

	MAHATMA GANDHI UNIVERSITY Kottayam, Kerala Undergraduate Programmes (HONOURS) 2024 Admission Onwards
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SYLLABUS				
SIGNATURE COURSE				
Name of the College	Alphonsa College, Pala			
Faculty/ Discipline	English			
Programme	BA (Hons) English			
Course Coordinator	Sonia Sebastian			
Contributors	Dr. Sonia Sebastian, Lt. Anu Jose, Ms. Sruthi Catherine Thomas			
Course Name	Performance Studies: Theory and Practice			
Type of Course	SEC			
Specialization title	This Signature Course does not have a specialization.			
Course Code	MG5SECENGA00			
Course Level	300			
Course Summary	This course introduces foundational concepts and critical frameworks in Performance Studies, examining performance as theory, practice, method, and metaphor across cultural contexts. It explores ideas of ritual, play, representation, embodiment, presence, and performativity, while engaging with classical and modern aesthetic traditions to understand performance as a dynamic mode of meaning-making and lived experience.			
Semester	5	Credits		3
Course Details				
	Learning Approach	Lecture	Practical/Lab-P	Total Hours
	Credits	2	1	60
Pre-requisites, if any				

Course Outcomes (CO)

Number of COs		5	
CO No.	Expected Course Outcome	Learning Domains *	PO No
1	CO1: Demonstrate an understanding of foundational theories and concepts in Performance Studies.	U	PO1, PO2
2	CO2: Analyze how performance operates within cultural, social, and political contexts.	An	PO1, PO2, PO3, PO10
3	CO3: Critically interpret visual texts—films, advertisements, social media, and digital art—through performance frameworks	A	PO1, PO2, PO6, PO10
4	CO4: Apply performance analysis to visual media, exploring embodiment, spectatorship, and representation.	A	PO3, PO8
5	CO5: Articulate interdisciplinary connections between live and mediated performances in research and creative practice.	S	PO3, PO9, PO10

CO-PO Articulation Matrix

CO/PO	PO 1	PO 2	PO 3	PO 4	PO 5	PO 6	PO 7	PO 8	PO 9	PO 10
CO 1	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CO 2	3	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CO 3	3	3	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	3
CO 4	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
CO 5	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	3

'0' is No Correlation, '1' is Slight Correlation (Low level), '2' is Moderate Correlation (Medium level) and '3' is Substantial Correlation (High level).

Course Content

Content for Classroom transaction (Units)

Module	Units	Course Description	Hrs	CO No.
1		Mastering the foundational theories and concepts		
	1.1	Theory of Rasa : SN Dasgupta	5	["1"]
	1.2	Preface to Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory: Simon Shepherd	5	["1", "2"]
	1.3	Performance and Performativity; Ritual, play and representation. Performance as method and metaphor. Theories of embodiment and presence	5	["1"]
	1.4	Practicum: Practical application - interpreting Indigenous Performance, Visualization, Stage setting	15	["4", "5"]
2		Analyse cultural and social phenomena using performance as a lens		
	2.1	Gravedigger Scene: Hamlet Act V Scene I	2	["2", "3", "4"]
	2.2	Chithra: Rabindra Nath Tagore	3	["2", "3", "4"]
	2.3	Nagamandala: Girish Karnad	3	["2", "3", "4"]
	2.4	Practicum: Practical application - Screen play writing	7	["2", "3", "4"]
3		Master the interdisciplinary evolution in the area		
	3.1	"The Passing": Bill Viola	2	["3", "4", "5"]
	3.2	"Kanthara": Directed by Rishabh Shetty	3	["3", "4", "5"]
	3.3	Vanaprastham: Directed by Shaji N Karun	2	["3", "4", "5"]
	3.4	Practicum: Field Visit, Practical Applications - Stage Performances	8	["4", "5"]

Teaching and Learning Approach	Classroom Procedure (Mode of transaction) Lecture involving chalk&board method, multimedia presentation, movie screening, group discussion, peer teaching, hands on experiment
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Assessment Types	MODE OF ASSESSMENT Mode of Assessment: Both
	A. Continuous Comprehensive Assessment (CCA) • Theory - 15 Marks Assignment, MCQ, Viva • Practical - 15 Marks involvement in classroom activities, Experiential learning
	B. End Semester Evaluation (ESE) • Theory - 35 Marks Assessment Methods - Written Examination Duration of Examination - 1.30 Hrs Pattern of examination for Theory - Non-MCQ Different parts of written examination - Part - A , B , C Answer Type: ◦ PART - A ◦ One Sentence - (10 out of 12) - $10 \times 1 = 10$ ◦ PART - B ◦ Short answer - (5 out of 8) - $5 \times 2 = 10$ ◦ PART - C ◦ Short Essays - (3 out of 5) - $3 \times 5 = 15$ • Practical - 35 Marks Assessment Methods - NA Duration of Examination - N/A

References

- Bharata. The Nāṭyaśāstra. Translated by Manomohan Ghosh. 2 vols., Asiatic Society, 1951-1961. The Nāṭyaśāstra remains one of the most comprehensive classical treatises on dramaturgy and aesthetic theory in the Sanskrit tradition. Traditionally attributed to Bharata Muni and composed between roughly 200 BCE and 200 CE—with later interpolations—the text systematizes theatre as a highly codified, integrative art form that synthesizes movement, speech, music, architecture, costume, and emotional expression. Rather than isolating theatre as secular entertainment, the treatise situates it within a cosmological and ethical order, conceptualizing performance as divinely ordained and socially instructive. Theatre emerges as a pedagogical medium designed to offer moral guidance while providing aesthetic pleasure. At the core of the text lies the theory of *rasa*, the aesthetic essence experienced by the spectator. *Rasa* is not merely emotion but refined affect, produced through the interaction of *bhava* (enacted emotional states), contextual determinants, and expressive manifestations. This aesthetic model places embodied performance at the center of meaning-making. The performer's disciplined execution of *abhinaya*—classified into gestural (*āṅgika*), verbal (*vācika*), costume-related (*āhārya*), and psychophysical (*sāttvika*) modes—creates the conditions for aesthetic transformation in the audience. The spectator's experience becomes an act of contemplative participation, suggesting an early reception theory grounded in affective cognition. The treatise's meticulous attention to stagecraft, spatial organization, musical structures, and codified gestures reveals a sophisticated semiotic system. Yet this codification does not reduce theatre to mechanical reproduction; rather, it articulates a grammar of embodied expressivity through which transcendence becomes possible. The body is simultaneously a technical instrument and a sacred vehicle. For Performance Studies, the Nāṭyaśāstra complicates Western genealogies of theatre that foreground Aristotle as origin. It offers a non-Eurocentric epistemology of performance grounded in embodiment, affect, and ethical pedagogy. By conceptualizing theatre as transformative praxis embedded within cosmic and social orders, the text continues to inform contemporary debates on spectatorship, performativity, and intercultural aesthetics.
- Carlson, Marvin. Performance: A Critical Introduction. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2004. Marvin Carlson's Performance: A Critical Introduction functions as a foundational mapping of Performance Studies as a multidisciplinary field. The book traces the semantic and conceptual expansion of "performance" beyond theatrical production to encompass ritual, everyday behavior,

political spectacle, media events, and cultural practices. Carlson demonstrates how performance operates as both representation and enactment, bridging anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and theatre studies. Drawing upon Erving Goffman's dramaturgical sociology, J. L. Austin's speech act theory, and Victor Turner's ritual analysis, Carlson articulates performance as socially situated action. He foregrounds the reflexive dimension of performance, emphasizing its awareness as framed behavior—a quality echoed in Schechner's notion of "restored behavior." Performance becomes citational and iterative rather than singular or spontaneous. Carlson also addresses debates concerning liveness, theatricality, and cultural memory. He argues that performance is deeply embedded in processes of repetition and recall, linking it to historiography and collective identity formation. The book's strength lies in its synthesis: it does not privilege theatre alone but situates it within broader cultural processes. As an introductory yet theoretically rigorous text, Carlson clarifies terminological ambiguities while charting intellectual lineages within the field. For scholars and students, it provides a conceptual architecture through which performance can be analyzed as social action, cultural production, and epistemological practice.

- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Iris Jain, Routledge, 2008. Erika Fischer-Lichte proposes a phenomenological reorientation of theatre aesthetics grounded in transformation rather than representation. Challenging semiotic models that treat performance as a system of signs to be decoded, she argues that performance constitutes an event generated through the dynamic interaction between performer and spectator. Central to her argument is the "autopoietic feedback loop," a reciprocal process through which performers and audiences co-create the performance's meaning in real time. Performance, in this formulation, is emergent rather than fixed. The aesthetic experience unfolds as a process that destabilizes conventional subject-object distinctions. Spectators do not merely interpret; they undergo perceptual and affective shifts. The event of performance produces liminality, reconfiguring social and personal identities within the space of encounter. Fischer-Lichte draws from avant-garde theatre and performance art to illustrate how embodiment and presence disrupt textual authority. She foregrounds corporeality as the primary site of aesthetic production, emphasizing the ephemeral and irreproducible nature of live events. By privileging embodiment over representation, she advances what may be termed a post-semiotic aesthetics. Her work significantly contributes to Performance Studies by articulating performance as ontological event. The theatre becomes a site of communal becoming, where transformation occurs not symbolically alone but materially, through shared embodied experience.
- Freeman, Rich. *Ritual Performance and the Politics of Identity: Theyyam in Northern Kerala*. PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1991. Freeman's ethnographic study of Theyyam offers a detailed analysis of ritual performance as a site of socio-political negotiation in Northern Kerala. Through extensive fieldwork, he demonstrates how Theyyam operates within a matrix of caste hierarchy, regional memory, and sacred authority. The ritual performer temporarily embodies a deity, generating a charged moment where social boundaries are both suspended and reinscribed. Freeman situates Theyyam within historical and political contexts, showing how ritual performance mediates identity formation. The performance space becomes a contested terrain where subaltern communities articulate claims to legitimacy and recognition. Drawing upon Victor Turner's ritual process model, Freeman nonetheless grounds his analysis in local specificity, emphasizing historical contingencies and modern transformations. Rather than treating ritual as static tradition, Freeman interprets Theyyam as dialogic practice engaged with reform movements, state politics, and shifting cultural landscapes. Performance here is neither mere spectacle nor pure devotion; it is lived social negotiation. The dissertation remains a valuable contribution to Performance Studies and South Asian anthropology, illustrating how embodiment, belief, and power intersect within ritual enactment.
- Gokulsing, K. Moti, and Wimal Dissanayake. *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*. 2nd ed., Trentham Books, 2004. Gokulsing and Dissanayake analyze Indian popular cinema as a cultural performance that reflects and shapes social transformation. Their study situates Bollywood within broader historical trajectories—from colonial modernity to post-liberalization globalization. Cinema emerges as a narrative form through which anxieties about gender, class, religion, and national identity are dramatized. The authors foreground melodrama, song-and-dance spectacle, and star performance as culturally coded elements that articulate collective desires and tensions. Film performance extends beyond acting to encompass choreography, music, and visual spectacle, creating affective communities among audiences. By treating cinema as performative practice, the book expands Performance Studies into the realm of mediated culture. It demonstrates how film participates in mythic and ritual structures while adapting to market forces and transnational flows. The text underscores cinema's role in shaping cultural memory and negotiating tradition and modernity within a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 1993. Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* interrogates the ontology and politics of performance through the lens of disappearance. She argues that performance's defining condition is its ephemerality; it exists only in the present and cannot be fully captured through documentation. This refusal of reproduction becomes politically significant, particularly for marginalized subjects whose visibility is regulated by dominant representational economies. Drawing from feminist theory and psychoanalysis, Phelan critiques the visual economy of representation and the commodification of identity. Performance art becomes a space where invisibility functions as resistance rather than erasure. The politics of presence and absence intersect within structures of power. Her insistence on liveness sparked debate, especially in contrast with arguments that emphasize mediatization. Nonetheless, *Unmarked* remains a central text in articulating performance as a political act that resists commodification and challenges fixed identity categories.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2013. Schechner's text consolidates Performance Studies as a broad interdisciplinary domain encompassing ritual, theatre, play, sports, and everyday life. His

concept of “restored behavior” defines performance as rehearsed and repeatable action, underscoring its citational character. Drawing from anthropology and theatre practice, Schechner situates performance on a continuum rather than as discrete artistic event. He integrates Turner’s notions of liminality and *communitas* while foregrounding rehearsal, training, and embodiment as critical processes. The text functions both as theoretical treatise and pedagogical guide. It institutionalizes Performance Studies while advocating methodological openness and intercultural exchange. Schechner’s expansive framework continues to shape how performance is theorized as process, behavior, and social practice.

- Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. PAJ Publications, 1982. In this text, Turner examines the affinities between ritual and theatre, arguing that modern theatrical forms retain ritual’s transformative structures. Concepts such as liminality and *communitas* explain how performance generates anti-structural spaces where social norms are temporarily suspended. Turner foregrounds play as serious cultural practice that mediates between order and spontaneity. Theatre becomes a reflexive arena in which societies dramatize and interrogate themselves. His work significantly shaped the convergence of anthropology and theatre studies.
- Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine Transaction, 1969. Turner’s seminal work elaborates a theory of ritual grounded in the dialectic between structure and anti-structure. Through analysis of Ndembu rites, he formulates liminality as transitional ambiguity and *communitas* as egalitarian social bonding. Ritual is interpreted as both reaffirmation and critique of social order. Symbols are multivocal and processual, emphasizing enactment over static meaning. The text profoundly influenced Performance Studies by conceptualizing ritual as embodied social drama and transformation.
- Shepherd, Simon. Preface. *The Cambridge introduction to Performance Theory*. Cambridge University Press. 2016. This Preface outlines how everyday interaction is viewed as performance and advises readers to use the section conclusions as a guide.

Suggested Readings

- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008. Barba, Eugenio, and Nicola Savarese. *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006. Bharucha, Rustom. *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. Routledge, 1993. Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990. Conquergood, Dwight. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *The Drama Review*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2002, pp. 145–156. Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, 1959. Kershaw, Baz. *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. Routledge, 1999. Kippen, James. *The Tabla of Lucknow: A Cultural Analysis of a Musical Tradition*. Cambridge UP, 1988. McKenzie, Jon. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. Routledge, 2001. Nair, Shanta Gokhale. *Playwright at the Centre: Marathi Drama from 1843 to the Present*. Seagull Books, 2000. Rao, Nancy Yunhwa. *Performing the Nation: Music and Cultural Politics in South India*. Oxford UP, 2009. Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. Columbia UP, 1996. Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke UP, 2003. Zarrilli, Phillip B. *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play*. Routledge, 2000.

Affidavit

- We, Alphonsa College, Pala and Sonia Sebastian, retain the copyright of this syllabus and expressly prohibit its distribution in complete form to any institution outside our own.
- We, Alphonsa College, Pala, agree to appoint a new course coordinator for the proposed Performance Studies: Theory and Practice in the event of the unavailability of the currently nominated coordinator. This appointment will ensure the continued coordination of course delivery, assessments, and all related academic responsibilities necessary for the successful implementation of the signature course, for as long as the college offers this programme.
- We, Alphonsa College, Pala and Sonia Sebastian, declare that no part of this signature course submitted here for approval has been taken from the course content developed by, or from any of the course titles prepared by, the BoS/expert committee in the same discipline under our University.