

Name of the Scholar: Deepti Zutshi

Name of the Supervisor: Dr. Anuradha Ghosh

Name of the Department: Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Languages

Title of the Ph.D Thesis: Between Violence and Silence: A Study of Performance Aesthetics in Manipur

The Ph.D thesis titled “Between Violence and Silence: A Study of Performance Aesthetics in Manipur” analyses the theatre scenario in the volatile context of the state of Manipur where a turbulent history of violence has created a ‘third’ space between the oppressive violence of the State machinery, insurgency and similar forces, and the forced silence of the people caught between the two.

The first chapter of the thesis is called 'Discovering the Self: Between Violence and Silence'. It includes a documentation of aspects of the socio-political context of Manipur which get highlighted in the performances of the theatre groups selected for study. It gives an account of the grid of oppression, created by the implementation of AFSPA in the state, as well as the agency of the government in strengthening the feeling of alienation felt by the people of Manipur, through inconsistent policies that seem to disregard their aims and aspirations. This chapter also entails a discussion of the non-violent mode of resistance represented by Irom Sharmila and the active mode of resistance represented by the Meira Paibis and the Ima protest against the rape and murder of Manorama Thangjam in 2004. The documentaries, news and magazine reports and scholarly articles cited in this chapter point towards an existential angst, which can also be observed in the theatre practitioners of Experimental Theatre in Manipur, as they try to create alternative narratives of lived reality through theatre.

The second chapter of the thesis, titled 'The Aesthetics of Performance', discusses the theories of performance posited by Heisnam Kanhailal and Ratan Thiyam in their writings on theatre/interviews. It scrutinises three aspects of the performance aesthetics conceptualised by these practitioners – 'Theatre as Ritual: The Dialogue between the Categories of 'Folk' and 'People' in Relation to Theatre', 'The Visual Culture of Manipur' and 'The Question of Language: The Human Connection'.

The third chapter titled 'The Metaphysics of Performance' focusses on the themes highlighted in the selected texts and the manner in which they are performed by the groups. It includes a sequential analysis of the performance texts to examine patterns of intersections between the different practices and the use of visual and cultural codes for creating a specific aesthetics. The texts selected for study have been categorised on the following lines – 'Performance as Adaptation', 'Performance as Cross-Cultural Exchange' and 'Performance as Political Dialogue', in order to analyse them in an intra-systemic comparative mode.

The chapter 'Towards a Conclusion: The Rhythms of Performance' analyses the question of 'form' and the categories (the cultural history of Manipur and its socio-political context) that it is inspired by. It also examines the relation of form to aesthetics and the negotiations that have to be made with respect to form over time. For a state whose history has been little more than an accumulation of spectacles of violence caused by military forces, insurgent groups and inter-ethnic conflict, the form of the spectacle seems to be the fittest for an artist who endeavours to document and critique it.

The personal interaction with the directors, performers and spectators has been documented in the thesis in the form of Appendices.