

The Politics of Cultural Practice

Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization

RUSTOM BHARUCHA

THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL PRACTICE

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IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION**

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*To all my friends,
who sustained this book,
and
in memory of Fritz Bennewitz,
an intercultural seeker and one-eyed director,
who saw the world differently*

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The intercultural investigations of this book have been catalysed by numerous interventions in cultural and activist forums in different parts of the world. My first acknowledgement, therefore, would be to my diaspora of friends, whose generosity and hospitality have made the vulnerabilities and risks of border-crossing not merely tolerable, but intellectually exhilarating.

Most of the essays in this book can be regarded as experiments in 'travelling theory'. 'Interculturalism and its Discriminations', for instance, has gone through many incarnations in the following forums: the First Dom Tower lecture organized by Passepartout in Utrecht; the 'Inroads' conference at the Centre for Intercultural Performance in the University of California at Los Angeles; 'Frameworks for Art' at the Mohile Parikh Centre for the Visual Arts in Mumbai; 'Bodies in Question' at the ADSA conference in Hamilton, New Zealand; the Arts Summit II conference on multiculturalism in Jakarta, Indonesia; 'Intersections' organized by the New World Theatre in Amherst, Massachusetts; and the National Congress of Japanese Society for Theatre Research in Tokyo. I am grateful to Emile Schra, Judy Mitoma, Noreen Tomassi, Radhika Subramaniam, Shaila Parikh, Sal Murgiyanto, William Peterson, and Mitsuya Mori for their invitations, and most of all, to Roberta Uno and Jules Holledge for continuing the dialogue on interculturalism with their inspired net-working of marginalized theatre cultures in Asia.

At least three of the essays have been inspired by the specific themes and concepts of different forums. 'Phantoms of the Other' was first presented as a lecture on 'Somebody's Other' at the National Theatre in Britain on the invitation of Rose Fenton and Lucy Neal, the two stalwarts of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). 'When "Eternal India" Meets the YPO' was sparked by the theatrical audacity and play of an itinerant, site-specific conference on tourism and performance organized by the Centre of Performance Research in Aberystwyth, Wales. The first draft of 'Towards a Politics of Sexuality' was provoked by an invitation to participate in a conference on the City of Women in Ljubljana, Slovenia. For reasons that will become apparent in the course of this narrative, I remain grateful to the organizers of this conference and to my friend Aldo Milohnic in particular for making me think about 'interculturalism in the state of malaria'.

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generous invitation. This essay, however, could not have been adequately conceptualized without the political insights that I have received from conferences on secularism, Third World activism, globalization, and *transitions in contemporary India*, organized by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Shimla, the South Asia Solidarity Group in London, the Indian National Social Action Forum in Mumbai, and the Fundacao Oriente in Lisbon, Portugal, respectively. I am particularly grateful to those interlocutors from other disciplines, notably Romila Thapar, Sumit Sarkar, Achin Vanaik, K.N. Panikkar, Jairus Banaji, Rohini Hensman, Kumkum Sangari, Urvashi Butalia, Rajeev Bhargava, Peter D'Souza, Sudhir Chandra, Satish Kolluri, and Javeed Alam, whose scholarly and activist investments in the secular struggle of contemporary India have been deeply inspiring.

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For my theatre practice, I remain indebted to the Ninasam Theatre Institute in the village of Heggodu, Karnataka, which has been the testing ground for most of the intracultural experiments in theatre discussed in this book. I would also like to acknowledge the sponsorship of the Rangayana Theatre in Mysore for my production of *Peer Gynt*, who could never have metamorphosed into *Gundegowda* without the inspired translation of S. Raghunandan. Max Mueller Bhavan (New Delhi), Vivadi, and NORAD are also to be thanked for their administrative and financial support of the other productions discussed in the book. While my focus in these productions is on dramaturgy rather than performance, I would acknowledge the deep insights that I have received from all the actors, particularly from those who have alerted me to the hegemonic role of the director. To my old friend Anuradha Kapur, who intervened at a particularly problematic moment in my representation of a feminist text, I remain grateful not only for the grace of her intervention, but for the dialogue that followed on the politics of gender.

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the Arab Arts Project in Amman, Jordan, for which I must thank Kiki Davies and Hassan El-Geretly for their invitation.

It should be clear by now that the multiple locations of my friends and the world of my writing are deeply interrelated. Indeed, I can only reiterate that as an independent writer I could not have sustained my research in other cultures without the hospitality that I have received from Dan and Mary-Frances Dunham, Richard and Nina Toller, Vijaya Nagarajan and Lee Swenson, Mehlli Gobhai, Joost Smiers, Mae Paner, and Richard Emmert, who have welcomed me in their own homes. As for my extended theatre family, it gives me pleasure to acknowledge the warmth I have received from Christine Nygren, Eugene van Erven, Geoff Gillham, PETA in the Philippines, Sardono and Amna Kusumo in Indonesia, and above all, Ong Keng Sen and his associates at TheatreWorks and, the Flying Circus Project in Singapore, whose intercultural explorations have compelled me to write another narrative that crosses the boundaries of this particular book.

Not everything that one experiences in the world of cultural practice can be accounted for in writing; indeed, not every friendship can be acknowledged in words. The memory of Fritz Bennewitz, who sustained twenty-five years of active intercultural theatre research in India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, has yet to be adequately documented. I do believe, however, that these seeming absences are internalized in an inner map of the world that inspires new imaginaries of cultural exchange. For the moment, as I look back on some of the critical intersections that have contributed to the life of this book, I am tempted to rewrite the closing lines from one of my favourite plays – Brecht's *In the Jungle of Cities*: 'The chaos has been used up. And it was the best time.' The chaos persists – I live in Calcutta, after all – but the writing of this book has been, if not the 'best time', then certainly the most intense and turbulent of times that I would like to share with you now.

Calcutta
October 1999

A Brechtian maxim: don't build on the good old days, but the bad new ones.

Walter Benjamin

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INTRODUCTION

This book is concerned with emergent cultural practices in India and other parts of the world that resist the larger forces of globalization and communalism (or religious sectarianism, as it is more widely understood, in the different manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and ethnic cleansing that affect the world today). While India is the 'lens' through which I see the world, it is also the stimulus that brings together any number of sites that are embedded in an intricate network of social, historical, political, and economic contexts at once localized and mediated by global and national agencies. These sites, as will become clear in the course of this book, are not predetermined cultural realities but constructions that are held together not so much by what is 'given' in any culture, but by what is 'invented' through their negotiations of specific interventions, assaults, inputs, and collaborations.

Within the spectrum of national and global forces that determine the politics of cultural practice examined in this book, the word 'cultural' becomes a highly conflictual term linked to the increasingly contested field of 'culturalism'. Theorized by Arjun Appadurai as 'the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics', culturalism is invariably 'hitched' to certain 'prefixes' (Appadurai 1997: 15). In this study, I will be focusing on *interculturalism*, *intraculturalism*, *multiculturalism*, and secularism. The last term would seem to be the 'odd man out', but it is vital for my reading of cultural theory and practice in this book, as will become evident in the critical genealogy that follows on the keywords in this narrative.

My purpose is not to historicize the 'intercultural', the 'intracultural', the 'multicultural', and the 'secular' in their larger ideational contexts, but, more simply, to note how they have entered my critical vocabulary at particular junctures in time. If I am wary of beginning any study of culturalism with definitions (see Pavis 1996: 1–10), it is not merely because I find them too prescriptive, but because I prefer to engage with working propositions that actually challenge the articulation of practices as they are in the process of being explored. What concerns me, therefore, is not the essential meaning of cultural terms, but how meanings mutate and metabolize in the course of their transportation, translation, and specific uses in other cultures.

In this context, I was alerted as early as 1977 to the problematic of translation in intercultural theatre practice through Peter Brook's production of *The Ik*, based on Colin Turnbull's anthropological study of an African tribe that has been dehumanized through hunger and displacement. In a memorable interview, Kenneth Tynan had called the reader's attention to an appalling lapse in Brook's representation: '[I]n the programme it just said "as far as anyone knows the Ik still exist." As far as anyone knows? I mean, here we were,

invited to feel compassion and horror at their plight, but, nobody in the production had even bothered to find out whether they still existed' (quoted in Bharucha 1978: 59).

The provocation of this statement challenged me as a first-year graduate student at the Yale School of Drama, where 'interculturalism' did not exist either as a subject or as a critical category. At that time I was used to asking questions of productions and performances: 'Does it "work"?', 'Is it "true"?', 'How "real" is it?' Now I found myself asking: Is this *right*? Is it right to do a play about people from another part of the world, with whom you have no real contact, but whose condition provides you with a convenient metaphor for 'inhumanity'? Brook's 'despondent nihilism' has been aptly summarized by Tynan in his pithy description of the maestro's world-view: 'human beings, left to themselves, stripped of social restraints, are animals, and are inherently rotten, and destructive' (Tynan 1977: 23). Indeed, *The Ik* in its chic use of non-verbal babble to suggest the primitivization of African 'natives' will surely go down in intercultural theatre history as a paradigmatic example of primordializing the Other as an anthropological object.

In 1977, my problem was not with Brook as such, but with the troubling questions that were triggered on reading Tynan's interview: Is there an ethics of representation in theatre? What are the alternative modalities of representing the Other with responsibility and engagement? How does one begin to respect – and not just tolerate – cultural differences? Can economic inequalities be included in one's respect for cultural difference? Questions unlimited, but with no answers in sight. There was nothing in the intellectual milieu of Yale, despite its prodigious resources of other cultures in the Sterling Library, that could begin to prepare me for an adequate recognition of the Other. Forget the *Ik* – they did not exist in my entirely white, liberal, and Eurocentric curriculum at the School of Drama – but what about blacks? In 1977, they were not particularly visible on campus either, and they socialized almost entirely among themselves. Between the African American Department and the Drama School, adjacent to each other in the same complex, there was almost no dialogue. The irony deepens when one confronts the demographic reality of New Haven – the alleged ghetto surrounding Yale – where more than half the population continues to be black.

How can one presume to talk about interculturalism, I would argue, if one hasn't begun to encounter the diverse social and ethnic communities inhabiting one's own public space? Rhapsodizing (or agonizing) about the Other 'out there' in some faraway place, without addressing the others in one's own neighbourhood or work place, is a kind of cosmopolitan affectation that one would have imagined to be entirely anachronistic in our times.

In 1977, it is true that 'multiculturalism' was not a buzz-word; the politics of identity relating to gays, lesbians, and other minorities was in an embryonic stage; debates around 'political correctness' and 'hate-speech' had not yet disturbed the complacencies of implicit racism. It is obvious that times have changed. Or is this a self-deception, a politically correct reflex on our part that is not substantiated by any significant alteration in our respect for others? One

could ask: To what extent have times changed? For whom have they changed? In which constituencies? Certainly, there is more talk about 'cultural difference' than ever before, but is it really making a difference to the shaping of a multicultural society? Has the largely academic production of new alterities succeeded in the crossing of borders across class and race, or is it reinforcing new insularities embedded in the rhetoric of cultural difference? Do we cross some borders only to close others?

Increasingly, I have a perverse way of dealing with the seeming vulnerabilities of those privileged groups that attempt to legitimize their absence of interaction with other (generally coloured) minorities. 'We're likely to be misunderstood'; 'It could seem that we're patronizing them'; 'What would I say to them?'; 'I don't want to be rejected': these are some of the responses that one is likely to encounter in a litany of excuses. Instead of false reassurance – 'Don't worry, you'll be welcomed by them' – I offer the possible benefits of being excluded. As I shall be elaborating on my experiments in dismantling the hegemony of direction in intracultural contexts of theatre (where I may not know the language of the actors), there are some unprecedented insights that can be gained from being silent, decentred, marginalized to the corners of a room, excluded from the intimacy of certain bondings. There are lessons in humility to be learned from being 'left out', and perhaps they need to be extended beyond the practice of theatre into the actual vulnerabilities of engaging with the Other not as a tokenistic presence or as a nice foreigner, but as a person with whom one can dialogically redefine the world.

It is obvious that we have shifted ground from my preliminary observations on the 'intercultural' (through Brook's representation of the Ik) to a broader perspective on the 'multicultural' (through my critical retrospective on the actual site of my study of dramaturgy at Yale, within the larger constraints of interactions with 'other' cultures in public life). Such jostlings of the 'inter' and the 'multi' will continue to punctuate the narrative of this book. However, for the sake of clarity, it would be useful not to shift gears yet again, by focusing on what I had described earlier as a 'working proposition' on my use of specific cultural terms, beginning with the 'intercultural'.

To get to the point, therefore, I was introduced to the 'intercultural' through some rather random reflections on a particular kind of Euro-American theatrical practice involving interactions and borrowings across cultures. Indeed, I continue to be struck by how the intercultural continues to be invoked more readily by artists than by political thinkers, or by philosophers, or for that matter by politicians (who have become increasingly more eloquent on the virtues of multiculturalism). While I will be suggesting in the conclusion to my book how the intercultural can enter other fields of critical inquiry outside the realm of performance, I would acknowledge that the word remains, at least within the narrative of this book, immersed within the actual practices not merely of understanding other cultures (more specifically, outside one's national boundaries), but of interacting with them through the specific disciplines and languages of theatre.

At one level therefore, I would uphold the perspective on interculturalism offered by Richard Schechner, who has to be credited for his persistence in initiating and pursuing the term through the 1970s, when the word gained a free-wheeling resonance in *avant-garde* performance circles. Not interested in perpetuating what has been described not inaccurately as my penchant for 'daddy-bashing', I will not reiterate here my considerable polemic (Bharucha 1993: 28–40) on Schechner's neo-liberal celebration of interculturalism in terms of its naive, if not ethnocentric, embrace of the cultures of the world, with insufficient regard for their social, economic, and political contexts. What concerns me instead is Schechner's more recent clarification (Pavis 1996: 42) that he began to use the word 'interculturalism' in the 1970s as 'a contrast to "internationalism"', in order to emphasize the 'the real exchange of importance to artists was not that among nations, which really suggests official exchanges and artificial kinds of boundaries, but the exchange among cultures, something which could be done by individuals or by non-official groupings, and it doesn't obey national boundaries' (ibid.).

While this perspective corresponds broadly to how I respond to the 'intercultural', I will try to give it a more rigorous reading within the framework of voluntarism and the circumscribed autonomies of individuals and non-official cultural groups. I stress 'circumscribed' autonomies because, unlike Schechner's rather cavalier distinction between 'nations' (which are 'official') and 'cultures' (which are assumedly 'free'), I have no such illusion that intercultural interactions can be entirely free from the mediations of the nation-state. In particularly authoritarian states like Singapore, for instance, the state *will* inscribe its presence in the intercultural narrative, even if it is not ready to support its activity (see Bharucha 2000 for a contextualization of this political intervention). In short, there should be no false euphoria about the celebration of autonomy in interculturalism. The autonomy exists, but I believe it has to be negotiated, tested, and protected against any number of censoring, administrative, and funding agencies that circumscribe the ostensibly good faith of cultural exchange itself.

At a more complex political level, I would like to highlight the necessity of not entirely abandoning the 'national' in one's redefinition of the 'cultural'. While I am not a nationalist, I am not entirely prepared to let go of the legitimacy and potentially liberating force of the 'national', particularly in relation to those people's movements against globalization in Third World countries, which could be the only hope for challenging and redemocratizing the state. In short, I would like to acknowledge here my political affinities with Samir Amin's important consideration that in an age of '*uneven*' globalization' (where, contrary to the liberal rhetoric of global 'flows', there is 'no free movement of workers worldwide'), popular nationalist movements in the periphery are necessary 'to save the state from capitulation to the demands of transnationalization. They alone can renationalize the state and allow it to gain control over accumulation' (Cheah 1998a: 34–35).

It seems to me that this perspective is more valid – and certainly, more realistic – than the post-national pitch offered engagingly by Arjun Appadurai

who in his scathing dismissal of the moribund nation-state, is nonetheless blank when it comes to providing a viable alternative. 'I do not know' is his disturbingly candid answer, in response to his own valid questions: '[I]f the nation-state disappears, what mechanism will assure the protection of minorities, the minimal distribution of democratic rights, and the reasonable possibility of the growth of civil society?' (Appadurai 1997: 19). Unfortunately, I *do* know what could replace the nation-state, and it is disingenuous on Appadurai's part not to acknowledge what already exists as a surrogate, if not an accomplice, of the state – the market, as determined by the agencies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which are unaccountably absent in Appadurai's discussion on the cultural dimensions of globalization.

'Economic determinism' has been the charge raised against those Third World scholars and activists who would seem to reduce globalization to the expansion of capitalism through multinational and transnational corporations across national sovereignties and borders. These scholars have no particular interest in exploring Madonna's cultural assimilation in the fashion industry of the Congo, or the hybridity of pop songs across borders. The discourse on globalization in India, it should be admitted, is positively puritanical in its refusal to engage with the salacious gossip that is such an integral element of metropolitan cultural discourse these days. Instead, there is the unequivocality of activist rage against the encroachments of power plants and industries that have decimated entire environments and deprived entire communities of their livelihood. This rage may be uninflected, but is it unjustified? It would seem to me that the silencing of economic realities in cultural discourse can only obfuscate our search for what Gayatri Spivak has so accurately highlighted as 'ecological sanity', where we must 'learn to learn' the 'knowledge' that is being ruthlessly substituted by the 'telematic postmodern terrain of information command' (Spivak 1998: 343).

Therefore, in addition to the erasure of the 'national' in intercultural discourse, it becomes necessary to be extremely vigilant about how the 'global' is in a position to hijack the assumedly democratic interactions within the 'autonomous' agendas of interculturalism. Needless to say, the 'national' and the 'global' are insufficiently inscribed in Schechner's largely non-theoretical writings on interculturalism. While the 'national' tends to be erased through what I will describe in the next chapter as an 'eternalist fallacy', by which interculturalism is imagined to precede the birth of nations, the 'global' is subsumed within an uncritical acceptance of the modes, mechanisms, and agencies that constitute First World affluence.

Indeed, this totally unproblematic (non-)reading of capital is equally evident in the growing number of writers on performance and queer theory ostensibly on 'the Left', who for all their transgressions continue to live in a cocoon of performativity that is curiously indifferent to those very agencies of capitalism that have rendered so many of their colleagues unemployed and denied their right to livelihood. Indeed, the right to *life* has been called into

question by some of the harsher manifestations of global capital in the propagation of the gene, pesticide and pharmaceutical industries. While these seemingly large and remote manipulations of the world's natural resources would seem to be very distant from the immediacies of cultural practice, they are, in actuality, transforming the cultural discourse around rights, ownership, and belonging. Therefore, a critique (or at least, a cognizance) of global capital would seem to be mandatory for the democratization of intercultural practice and discourse.

Allow me to jump-cut the narrative at this point and address the 'intracultural', which first entered my critical vocabulary around 1987, by which time I had returned to India after an approximately ten-year stay in the United States. Why did I return? It's a long story. Suffice it to say that it was a choice, I'm grateful that it existed, I have never regretted acting on it, and, perhaps, I wouldn't be writing this book if I had not reflected on its implications. A more caustic interpretation has been provided by an NRI (Non-Resident Indian) friend who, while thoroughly disapproving of my foolishness in giving up the Green Card, was none the less compelled to acknowledge that my return could be understood in relation to 'the Law of Diminishing Returns'. I shall leave you to ponder this enigma of economics.

At a biographical level, it is very obvious (but only in critical hindsight) that my *interculturalism* was precipitated on leaving India for the first time, and that my *intraculturalism* was catalysed on my return. In *Theatre and the World* (1990/1993), I have described at length how an intercultural theatre project around Franz Xaver Kroetz's one-woman, wordless monodrama *Request Concert* was my pretext, at a certain level, for returning to India. I will not repeat that story here, except to indicate that this project catalysed my articulation of the 'intracultural' – a term that I was compelled to invent for myself as a critical shorthand to differentiate intercultural relations *across* national boundaries, and the intracultural dynamics between and across specific communities and regions *within* the boundaries of the nation-state. Once again, this is not a definition, but a working proposition that I will elaborate on in my dramaturgical investigations of intracultural theatre in Chapters 3–5.

At this theoretical juncture in the narrative, it would be useful to inscribe the *politics of relocation* within the inevitable narrative of homecoming that I had written into my journey in *Theatre and the World*. 'Relocation' to one's own home challenges the dominant narratives of migrancy that have been valorized in recent postmodern cultural theory. It is assumed in such narratives that the formerly colonized peoples will seek other futures in former colonies where they will be in a position to challenge the civilizational premises of their erstwhile rulers. But that such migrants should even aspire to returning to their homelands would seem to be a regressive, if not unproductively nostalgic manoeuvre. Thus, as Pheng Cheah has put it bluntly in his larger contextualization of Homi Bhabha's affirmation of hybridity as cultural agency:

Bhabha is not interested in those who cannot migrate and for whom coerced economic migration would be a plus . . . Indeed, he cannot even be said to be very interested in those who leave the South temporarily, in order to return, or in the repatriation of funds by migrant workers to feed their kin in the Third World. In Bhabha's world, postcoloniality is the hybridity of metropolitan migrancy. Everything happens as if there are no postcolonials left in decolonized space. (Cheah 1998b: 301)

This is, indeed, an accurate description of the implicit closures in hybridity theory, which seems to have reached an impasse in the refusal on the part of theorists like Bhabha to deconstruct their privileging of migrancy in First World, academic, metropolitan locations. Likewise, in fictional celebrations of hybridity, notably in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, which has been described by the author as a 'love song to our mongrel selves', the 'migrant condition' of metropolitan London becomes 'a metaphor for all humanity' (Rushdie 1990). Not only does this essentialization (and universalization) of 'the migrant condition' deny the different historicities of migrancy for which there may be – at times, for some people – nothing to celebrate, it also fails to account for those individuals and communities that resist migrancy on the basis of other loyalties and bonds to family, tradition, community, language, and religion that are not always translatable within the norms of liberal individualism. To endorse Rushdie's presumptuous claim, therefore, that 'the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision' (Bhabha 1994: 5) is to play into what I would describe as the residual narrative of migrancy that may need to be dislodged by a sharper and more reflexive assessment of the continued inscriptions of 'home' in the mutabilities of the world.

For a start, it may be necessary to dispute the assumptions that invariably underlie the absorption of transnational migrant communities in what Arjun Appadurai has described as 'diasporic public spheres'. We need to question the virtuosity of such constructions through the unsubstantiated evidence of other such claims in populist postmodern theory that 'everybody's on the move these days', or more extravagantly, that 'we are all tourists'. Once again, I turn to Pheng Cheah for some much-needed crude thinking on the relatively uninvestigated perceptual processes of identity in migrant contexts from the perspective of migrants themselves.

Countering the blind faith in global cosmopolitanism, Cheah rightly suggests that '[i]t is unclear how many . . . migrants feel that they belong to a world. Nor has it been ascertained whether this purported feeling of belonging to a world is analytically distinguishable from long-distance, absentee national feeling' (Cheah 1998a: 37). He goes on to state the obvious, which is sometimes totally undermined in the theoretical climate of our times, where the dematerialisation of reality is almost mandatory for the positing of a new politics: '[T]he argument that transnational print and media networks extend a world community beyond transnational migrancy to include peoples dwelling in the South has to reckon with the banal fact that many in the South are illiterate [this would include half

the adult population of India]' (ibid.). What Cheah refers to as the 'banal fact' of not having access to global communicative mechanisms – and I will be dealing with the lacunae in Benedict Anderson's assumptions relating to 'print capitalism' later in the book – has to be acknowledged as the stark reality for millions of people, who continue to live outside of modernity not necessarily by choice but because of the poverty that continues to be thrust on them by the agencies (and collusions) of the state and the market.

Against this background, the politics of my relocation in India cannot be read outside of the framework of privilege. I have no desire either to camouflage or to disown this privilege; rather I would like to test it within certain trajectories that do not readily fall into the narrative suggested by 'The Return of the Native'. This is not my narrative, I should emphasize, even though this is how my relocation can be read, and, indeed, does get read, as in Patrice Pavis's unaccountable caricature of my return: 'Bharucha ultimately only wants one thing: to return home, to go back to India, to work in small isolated villages with pupils from a rural background, and to confront his own traditional cultures with "the tensions and immediate realities of their history"' (Pavis 1996: 196). To set the record straight, I have never subscribed to a one-point agenda, and my desire to return to India was not motivated (as Pavis seems to imply) by any altruistic need on my part to work with rural actors in 'small isolated villages'.

Heggodu, the village in the Malnad district of Karnataka, has, indeed, been the site of many of my most potent theatrical experiments, some of which I describe in this book. But it would be disingenuous to de-link Heggodu from the Ninasam Theatre Institute, which is consciously committed for all its communitarian ideology to a *modern* Indian theatre practice. At Ninasam, I have found a space in which I have worked long hours with the students on issues and problems that I do believe have extended my research beginning with *The Request Concert Project*. If in its site I have found ground realities that challenge my metropolitan, cosmopolitan, and secular assumptions, I should also add that I in turn have challenged the brahminic and patriarchal structuring of the institution through its tacit evasion of realities dealing with gender and caste. While I no longer work at Ninasam on a regular basis, my dialogue continues with its participants not just, I might add, on 'rural' matters, but on theoretical issues relating to the 'cosmopolitan vernacular', the ongoing debates between secularists and communitarians in India, and the politics of funding. This dialogue, I should add, could be one of the strongest contributing factors to my definition and practice of intraculturality in India today.

At a conceptual level of cultural practice, the 'intra' denotes the possible relationships between different cultures at *regional* levels – for example, between the states of West Bengal and Kerala, Manipur and Maharashtra. Tellingly, in the absence of viable infrastructures for such exchanges on an ongoing basis – a problem that I will elaborate later in the book – the 'intra' in my theatre work refers more pertinently to the differences that exist within the boundaries of a particular region in what is assumed to be a homogenized culture ('Kannada