**Research Article**

# Exploring Classroom Pedagogy of Sanskrit Drama through Postmodern Perspectives

Dhrumi Shah[1*], Dr. Swati Bhise[2]

[1*]PhD Scholar, Amity University, Mumbai
[2]Assistant Professor, Amity University, Mumbai

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| | This paper explores classroom pedagogy of Sanskrit drama for semester six undergraduate students of B.A. English to improve their understanding and analytical skills in the context of Indian classical drama from postmodern perspectives like spatiality and deconstruction. To achieve the research outcome, student-centric approach, integrating interactive learning, experiential learning, and case-based learning, was adopted. It was observed that learners' cognitive skills and interpersonal skills like communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, etc. improved. |
| | **Keywords:** education, pedagogy, Sanskrit drama, postmodernism |

## Introduction

Sanskrit drama, the most ancient Indian dramatic tradition, is an important genre in Indian classical literature. It flourished in India between the first century A.D. and the tenth century A.D. (Richmond 9; Richmond 13). Despite its decline due to various socio-political reasons, the genre significantly contributed to shaping and impacting several other performative arts, including Indian vernacular theatre and modern Indian drama (Keith 243; Satyavrat xiii). Moreover, the first English translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam* as *Sacontala – the Fatal Ring* by William Jones in 1789 spurred Indian and Western scholars' interest in this theatrical tradition. To date, several academic endeavours have located the advancement of the Sanskrit dramatic tradition, studied the contributions of various playwrights, examined Indian aesthetics, and translated associated dramatic texts. Consequently, playwrights like Bhasa, Shudraka, and Kalidasa continue to enjoy global recognition for their endlessly performed, adapted, and critically studied works even today.

While current academia boasts extensive literature related to the textual, authorial, social, and linguistic contexts of the plays, there exists an academic vacuum concerning classroom pedagogy in undergraduate classrooms. In particular, learners of Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in English are taught the English translation of Sanskrit plays to foster learners' cultural and historical insights, encourage comparative study of world literatures, understand the evolution of different dramatic techniques, develop linguistic skills, appreciate Indian aesthetics, and advance interdisciplinary knowledge. Currently, educators primarily adopt traditional pedagogical approaches to teaching Sanskrit drama, limiting pedagogy to historical context, textual analysis, and rote memorization. Such approaches restrict learners' critical understanding and interpersonal growth. Therefore, in addressing the research gap related to the classroom pedagogy of Sanskrit drama, it is imperative to examine how integrating postmodern perspectives, viz., spatiality and deconstruction, while teaching these plays can help to advance learners' cognitive and interpersonal skills. Incorporating spatiality based on the works of scholars like Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault will encourage learners to understand the importance of space in a dramatic performance. This is important because space is the most significant prerequisite for an act of drama (no drama can be performed without space). Also, applying spatiality will help learners understand the fictional spaces of the plays and how they impact intra-textual relationships and textual reception. Further, Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction will encourage learners to critically analyse texts and make multiple textual interpretations. Thus, applying these perspectives will reveal new dimensions in the context of teaching and learning Sanskrit drama.

## Methodology and Methods

To integrate postmodern perspectives into the classroom pedagogy of Sanskrit drama, a qualitative research design was employed, and a student-centric approach, incorporating interactive, experiential, and case-based learning, was adopted.

### Research Design and Participants
The research participants were sixth-semester learners enrolled in the B.A. English course, and the research investigated how the chosen pedagogical strategies could enhance students' understanding and analytical skills related to Sanskrit drama while fostering their cognitive and interpersonal skills like communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution.

### Student-centric Pedagogical Approach
Student-centric pedagogy is also known as learner-centric education. This pedagogical approach focuses on learners and places them at the centre of the learning process (Tang 72). Emphasising active learning, personalised teaching, and critical thinking, this pedagogical method aims to make education more engaging and tailored to individual learners' needs and interests (Tang 73).
For the research, this pedagogical approach was grounded in postmodern theories of spatiality and deconstruction. It integrated interactive, experiential, and case-based learning methods to facilitate an engaging and reflective learning environment.

### Interactive Learning
At the outset, interactive learning involves educators and learners. It motivates and expects learners to participate in the learning process, encourages discussions, cultivates independent learning, and employs various teaching aids to retain learners' attention (Senthamarai S36). This method was the foundation of the pedagogical strategy. Learners were encouraged to participate in discussions and provide their individual point of view regarding the settings, characters, structure, and background of the plays. Discussions regarding the universality of the thematic concerns of the play were also undertaken. Furthermore, group discussions and debates related to the different narrative aspects were held to allow learners to critically engage and evaluate the texts, understand multiple perspectives, deconstruct traditional understandings of the plays, and explore multiple interpretations. Thus, overall, the classroom environment was created to encourage learners' active participation while studying Sanskrit plays.

### Experiential Learning
Experiential learning mainly positions learning as a continuous activity in which learners bring their own ideas, knowledge, and practices as they understand new information (Bartle 2). For the research undertaken, experiential learning was incorporated in the classroom through hands-on activities, performances, and real-world applications. Learners participated in role-play exercises. Learners assumed the roles of different characters in classroom playreading. They also performed selected scenes to experience and comprehend the spatial and performative aspects of the plays. The performances were also recorded so that learners could get a better understanding of their articulation, acting, body language, and spatial dynamics in a performance. In addition to this, learners were encouraged to critically reflect on their experiences of the playreading and performance through reflective writing and journaling.

### Case-based Learning
Case-based learning is an interactive teaching approach that engages learners with stories or instances that pose questions, present problems, and enliven theoretical concepts (Hoffer 75). The aim is to make theoretical knowledge more relevant and help learners understand its real-time applications. Here, case-based learning was employed to motivate learners to analyse and interpret complex scenarios in the plays. Realistic case studies were developed from the narratives and were employed to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The learners worked individually and in groups to dissect or deconstruct the cases. Thereafter, they discussed various perspectives and presented their holistic analyses.

## Results and Discussion

Integrating postmodern perspectives into the classroom pedagogy of Sanskrit drama gave promising results. It enhanced learners' cognitive and interpersonal skills as they obtained holistic and critical textual understanding and strengthened their communication, teamwork, problem-solving, conflict resolution, articulation, body language, and collaboration.
Interactive learning helped learners gain in-depth insights into the settings, characters, structures, and themes of the plays. They were able to develop nuanced interpretations. The group discussions and debates allowed learners to critically engage with the texts. Their sensitivity increased as they embraced and understood different perspectives offered by their peers and deconstructed the traditional understanding of the plays. This fostered their analytical thinking and augmented their understanding of Sanskrit drama.

Further, experiential learning provided learners with hands-on experiences, enriching their understanding of the spatial and performative aspects of Sanskrit drama. The role-play exercises and performances of selected scenes allowed learners to understand the characters better. They also improved learners' body language, articulation, and vocabulary as they immersed themselves in the texts. Additionally, reflective writing and journaling improved the learners' writing abilities, self-awareness, and analytical skills.

Case-based learning added a new dimension to the skills improved through experiential and interactive learning. As learners analysed and interpreted complex situations in the plays and the realistic case studies developed from the narratives, they applied their theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. This promoted their critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Moreover, working individually and presenting their perspectives improved learners' confidence and presentation skills, whereas working with a group solidified their people management and conflict resolution skills.

Thus, taken together, the integrated pedagogical approach fostered learners' cognitive and interpersonal skills. It offered more learning and growth than those offered by conventional pedagogical approaches.

### Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although restricted to two postmodern perspectives, the undertaken research and its results have significant implications for pedagogy. They highlight the effectiveness of a student-centric approach, based on the postmodern concepts of spatiality and deconstruction, integrating interactive, experiential, and case-based learning methods to enhance learners' cognitive and interpersonal skills in the context of Sanskrit drama, the most ancient Indian dramatic tradition. Future research could explore classroom pedagogy through other postmodern concepts, like intertextuality, hybridity, and fragmentation. It could also study the long-term effects of this pedagogical approach and investigate its applicability in other educational contexts and disciplines.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of postmodern perspectives, viz., spatiality and deconstruction, into the classroom pedagogy of Sanskrit drama for learners of B.A. English in semester 6 yielded positive and promising results. The student-centric approach that incorporated interactive, experiential, and case-based learning methods enhanced learners' cognitive skills of critical thinking and analysis and interpersonal skills of communication, teamwork, collaboration, presentation, conflict management, body language, articulation, decision-making, and problem solving. The pedagogical approach not only expanded learners' understanding of Sanskrit drama but also enhanced their personality development, thus surpassing the limitations of traditional pedagogical methods. The limitation of this research is that it concentrates on two postmodern concepts. Future studies could build on this research by incorporating more postmodern perspectives and studying pedagogical implications in other educational practices and interdisciplinary contexts.

## Works Cited & References

1. Bartle, Emma. *Experiential Learning: An Overview*. Australia, The University of Queensland, 2015, itali.uq.edu.au/files/1264/Discussion-paper-Experiential_learning_an_overview.pdf. Accessed 9 June 2024.
2. Hoffer, Erin Rae. "Case-based Teaching: Using Stories for Engagement and Inclusion." *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2020, files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1263931.pdf.
3. Keith, A. Berriedale. *The Sanskrit Drama in its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*. Oxford University Press, 1954, London.
4. Richmond, Farley. "Traditional Indian Theatre." *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, edited by Siyuan Liu, Routledge, 2016, pp. 9-30.
5. Satyavrat, Usha. *Sanskrit Dramas of the Twentieth Century*. Vol 1, Meharchand Lachhmandas, 1971, Delhi.
6. Senthamarai, S. "Interactive teaching strategies." *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research*, May 2018, pp. S36–38. https://doi.org/10.21839/jaar.2018.v3is1.166.
7. Tang, Kuok Ho Daniel. "Student-centered Approach in Teaching and Learning: What Does It Really Mean?" *Acta Pedagogia Asiana*, vol. 2, no. 2, Mar. 2023, pp. 72–83. https://doi.org/10.53623/apga.v2i2.218.