective of their names, behave similarly when they are in power. The scene also levels revolutionaries and reactionaries as equals. Although the two sections have opposing ideologies in theory, practically both of them prefer an autocratic and monologic outlook. The only hope is the awakening of the Ranjans within us, which means realizing our own identity, consciousness, and political will. Thus, the scene ends on a positive note, with hope for the prevalence of humanity.

Thus, the play touches upon a number of ideas to pinpoint the primary theme of non-conformity towards any fundamental or institutionalized agenda. It is an earnest appeal to realize the true potential of religion and politics and not get trapped into the party-based political web. History has many references to collective social revolutionary movements where people have broken all institutions of power and liberated themselves. The play suggests that there is no right or wrong party; every party can function rightly, if it respects its ideology and the people it represents. Every individual's voice needs to be represented by the respective parties, and that is possible only when the monologic structure is re-structured into a dialogic, rather a multi-logic one.

Structural analysis of the play:

Not only thematically, but Jana Sanskriti adheres to its multi-logic approach in its operation and execution as well. This play primarily focusses on long conversations and logical exchanges. Generally, discussion-oriented plays

involve dialogue between two people or two countering ideas. However, it needs to be noted that in the play *Perspective*, there are around eight to ten symbolic characters in every scene, who symbolize various sections of people. This technique helps in including more people into the discussion revealing more opinions, more reactions, and more perspectives.

The composition of the play also evinces the inclusive approach of Jana Sanskriti. Jana Sanskriti follows ensemble methodology to create its plays. It means, the plays are not created by an objective author or playwright, but these are created collectively by the entire team. Interestingly, the team here doesn't mean the performers only; it involves the residents from the village. The team of Jana Sanskriti interacts with the people and all of them together decide the theme, the dialogue, the characterization and other technicalities for the plays. Thus, the texts already carry the perspectives of a number of people, even before it is performed on the stage. These collectively created plays are performed on the stage employing the popular TO technique of 'spect-acting', where people from the audience can replace any actor and act on his/her place. There are many instances where the spectators and the actors engage in constructive discussions during the play, and plan some course of action to deal with some specific issue. There are various campaigns, rallies and awareness initiatives taken by the JS team along with the local people to bring about positive changes in the society.

Conclusion: -

Thus, rather than just being dialogic, Jana Sanskriti functions on the principle of multi-logicity. Right from creating the plays to performing them on-stage to organising post-performance activities, during all the stages, Jana Sanskriti involves the people and their multiple perspectives. This collective approach helps in countering fundamentalism, as multiple voices are expressed and respected. The creation of the texts also illustrates how the authority of an author can be countered through an ensemble creation. Furthermore, the plots are structured in a way that does not allow for any protagonist character. Thus, the authority of a single actor or character is also countered. Similarly, during the performance, the actor's dominance is countered, as the audience are equally involved and can act on stage. Thus, in all the stages, Jana Sanskriti attempts to break all kinds of conventional monologic structures and to create an all-inclusive dialogic framework. With mutual involvement and interaction people get to know, understand, value, and support each other. And where mutual understanding prevails, there can be no space for monologic dominance or institutional violence.

Contribution and further scope:

Being an applied theatre form, there is very little academic scholarship available on Jana Sanskriti as a whole. Furthermore, there has not been a single work on analysis of the plays till now. A few references and instances are there on the very popular plays like *Sarama* and *ShonarMeye*; however, the play *Perspective* is not even mentioned anywhere except the play text itself. So, this article is the first attempt to analyse the play both thematically and structurally. As can be deduced from the discussion, the play is a very relevant account of the current political scenario, although it is composed around twenty years earlier. Thus, there is a huge scope for theoretical analysis of the plays of Jana Sanskriti. Also, though there have been a few studies on the socio-political relevance, there is still a huge scope on conducting case studies and surveys on developmental aspects of Jana Sanskriti.

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