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THE THEATRE OF K. N. PANIKKAR: AN ANALYTICAL AND
PERFORMATIVE STUDY.

INTRODUCTION

In the institution ‘Sopanam’, formed by Shri K. N. Panikkar, I have got the opportunity to
knowing, learning and imbibing of Sanskrit Theatre, Indian Theatre, different aspects of
Natyashastra, along with the Indian method of Acting, Actor’s training methodology, Designing
and the thing that holds supreme importance for me, i.e. Direction under the guidance of Guru
Shri K. N. Panikkar. Meanwhile I was also lucky enough to get connected with the creative
process involved in the plays directed by him as well as the plays that he himself wrote and
directed.
But when I decided to methodologically and scientifically analyze his creative process, my inner knowledge and experiences underwent a journey of reincarnation. Means, if an analytical and performative analysis is to be done on Shri K. N. Panikkar’s theatre, its detailed study can be done mainly on the basis of two phases.

➢ Phase I: Detail Study of Panikkar’s Production/Direction Process

(Content and Form):

⇒ Text to Sub-Text/Performance Text:

How the script is interpreted, how the content is understood and how the sub-text/performance text is created means process of the deconstructing and reconstructing of the text.

⇒ Performance Text to Performance/Prayog:

How the ideas and interpretation are transformed into the performance through ‘Visual Poetry and Aesthetics’. How Panikkar created a language of his own by making use of contemporary relevance of Natyashastra and Traditional Theatre elements through his own analysis and interpretation will also be an interesting aspect to study.

➢ Phase II: Study of Panikkar’s Acting Methodology-Style/Actor’s Training Process:

⇒ Vaachika (Expressing through Speech):

Voice Training, Music lessons comprising of Vedic Chanting, Vocalization of Rhythms, Textual Rendering in Sanskrit, Classical Music etc.
⇒ Angik/Sharira Bhava (Acting through Body Movement):

Dance practiced as an applied discipline in Theatre, Training in Classical and Folk instrument’s application in movements, Kalari - Martial Art training, Physical exercises – to keep body and mind under control, Yoga practice.

⇒ Saatvik (Mental Acting):

Practice of bringing out the emotions synchronizing vocal with rhythm and movements and creating the emotive thrust.

⇒ Aaharya:

An exposure to Set Designing and decorations, exposure to the Costumes – Make up in the Traditional and Folk art forms to contemporary theatre.

In totality, keeping the above discussed points in mind, the ‘Research Project’ is divided into four chapters, which are as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

PRACTICES OF SANSKRIT THEATRE:

- In this chapter, ‘Three Major Trends’ of ‘Sanskrit Play Productions’ -
  - Western Model,
  - Natyashastric Tradition and
  - Modern Attempts is discussed and described in detail; along with respective trends, various directors and their approaches / methodology and presentational style.
- Among all the directors, How Panikkar’s ‘Sanskrit Play Production Methodology’, is found unique and authentic; is also discussed in brief. With this, his ‘Artistic and Creative Journey’ and ‘Theatre Activities Timeline’ is also analyzed.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS “THANATHUNATAKAVEDI”:

OUR OWN PLAYS ABOUT OUR OWN PROBLEMS IN OUR OWN FORMS:

- In this chapter, a detailed study of ‘Panikkar’s Theatre’, has been discussed in which plays that have been directed as well as written and directed by him and evaluating...

  - Performance Structure - Pattern / Performance Language,
  - Acting Pattern and
  - Production Design Pattern on the basis of his six path-breaking plays, a case study will is prepared and discussed; which are –

  - Karnabharam
  - Urubhangam
  - Abhijnana Shakuntalam
  - Theyya Theyyam
  - Kalivesham
  - Vikramorvashiyaam
Methodology (Macro Text/Sahitya Vs. Micro Text/Abhinaya):

⇒ Performance Text:
  → Dramatic Personae (In Order of Appearance).
  → Synopsis of the Play.
  → Interpretation with Director’s Note.
  → Dramatic Text - Deconstructing and Reconstructing.

⇒ Scene wise Analytical and Performative Study with Illustration:

CHAPTER 3
THE THEATRE OF RASA:

AN ANALYTICAL AND PERFORMATIVE ANALYSIS / STUDY OF THE THEATRE /
DIRECTION STYLE OF K. N. PANIKKAR:

• In this chapter, an “Analytical and Performative Analysis of The Theatre of K. N. Panikkar” has been discussed and evaluating...

⇒ The “Macro Text Vs Micro Text” means –

  → “Dramatic Structure Vs Performance Structure”,
  → “Narration Vs Action”,
  → “Event Vs Character”,
  → “Vachaya Vs Suchya”,
  → “Sahitya Vs Abhinaya”; which is a palimpsest meeting of the “Classic” and the “Contemporary” on the grounds of the relation between “Narration and Action” and ultimately transforms in the “Rasa”.


METHODOLOGY:

⇒ LOKA-DHARMI AND NATYA-DHARMI:
⇒ LANGUAGE OF THE BODY IN THEATRE - ABHINAYA:
  ⇒ SATVIKABHINAYA:
  ⇒ CREATION OF ARTISTIC CODES:
  ⇒ AUDITORY – VERBAL – SHRAYYA ⇒ VACHIKABHINAYA:
  ⇒ VISUAL – NON VERBAL – DRSHYA ⇒ ANGIKABHINAYA:
  ⇒ SHARIRA BHAVA - EXPRESSION OF THE BODY:
⇒ INTERRELATIONSHIP OF SPACE AND TIME:
⇒ INTERRELATIONSHIP OF DRSHYA AND SHRAYYA:
  ⇒ KRIYA AND DHWANI (VAAK - SANGEET):
⇒ LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION:
⇒ MIND – A MECHANISM: MIND ⇒ MAN’S ACTION:
  DECODING ⇒ ENCODING ⇒ DECODING ⇒ ENCODING
⇒ TEXTUAL PERFORMANCE LEVEL:
⇒ NON TEXTUAL - CODES OF SHUSHKAKSHARAS AND AKSHARA:
⇒ KAKSHYA VIBHAG:
  ⇒ GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS AND MULTI FOCAL SCENE SETTINGS:
⇒ CHITRA YAVANika – THE CURTAIN:
⇒ CHARACTERS:
⇒ CHITTA VRITTIRODHA – METHOD OF TRANSFORMATION:
⇒ AVASTHANUKIRTAANAM: RASA/AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE:
CHAPTER 4

AESTHETICS OF THE THEATRE OF K. N. PANIKKAR:
RASA TO RASA DHVANI - THE META CREATION THROUGH IMAGINATION.

1. NARRATOLOGY OF THE THEATRE OF K. N. PANIKKAR:
2. CONCLUSION:

- In this internationally acclaimed Sanskrit theatre director Panikkar’s contribution in making the “Theatre of Roots and Indigenous Sources” stronger and their usage in the experimental theatre movement of ‘Post Modern’ era is also elaborated. In this matter, the possibilities of ‘Content and Form’ in Indian theatre have been also talked about.

- Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 (Vikramorvashiyan and Kalivesham) is divided into I six month schedule.
- Chapter 2 (Karnabharam, Urubhangam, Abhijnana Shakuntalam, Theyya Theyyam) is divided into II six month schedule.
- Chapter 3 is divided into III six month schedule.
- Chapter 4 is divided into IV six month schedule.
CHAPTER 1

PRACTICES OF SANSKRIT THEATRE:
CHAPTER 1

PRACTICES OF SANSKRIT THEATRE:

❖ PART 1:

- In India as well as in Abroad (East and West)

⇒ Practices of Sanskrit Theatre,
⇒ Sanskrit Play Productions and
⇒ Performances of Sanskrit Drama are being implemented by various directors since many years and have also served as a visual treat to spectators, which has been interesting and quite a challenging phenomenon.
- So far, many directors have contributed towards Sanskrit plays by adding their own interpretations and experimenting with the different style or styles.
- Here, ‘Style’ word is used with respect to –

⇒ PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE PATTERN,
⇒ ACTING PATTERN,
⇒ PRODUCTION PATTERN.

- In totality, it can be said that Practices of Sanskrit Theatre / Sanskrit Play Productions can be characterized under ‘Three Major Trends’ –

⇒ WESTERN MODEL,
⇒ NATYASHASTRIC TRADITION,
⇒ MODERN ATTEMPTS.
WESTERN MODEL:

- Approximately in the 19th Century, and mainly when the British East India Company was established in India, the British introduced “Modern European Theatre” to India in different ways; in this way ‘Western plays / British Theatre performances’ also traveled in India. As a result, its effect could be seen on Sanskrit plays, which were translated into different Indian languages and performed in different parts of India by urban middle-class intellectuals.

- But its presentational style was laid down / depended on ‘British Theatre / Western Theatre’ style and this was clearly visible till independence, the salient features of which are as follows:

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE PRESENTATIONAL STYLE/S:

⇒ The dialogues of Sanskrit Classical Plays were spoken in a Realistic manner like contemporary social plays.

⇒ The ‘Shlokas – Verses’ were either dropped considering being unnecessary as found impeding the action of the play or were paraphrased into prose or as in Maharashtra songs were introduced in the translated plays.

⇒ The dance and music had become part of the plays staged though the dialogues were spoken in a semi realistic style.

⇒ The descriptive passages such as Vidushaka’s description of the seven-storied mansion of Vasantsena were deleted as they were thought to be unnecessary padding.

⇒ These plays were invariably produced in the Proscenium Theatres with settings consisted of flats, painted wings, borders and backdrops.

⇒ The furniture that was not required was painted on the screens depicting a palace or a house or a hut. An attempt of at verisimilitude was made by the use of perspective in painting scenery.

⇒ The costumes of heroic types at times were, more or less, based on the Western Melodrama, which themselves reflected the Greek or the Roman influence.
A touch of Indianness was added to the costumes by a ‘Turban’ with a jeweled plume or tassel; a long ‘Coat’ heavily embroidered with ‘Zari’, a ‘Crown’ and embroidered ‘Shoes’.

The women usually donned saris worn in the style and material prevalent in the region.

In short, the whole atmosphere was rather akin to the presentations of the melodrama of the West with touches of Indianness with elements such as music, dance, costumes and scenery that reflected some Indian scene.

The three dimensionality of the actor was pitted against the two-dimensional flat painted surfaces.

**MAJOR PRODUCTION SUMMARY:**

On 21 Dec. 1831 the newly formed theatre company of Bengal Hindu Theatre performed H.H. Wilson’s English translation of Bhavbhuji’s “Uttar Ramacharitam” at Prasna Kumar Tagore’s Garden House, along with selected scenes from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar.

Vidyatoshini Theatre presented Bengali Translations of Bhatt Narayan’s “Venisamharam” (Tr. Ram Narayan Tarkatna), Kalidas’ “Vikramorvashiyam” (Tr. Kali Prasanna) and Bhavbhuji’s “Malati Madhav” (Tr. Kali Prasanna) on 11 April 1857.

Pathuria Ghat Rangmanch performed the Bengali Translation of Kalidas’ “Malavikagnimitram” (Tr. Yatindra Mohan Tagore) in 1859; Royal Bengal Theatre also performed Kalidas’ “Shakuntala” in 1890 before Queen Victoria.

The New Theatre Movement in Kannada also started with Translations - Adaptations of Sanskrit Classical Plays towards the end of 19th Cent.

Kirloskar Natak Mandal initiated its Professional Activities on regular basis with the staging of “Shakuntala – Its Four Acts” in a Marathi translation entitled “Sangeet Shakuntala” on 31st Oct. 1880 at Pune, in which the verses of the play were rendered in classical music and the local milieu in costume material, mode of wearing, hair style and ornaments of the time are reflected. *(Illustration: 1)*
→ In Hindi, Bhartendu Harishchandra also Translated – Adapted Sanskrit Classical Plays.
→ Parsi Theatre presented Hindi-Urdu Translations of Sanskrit Plays which were performed in either Shakesperean or Parsi Theatre Style.
→ Prithvi Theatre’s maiden venture was also the performance of the Hindi adaptation of “Shakuntala” on 15 January 1944 at Bombay’s Opera House. Though artistically unsuccessful, it was highly popular among theatergoers and fetched 212 performances. *(Illustration: 2)*
→ Daji Bhatawadekar directed “Shakuntala” for the Brahmana Sabha Bombay in early fifties, which was staged at Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan with a setting, with tree branches and a painted curtain depicting on ashram. The same production was revived in 1970-71. *(Illustration: 3)*
→ Daji Bhatawadekar also directed Marathi Musical Sangeet “Mrichhakatikam” for the Brahmana Sabha of Bombay.
→ Dr. V Raghavan, the founder of ‘The Sanskrit Rangam’, (founded in 1958) directed “Shakuntala” in 1961. *(Illustration: 4)*
→ “The Priest and the Prostitute” – Performed in Sanskrit by Sanskrit Rangam at the Museum Theatre, Madras in 1960, Directed by V. Raghavan. *(Illustration: 5)*
→ Sanskrita Rangam has staged many Sanskrit Classics interspersed with Karnatic Music and Bharat Natyam Dance and with Realistic Settings.
→ “The Priest and the Prostitute” – Performed in National School of Drama, New Delhi, in 1960.
→ Eminent Organizations such as Brahmana Sabha of Bombay, the Sanskrit Rangam of Madras and the Kalidas Samaroh of Ujjain staged Sanskrit plays as literary exercises rather than any theatrical experience to popularize Sanskrit language and literature.
CHAPTER: 1

NATYASHASTRIC TRADITION:

- Almost from 1940 and mainly after independence, "SWADESHI MOVEMENT" started gaining importance and various fields started tracing their roots and were in search of their own identity. This search had a great impact on Theatre also and thus began the quest for the "THEATRE OF ROOTS".
- Playwrights and Directors turned to their ‘Roots’ in –

⇒ "NATYASHASTRA",
⇒ "TRADITIONAL GENRES OF A PERFORMANCE"; for a search for an "OWN IDENTITY".

- Indian Theatre / Sanskrit Theatre is based on Bharata’s ‘Natyashastra’, in which majorly three characteristics of Sanskrit theatre have been discussed in detail –

⇒ PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE / PATTERN / SEQUENCE,
⇒ ACTING STYLE,
⇒ PRODUCTION ELEMENTS.

MAJOR PRODUCTION SUMMARY WITH SALIENT FEATURES OF THE PRESENTATIONAL STYLE/S:

⇒ In these phase, the impact of Natyasastra of Bharata is seen in the production style and technique with increasing awareness of music, dance, stylized gestures and movements, correct costumes and other Sanskrit Theatre conventions.

⇒ Various attempts were made at the re-creation of Bharata’s ‘Natya’ in the “Vikrushta Madhyam Natyamandapa” to create a congenial atmosphere for it was closer to the style of staging the Sanskrit Plays in which the “Natyamandapa” was an integral part of the production and integrating broadly the elements of the “Classical Dance Styles” such as “Hand Gestures and Movements, with Classical Music".
\( \Rightarrow \) The "Proscenium Stage" was consciously avoided with all its paraphernalia, such as, the drop or draw curtain, lighting except for illumination and setting of any kind. Thus, the qualities of "Realism" were deliberately done away with.

\( \Rightarrow \) In later fifties an awareness of staging Sanskrit Plays in ‘Language Translations’ could be seen with ‘Period’ costumes using only a platform stage, sans any settings as in the productions of the Hindustani Theatre of Delhi founded by Begum Zaidi, the first professional theatre of its kind, organized specifically to stage Sanskrit Plays in ‘Modern Vernacular Translation’. This is an early production which utilized mime, song and dance in a non-realistic style. No setting other than the simple back-ground was used.

\( \Rightarrow \) Shanta Gandhi earlier had staged in the National School of Drama, New Delhi and Bhasa’s "Madhyama Vyayoga" in the Small Studio Theatre as an exercise. Prof. Goverdhan Panchal recreated “Bharata’s Natyamandapa” with all its essential elements such as ‘Ranga’ with raised Rangasirsha, Rangapitha, Mattavarni on the either side of the Rangapitha and the Vedika with two doors on its either side, made in the back-wall. Over the vedika was raised a ceiling to represent Shadadaruka. A false wall with flats was created to make two doors in the back wall. Between this false wall and the real wall, there was a passage for the entries and exits. On the backside of these false walls were pinned the paper cuttings of stylized trees and branches which, when lighted, created an atmosphere of the forest locale of the play. The musicians ‘Kutapa’ occupied the Vedika. The play was staged with an elaborate Purvaranga in which stylized “Angika”, “Vachika” and music were used and colourful costumes with a feel for Bharata’s “Aharya” had created an atmosphere of some authenticity as seen. (Illustration: 6)

\( \Rightarrow \) Shanta Gandhi directed “Swapnavasavadattam / The Vision of Vasavadatta” which was staged during the International conference on the Art of Sanskrit Drama in Performance under the Asian Theatre Programme, University Theatre, University of Hawai in March 1974, with a feeling for the “Natyasastra” in a stage condition that is said to reflect “Bharata’s Natyamandapa”. Here we see Vasantaka the jester, strung by a bee, standing in the central area of the open stage marked by sacred paintings, in keeping with the ‘Ancient Staging Practices’. Vasavadatta, Padmavati and two Maids are imagined to be peeping out, unseen, from a bower on one side of the garden, while the jester and
King Udayana are trying to hide in the foliage in another part of the garden. The impression of the garden is created by gestures and by verbal description as the scenic representation is considered unnecessary. We can also see here open stage being marked by sacred paintings which probably refers to “Brahma Mandala” mentioned by Bharata.

(Illustration: 7 and 8)

⇒ Shanta Gandhi staged “Vikramovarshiyam” at the Kalidas Samaroh, Ujjain in 1974. The “Natyamandapa” with all its elements was roughly recreated by Goverdhan Panchal. Even the lighting arrangement on the pillars with earthen lamps was made. This was the first time in Ujjain that such an attempt at creating the “Natyamandapa” was made, where Sanskrit Plays till then were staged on improvised crude “Proscenium Stage”. The music in this production was classical played on Vina - Flute and Pakhavaj enhancing the atmosphere. Faintly ‘Stylized Movements, Hand-Gestures and Speech’ were used. The “Aharya” was also attempted as described in the ‘Natyashastra’. Here the use of “Mattavarinis” was confined to the characters waiting there for their immediate entry. But her attempt to recreate the “Sanskrit Natya Style” was, however, genuine.

⇒ Shanta Gandhi also produced “Urubhangam” both in Sanskrit and Hindi in 1979 at Ujjain with an elaborate ‘Purvaranga’ with “Rhythm – controlled Movement and Recitation of Shlokas”.

⇒ Another notable attempt in recreating the “Natyam Tradition” at Ujjain was the production of “Mudraraksas” of Vishakhadatt and “Abhijnana Shakuntala” of Kalidasa, both in Marathi traditions by Vijaya Mehta. The various areas of the “Natyamandapa” were broadly created by the designer, Godse. Here the “Mattavarini” on the left is treated like a corridor. Both the “Mattavarinis” raised on the levels, presumably for aid in compositions.

⇒ “Shakuntala” - Directed by Vijaya Mehta and Fritz Bennewitz played in German Democratic Republic. Here is seen the “Natyamandapa” of Bharata in a solid structure with the essential areas clearly defined but not tied together. (Illustration: 9)

⇒ Vijay Mehta’s production of “Abhijnana Shakuntala” in Marathi in the mixed style of ‘Bharati and Kaishiki Vritti’ and produced in Bharata’s “Natyamandapa” seemed to be
more significant for the purpose of recreating the "Naty Style". Here the competent actors were at home with their thinly 'Stylized Speech' which was interspersed with 'Stylized Hand-Gestures and simple Dance Movements in Kathak Style'. The verses of the text were recited by the actors or sung from the background from a tape. The raised and rectangular "Mattavarinis" were treated like corridors by the actors while making use of it for exits now and then. The Ashrama characters' costumes were 'Kashaya – Colour worn by Ascetics' throughout in tune with the Ashrama environment. (Illustration: 10)

⇒ Vijaya Mehta's production of "Mudrarakshas" was based on the 'Bharti Vritti - Predominating in Speech'. There were also moments which gave an impression of the realistic theatre but barring some such elements the overall production was impressive. (Illustration: 11)

⇒ In the hands of above directors and good actors, though not trained in the elements of "Tauryatrikam: Dance - Nritya, Song – Geeta and Instrumental Music – Vadya" essential for the correct "Production Style of the Sanskrit Plays" based on "Natyashashtra", feel of it was certainly created by both Shanta Gandhi and Vijaya Mehta in their respective productions.

⇒ On 9th Dec. 1989 the West Zone Cultural Centre sponsored the Sanskrit play "Dootvakyam" of Bhasa through the Sanskrit Seva Samiti which was directed by Goverdhan Panchal. His attempt was to produce the play in the "Natyashastra Tradition of Bharata" using music, dance, stylized "Angika", "Stylized Hand-Gestures in Bharata Natyam Style" and other "Stage Conventions of the Sanskrit Dramatic Traditions" such as the entry behind the "Chitra Yavanika". The picture depicts Duryodhana's entry being "Chitra Yavanika". Here the nature of Duryodhana is symbolized by the use of suitable motif painted on the "Chitra Yavanika". It was staged in the linear "Natyamandapa" environment with all its essential elements and was designed by the director himself. In this production, the Scenes such as the 'Chitrarapata' in which Duryodhana tries to divert his attention from being impressed by Vasudev's entry was made live for creating a visual effect and another scene in which Vasudeva calls his weapons was also made live by each personified weapon entering dancing befitting the
character. The convention of “Akashbhashit” was used for speaking of the non-present characters. (*Illustration: 12 and 13*)

⇒ Kamlesh Datta Tripathi staged the IV Act of “Vikramorvashiyam” in “Naty Style”, with music sensitively created by Premalata. The Director for the first time tried to investigate the possibility of staging the Act on a “Tryasara – Triangular Stage” of Bharata using some visual realistic elements like trees to create the atmosphere of the forest in which Urvashi was lost, instead of using models as suggested by Bharata.

⇒ Premalata Sharma and K.D. Tripathi had directed “Uttaramcharitam” for the Abhinava Bharti of Varanasi. The “Natyamandapa” was designed by Vasudeva Smart having a painted canopy over it with musicians at the back in the ‘Kutapa’ position. (*Illustration: 14*)

⇒ Srinivasa Rath and Sanjeev Dixit directed “Urubhangam” for Kalidas Academy, Ujjain in which an attempt was made to recreate the ‘Purvaranga of Bharata’ in a fine authentic manner. The picture shows the ‘Kutapa, Vedika and Jarjardhwaja’ on the right and Duryodhana with his son. (*Illustration: 15*)

⇒ The Sanskrit Rangam of Madras on the occasion of the 81st Birthday celebration of late Dr. V. Raghavan, staged “Swapnavasavadattam” in Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan’s Theatre directed by S.S. Janaki. It was staged in a linear “Natyamandapa” designed by Goverdhan Panchal with the various acting areas broadly defined by the bare structure which marked a departure from their style of production earlier. The various “Kakshyas” of the stage were very well utilized as the action flowed from one “Kakshya” to another smoothly and effortlessly. (*Illustration: 16*)

⇒ With the establishment of the Kalidas Academy in 1977-78 and taking over of the ‘Kalidas Samarohi’ by it has been a catalyst for Sanskrit Plays, bringing radical change in the production of the Sanskrit plays being staged in ‘Sanskrit, Hindi and Regional Languages’.

* Hence we could see impact of Laws and Practices of Natyashastra on presentation of Sanskrit plays approximately till 70s.
MODERN ATTEMPTS:

- Eclecticism in productions of the Sanskrit dramas. In the 70s...

"THEATRE OF ROOTS:

THE MOVEMENT OF ENCOUNTER WITH TRADITION"

...was strongly felt, in which ‘Playwrights and Directors’ turned to –

INDIGENOUS SOURCES:

⇒ TRADITIONAL THEATRE
⇒ RELIGIOUS RITUAL
⇒ CLASSICAL DANCE
⇒ MARTIAL ART
⇒ SANSKRIT / NATYASHASTRA AESTHETIC THEORY. This impulse became –

"OUR OWN PLAYS ABOUT OUR OWN PROBLEMS IN OUR OWN FORMS."

- Different directors, in this respect, according to their own interpretations, directed Sanskrit Plays on the basis of “Laws and Practices of Natyashastra” along with added their own "Regional Traditional Forms” which are laid down on / based on ‘Natyashastra’ to create their own unique style.

- The various experiments of the ‘Modern Era’ are mostly in the direction of finding contemporary idioms of staging the Sanskrit Plays for modern audiences and are not concerned with rediscovering the staging style or styles based on the ‘Natyashastra’. These are individual approaches to the Sanskrit Play with a stamp of individuality. This aspect gets emphasized as all of them draw more or less from their “Regional Traditional Forms”. These staging experiments of the Classical Sanskrit Plays for the modern audiences are aimed at giving varied theatre experiences for investigating new forms and new style of production, giving new interpretation to bring them to suit the modern times, thus, giving them a contemporary dimension.
Various modern attempts at staging the Sanskrit plays for contemporary audiences in different styles can be classified in the following broad categories.

**PRODUCTIONS REFLECTING “TRIBAL DANCE OR DANCE – DRAMA FORMS”:**

⇒ Habib Tanvir was among the first to create an awareness of the ‘Traditional Theatre’ among the urbans. His dedicated work on the ‘Chhatisgarhi Tribal Theatric Form – Nacha’ culminated in the “Mrichhakatikam” directed by him and presented at the Kalidasa Samaroha. It was a genuine, sincere attempt to investigate and apply the tribal ethos in all its aspects. It looked as if the tribals had suddenly discovered the play “Mitti Ki Gadi – Mrichhakatikam” handed down by one of their own man in their own dialect. It was an experience to see these tribals handling a classical play in their own dialect, in their own gestures, movements, songs and dances in the costumes and ornaments of their daily wear and performed on an open stage without scenery.  

(Illustration: 17)

⇒ Habib Tanvir had also adapted Vishakhadatta’s “Mudrarakshas” in Chhattigarhi and presented in ‘Nacha Form’, in 1977. (Illustration: 18)

⇒ In 1977-78 Habib Tanvir presented three plays of Bhasa viz. “Panchratram, Dootavakyam and Urubhangam” as a single play under the title “Duryodhana”. All the three plays were linked and connected through “Pandavani - The Tribal Narrative Form” of Chhattigarh and the plays were adapted in Chhattisgarhi language.

⇒ Habib Tanvir directed Bhatta Narayana’s “Veni Samharm” in Chhattisgarhi language again employing “Pandavani - The Tribal Narrative Form” of Chhattigarh.

⇒ Habib Tanvir’s Chhatisgarhi adaptation of Bhavabhuti’s “Uttara Ramacharitam” at Kalidasa Samaroha, Ujjain in 1979; attracted criticism by Sanskrit Scholars as they could not digest the fact that the Sanskrit Classics can be performed in the tribal idiom.

⇒ Habib Tanvir presented “Bhagvad Ajjukiyam” in Chhattisgarhi for which he himself had written the songs.
3 PRODUCTIONS BASED ON POPULAR “REGIONAL TRADITIONAL THEATRE FORMS”:

⇒ Kailash Pandya and Damini Mehta produced “Bhagvad Ajjukiyam” based on “Bhavai - The Popular Traditional Theatre Form of Gujarat” for Darpana Academy of Ahmedabad which was staged during the Oriental Conference in 1985.

⇒ Nautanki Kala Kendra, Lucknow, produced “Shakuntalam” in authentic “Nautanki” as a musical. (Illustration: 19)

⇒ “Loka Shakuntala” in “Yakshagana” style with stylized Hindi speech was directed by K.V. Subanna for the students of National School of Drama, New Delhi on an open stage in 1982. All the elements of the production – music, dance, costumes etc. were authentically used. (Illustration: 20)

⇒ Staging of “Hasyachudamani” by Vatsaraja directed by Omprakash Sharma in Mach style took place during Kalidasa Samaroh in 1986.

⇒ An experiment to stage Bhasas’s “Swapnavasavdattam” (1981) in the Mach style of Madhya Pradesh at the Kalidasa Samaroha, Ujjain, directed by Srinivas Rath and Sanjeev Dixit had the feel of authenticity of the regional popular dramatic form.

3 PRODUCTION STYLE BASED ON PURE “CLASSICAL / TRADITIONAL DANCE OR DANCE – DRAMA”:

⇒ Ratan Thiyam’s “Act IV of Vikramovarshiyam”, “Karnabharam” and “Urubhangam” all in Meitei translations was cast in the ‘Manipuri Dance’ in its pure authentic form.

⇒ Ratan Thiyam’s “Act IV of Vikramovarshiyam” was lyrical and poetic, the swimming swans, the flight of the birds, the elephant were all tellingly portrayed using Manipuri Dance’s lyrical quality, authentic Manipuri costumes, music and enchanting ‘Lasya Dance’. (Illustration: 21)
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Panikkar’s “Karnabharam” at the Bhasa Festival and “Urubhangam” at the Kalidas Festival at Ujjain were produced in the same style. From the descriptive passage in the texts, the director created visual images often with telling effect.

In “Urubhangam”, Panikkar brought two fold aspect of Duryodhana, the mundane one is the mortal existence of Duryodhana struggling under the pangs of death. The other is his spirit which unveils a supernatural dimension and is projected in his “Theyyam”.

“Mattavilasam” directed by Panikkar for NSD Repertory in 1984 and “Swapna Katha” directed for NSD Second Year Students in 1994. (Illustration: 25 and 26)

“Karnabharam” was presented by Lokdharmi, Kochi under the direction of Chandradasan at Bharat Rang Mahotsava – 2008 in Panikkar’s style synthesizing “Classical Regional Forms like Kutiyanam, Kathakali, Kalariyapattu, Padayani, Sopana – Sanggetham” to form a ‘Modern Theatrical Idiom’. (Illustration: 27)

Free Style of Taking Elements of Different Forms:

A sort of free style was attempted taking elements of different Traditional Theatre, Dance or Dance-Drama forms and sometimes including acrobatics and blending them in a stylized form.

The play “Hasyachudamani” directed by Bansi Kaul and staged at the Goa Kala Academy, Goa and “Venismaharam” also directed by him. (Illustration: 28)

Bhasa plays directed by M.K. Raina also fall in this category produced at Ujjain, Delhi etc. (Illustration: 29)

“Malavikagnimitram”, “Vikramorvashiyam” and “Mrichhakatikam” directed by K. S. Rajendran for the students of NSD, New Delhi and “Uttar Ramacharitam” at Bhopal, during the workshop and presented at Kalidas Samaroh also. (Illustration: 30 and 31)

Major plays of Bhasa like “Madhyama Vyayogam”, “Avimaraka”, “Pancharatram” etc., Bhatta Narayan’s “Venisamharam” directed by Bhumikeshwar Singh in “Chhau Style” at Delhi. (Illustration: 32 and 33)


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PERSPECTIVE DIRECTORS SEARCHING DISTINCTIVE STYLE OF PRODUCTION FOR sanskrit plays:

- "Mrichhakatikam" – Directed by E. Alkazi for the National School of Drama, New Delhi, staged at Kalidas Samaroha, Ujjain.

- "Shakuntalam" – Directed by Prabhat Kumar Bhattacharya for the Kalidas Academy, Ujjain, staged at the Kalidas Samaroha.

- "Urubhangam" – Directed by Satyabrata Rout for the East 15 Acting School, U.K. (Illustration: 34)

- "Mudrarakshasa", "Vikramorvashiyam", "Avimaraaka" and mixed version of "Bhagvad Ajjukiyam and Mattavilasam" - Directed by B.V. Karanth for the National School of Drama, New Delhi and some staged at the Kalidas Academy, Ujjain. (Illustration: 35 and 36)

* In this phase some of the directors who made intense and in depth efforts in this respect are Habib Tanveer, B. V. Karanth, K. N. Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam, Bansi Kaul, and M. K. Raina etc. They all experimented with different style or styles in Sanskrit theatre.

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* But among all the directors, ‘Panikkar’ is the best example of ways in which the ‘Theatre of Roots’ especially “Presentation Method of Sanskrit Theatre” has redefined “Modern Indian Theatre”. He has drawn his sources from “Indigenous and Classical, Traditional, Folk, Ritual Traditions”. Panikkar developed very unique and authentic method for “Presentation of Sanskrit Plays in Modern / Contemporary Indian Theatre”; because he uses the ‘Performance Structure / Dramaturgical Structure’ of ‘Kutiyattam - Most Nearest Traditional Sanskrit Theatre Form of the Natyashastra’, the ‘Actor – Training Methods’ of ‘Kathakali’, the ‘Physical Training’ of ‘Kalarippayattu’ and ‘Aesthetic Theory’ from the ‘Natyashastra’ to ‘Redirect the Aesthetic Goal of Performance’, the ‘Director’s
Relationship to Text’, the ‘Actor’s Relationship to Character’ and the ‘Spectator’s Mode of Engagement’, to create a theatre that has the capacity to present many perspectives.

- One of the characteristic of the “Roots Movement” and especially “Presentation Method of Sanskrit Theatre” and particularly of the work of Panikkar of its exemplary and most renowned practitioner, on whose work I focus on in my ‘Thesis’, because it offers an opportunity to examine the most important and influential theatrical innovations of the “Theatre of Roots Movement”, especially “Sanskrit Theatre” is that ‘Director / Playwright’ complicate the linear narrative, allowing for a multiplicity of voices and multiple perspective.

- Means, if an analytical and performative analysis is to be done on Panikkar’s theatre, it’s detailed study can be done mainly on the basis of

⇒ NATHYASHASTRA,

⇒ KERALA’S MAJOR PERFORMATIVE ART FORMS.

- In which the most important study of comparative analysis between “Regional Traditional Sanskrit Theatre – Kutiyattam” and the “Laws and Practices of Natyashastra”, because ‘Natyashastra’ is “A Dramaturgy / An Anthology of Sanskrit Theatre”, which is totally ‘Theoretical Aspect’, while ‘Kutiyattam’ is “The Most Nearest Traditional Form of Natyashastra” and “Living Tradition of Sanskrit Theatre”, which is totally ‘Practical Aspect’. If we take a close look at the presentation, a detailed study of its comparison and contrast is essential.