

Romancing the Rains

The ongoing NCPA workshop based on poet Kalidasa's verses promises to provoke multiple layers of creative and poetic thoughts about the clouds

By BINDU GOPAL RAO

The monsoons have arrived with a bang in most parts of the country and poems are certainly the flavour of the season. After all, poetry and the rains have a romantic and emotional connection like no other. Making most of this unbeatable combination is the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), which has lined up a virtual workshop that celebrates the clouds. The Mumbai-based cultural powerhouse's 'Monsoon with Meghdoot' puts the spotlight on the legendary Sanskrit poet Kalidasa's verses while honouring the written art form.

The sessions look at the themes of love, longing and anticipation as interspersed with changing rhythms of nature in the monsoon. The workshop seeks to get people to look deeper into a simple idea and to develop multiple layers of creative thoughts. It is designed for those pursuing literature, dance, music, writing or keen to work on theatre production on Kalidasa.

Swapnokalpa Dasgupta, Head of Dance, NCPA, says, "The connection to the monsoon is the story itself where the Yaksha has been banished from the heavens, and he sends the clouds as his messenger to his wife. When the Yaksha looked up, he saw the huge monsoon cloud as if a huge elephant was bending down to drink water, and that is the type of cloud that he spoke about. This itself shows how much thought goes into that one little simple sentence."

The sessions conducted by Dr Rishiraj Pathak, a poet, musician, dance litterateur and Sanskrit scholar, will have guest speakers Piyal Bhattacharya, Subodh Poddar and Sandhya Raman focussing on dance, visual art and



costume design respectively. The verses illustrated in the workshop have been chosen based on the richness of poetic devices, depth of imagery and profundity of the emotive engagement.

The team has chosen 24 *shlokas*, which give an essence of the entire *Meghdoot*. Pathak says, "Being a contemporary Sanskrit poet myself, I have immensely benefited from intensive study of Sanskrit

poetry as it has not only enhanced my poetic abilities but has also inspired me to be able to see animate in the inanimate."

Kalidasa's work is no less than a masterclass for understanding the power of the right words in poetry. "For example, just in the first verse itself, Kalidasa masterfully uses the word 'kanta' to refer to the Yakshini, instead of the word 'bharya', which is also commonly used to refer to the wife. 'Kanta' in Sanskrit refers to the newly-wed beloved wife, while 'bharya' refers to a wife who must be taken



(Clockwise from above) Swapnokalpa Dasgupta; Subodh Poddar; Piyal Bhattacharya; Rishiraj Pathak

care of. Just by choosing the word 'kanta' instead of 'bharya' here, Kalidasa has already offered the relational context between the Yaksh and Yakshini," explains Pathak.

Sahitya or the content of the poem can be stretched to one's imagination and can be interpreted differently. Costume designer Sandhya Raman, who finds the poem romantic, states, "The desire and love the yaksha wants to express can be shown through the colours, texture of fabrics and design of costumes in dance drama productions."

MONSOON WITH MEGHDOOT

Began on July 28; Upcoming ones are on Aug 4, 11, 18, and 25 at 6.30 pm on Zoom; Fee: ₹2,000; Age Group: 18+ years; Details: ncpamumbai.com

