

**SHAKESPEARE'S *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*
AS INTERPRETED BY
THE TEMPLE OF FINE ARTS INTERNATIONAL:
A 'PERSONAL' DEVOTIONAL POETICS.**

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Muralitharan Pillai
son of
D. M. Doraisamy Pillai and Saroja Nagalingam

BA (Drama) Queensland University of Technology, 2000



Faculty of Arts and Education, School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Murdoch University, 2011

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main focus work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

Muralitharan Pillai D. M. Doraisamy Pillai

Acknowledgements

With deepest and sincerest gratitude, I would like to thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Jenny de Reuck, for her unflinching support and guidance throughout the entire duration of this thesis. She has become a close and true friend to whom I am deeply and gratefully indebted too.

I would like to express my thanks to the kind and wonderful staff of Higher Degrees Research Team for their tremendous support during the candidature process. My thanks, too, must go to Professor Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe for a copy of his manuscript on *Consciousness and the Actor* and Mr Radha Krishnan for his generous support during the process. I would also like to thank my late Father, Mother, Brothers, Sister, Mrs Aehma Rajendran and Brother In-Law, Mr Rajendran Rangaraju. My heartfelt thanks, also, to all my close friends who stood by me during this lonely and challenging journey, in particular my dear friends TT Dhavamanni, S Krishna Kumar, Darren Bilston, Melissa Merchant, Andrew Kocsis and Salmiyah Fiedorowicz.

With deepest gratitude, I am grateful to the Temple of Fine Arts International, its loving teachers and Shiva Family International for their love, guidance and support without whom this thesis would not have begun its journey. A very special thanks to Perth Shiva Family members, in particular, *Annalakshmi*, the Management and the lovely Aunties of *Annalakshmi* who have been a constant source of inspiration and support throughout my trying times in Perth. With all my heart, I would like to thank the late Mr Udhaya Sagar, Ms Swaroopini Udhaya and Mrs Hamalatha Udhaya, together with the late Mr Vijaye Kumar Santhiran, Ms Bhumika Vijaye Santhiran, Master Himagiri Vijaye Santhiran, Mrs Anusooya Vijaye Kumar, Ms Santhini Chandrapal, Mr S Loganathan, Mrs Usha Ramakrishnan and Mr Vaidyanathan Appathurai for their unconditional love, support and encouragement in realising this thesis and my personal self.

Finally and most importantly, offering my total *pranams* and salutations, I prostrate in complete obeisance to my true friend, mentor, and Guru, **His Holiness Swami Shantanand Saraswathi (Swamiji)**, founder and inspiration of Shiva Family International and the Temple of Fine Arts International. Without Swamiji's continuous unconditional love, compassion, guidance and support, this thesis would not have been conceived, inspired or realised. Although, Swamiji, my Father, Udhaya, and Vijaye are not physically present to share my joy, I revel in the knowledge that they are sharing my joy from the Spirit realm, ever-present. Hari Om.

Abstract

From the time of Alexander the Great, to the colonising agendas of the Portuguese, Spanish and the English and, more recently, the pursuits of Western theatre practitioners, many have sought for ontological significance from India. What were they looking for? Swami Ramdas once remarked that all who sought him, wanted ‘trinkets’ but none sought him for the greatest treasure of all, *brahma gnanam* (knowledge of the Self or the Absolute Spirit-*Brahman*). Drawing inspiration from India, twentieth century theatre practitioners as diverse as Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Strasberg, Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski, Barba, Brook, Mnouchkine, Schechner and Zarrilli have embarked on attempts to search for and develop methodologies that aim to free the actor from the ‘tyranny’ of the Western theatrical idea; that is, the cognitively orientated training that develops in actors a capacity to perform from the ‘neck up’. Various actor-training methodologies, from varying cultural perspectives, have been developed only to find their unsatisfactory conclusion in merely scratching the surface of possible frameworks for an enriched theatrical training program as intercultural theatre reached a theoretical deadlock.

In their search for a solution to this Aristotelian-Cartesian body-mind dualism, theorists such as Mancing and Haney have surfaced the dire need to reassess Western theories of cognitive science that engage literary theory, cultural studies and criticism. The authors have suggested the alternative approach of defining and accessing the idea of pure consciousness as a methodology unique to the performing arts, one which is drawn from their understanding of the insights of Indian philosophy. A new generation of theorists and theatre practitioners, such as Malekin, Yarrow and Meyer-Dinkgrafe have further argued that the actor’s emotions in theatre practice can be successfully mediated and subsequently communicated on the platform of Indian theatre aesthetics taking as their informing paradigm, the *Natyasastra*. Their research has led them to the door, but I believe they are unable to gain entry because they lack the crucial ‘key’, or “*pratyahara*” (ethical preparations) that would allow them access. The ‘key’, as I argue in this research as practice/practice-led research project, lies in the practice of Swami Sivananda’s “Spiritual Ladder” elucidated by Swami Shantanand.

This thesis, which comprises an exegesis and the documentation of the unique training schedule developed through my personal theatre practice, aims at bridging that gap in

creating a clear pathway for the attainment of the ‘greatest treasure’ in theatre practice: pure consciousness or Absolute Spirit-*Brahman*. I propose a model of acting-theatre praxis whose theoretical coordinates are located in the paradigm of *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime*, the Vedic sciences of the *Natyasastra* as they relate to the state of pure consciousness and contemporary theories of Interculturalism. In order to fully locate the project, I have used the insights of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism, which offer useful frameworks for the interrogation of both collaborative and vertical traditional, theatre making. The insights that derive from the theoretical interrogation, here, of my theatre practice which include the presentation and analysis of the devised production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* adapted by the Temple of Fine Arts International suggest the possibility for the devotee of an acting-theatre praxis based on the pure consciousness of devotion and worship in adoration of the divine. The model developed here as part of the creative component of this thesis transpires in a devotional acting-theatre praxis, informed by my personal creative work at Murdoch University which provides an empirical (experiential) base from which to renegotiate the competing – often conflicting - demands of intercultural theatre practice.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Prologue	1
Hermeneutic Circle	1
Vision taking me to <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	4
Providence or Coincidence.....	9
A prayer to Lord <i>Ganesha</i>	11
A prayer to Guru	11
A prayer to the Goddess <i>Saraswathi</i> - Goddess of Knowledge	13
Conclusion.....	15
Chapter 1 - Introduction and Literature Review	16
Introduction	16
Vedic Philosophy and Consciousness	16
Interculturalism	19
Cultural Materialism and New Historicism.....	20
The Arguments	21
Primary Case Study - The Temple of Fine Arts	23
Secondary Case Studies – Creative Works at Murdoch University	25
Hegelian Circle of Hermeneutics	26
Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime	27
Conclusion.....	36
Chapter 2 – Theoretical Fore-structures	37
Introduction	37
Vedic Philosophy and Consciousness	38
Interculturalism.....	45
Language	58
Space	60
Body (race and gender)	61
Reinvention.....	66
The Vedas.....	67
Conclusion.....	75
Chapter 2 Appendix: AMND Program Brochure Cover page	77
Chapter 3 - The Temple Of Fine Arts	80
Introduction	80
The Temple of Fine Arts	82
Shiva Family as <i>Yagna</i>	97
The Temple of Fine Arts as <i>Yagna</i>	98
Annalakshmi as <i>Yagna</i>	104
Conclusion.....	108
Chapter 3 Appendix: Swami Shantanand – The Sage behind TFA.....	111
Chapter 4 - AMND: Interpretation	127
Introduction	127
Shakespeare	129
Swami Shantanand Saraswathi	131
Katharine Lee Bates	136
The Sri Chakra Yantra	137
Arnie Lade.....	143
Dr Hans Jenny and Cymatics.....	145

TFA's AMND radar field Diagram	148
Oberon- <i>Ananga</i> and Titania- <i>Bhogawathi</i>	163
Indian Boy- <i>Prem</i>	164
Puck- <i>Deepak</i>	165
The Lovers: Hermia- <i>Chandini</i> , Lysander- <i>Surej</i> , Helena- <i>Nishi</i> and Demetrius- <i>Prabha</i>	166
Conclusion.....	173
Chapter 5 - Devotional Acting-Theatre Praxis	175
Introduction	175
Ghostly Spectres	181
Western Academic Prestige	182
The Timeline of the <i>Natyasastra</i>	183
Critique of Schechner and the <i>Natyasastra</i>	189
Indian Philosophy: a reorientation	199
Devotional Acting-Theatre Praxis	207
<i>The Natyasastra</i>	237
<i>Abhinaya</i>	238
<i>Rasa</i>	238
Gurukula: <i>guru-sisya parampara</i>	241
Devotional Acting-Theatre Praxis–Led Research: Suggested Solution.....	243
Creative Work.....	247
Lord of Misrule.....	254
Symbolism of Lord <i>Nataraja</i>	257
The <i>Natyasastra</i> and Stanislavsky's System	274
Conclusion.....	279
Chapter 5 Appendices	282
Appendix 5.1: <i>The Captive Carousel</i>	282
Appendix 5.2: <i>Infinite Variety - Othello</i>	284
Appendix 5.3: <i>Lit by Limelight</i>	288
Appendix 5.4: <i>Master of the Revels</i>	292
Appendix 5.5: <i>The Phoenix and the Fighting Pandas of Yunnan Province</i>	294
Appendix 5.6: <i>Macbeth</i> (Japanese adaptation reinvention)	300
Epilogue.....	308
Bibliography.....	311