New Postcolonial Dialectics

New Postcolonial Dialectics:

An Intercultural Comparison of Indian and Nigerian English Plays

By

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To my brother
Subhas Sen
Without whom this book would never have seen the light of day

To my daughter
Puja Vengadasalam
Who lights up my days

To my husband
Pannirselvam Vengadasalam
Who is my support and anchor

And to my parents
Jagadindra Nath Sen and Chandana Sen
Who taught me that working hard is the way to being
good and great.

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PREFACE

I transpose an intercultural framework on to the scholarly investigation of the angst and ennui in the Indian and the Nigerian culturescape before and after the struggle for independence. Since theatre is a crucible for change, I comparatively study the colonial and pre-civil–war plays of Wole Soyinka with the dramas of Rabindranath Tagore from pre-Independence India and Badal Sircar from independent India for the way they mirror the interplay of cultures. As the objective of my intercultural exploration is to review the way the plays reflect the different phases of the cultural encounter that the colonial experience unleashed on India and Nigeria, I particularly examine how they manifest the revolutionary philosophies of the playwrights, who had made it their mission to express as well as awaken Indian and Nigerian national consciousness.

I begin the project with an introduction and a review of critical theories and scholarship on Indian and Nigerian drama. The appraisal reveals the urgent need for an intercultural dialectic. I end Chapter One with a description of the new intercultural scaffolding and the creation of boundaries for an emergent study and validation. In Chapters Two and Three, I consider Rabindranath Tagore's *Red Oleanders* (1925) and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (first performed in 1959) individually through an intercultural framework. As both Nobel Laureate playwrights chose to bear the mantle of cultural leadership, the two chapters investigate if their plays did, therefore, become typical dramatic responses to the colonial situation and the cultural needs of India and Nigeria as the countries waged a political and cultural struggle against the coloniser and its culture. In Chapters Four and Five, I strategically critique Badal Sircar's *Procession* (1983) and Wole Soyinka's *The Road* (1965) individually through an intercultural lens. The scrutiny assesses how far the interweaving of intercultural theatrical tools aided the dramatists in their portrayal of the changed milieu of the nascent Indian and Nigerian nations as they contended with the heartbreak of internal strife after the euphoria of achieving independence.

In Chapter Six, I present the inferences from the intercultural examination. In the first part of Chapter Six, Part One, I showcase the results from the cross-cultural inspection of *Red Oleanders* against *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Procession* alongside *The Road*. I go over the

similarities and the differences in the way the two colonial dramas celebrated the native who embraced alien influences, as well as study how the plays marked their writers' rejection of the simplistic dichotomies of the Swadeshi and Negritude movements for an intercultural perspective in their message and their stagecraft. I also highlight the similarities and differences in the outcomes of the intercultural assessment of the post-Independence plays of Wole Soyinka and Badal Sircar, where the authors chose to present the cultural landscape of Nigeria and India as the nations both threw away and yet internalised the cultural baggage that the coloniser had left behind. The reasons and the manner in which the native and the alien coalesced in the plays, as in the milieu from which they sprang, are spotlighted. In the second part of Chapter Six, Part One, I proceed to present the results of the comparative examination of the Indian and Nigerian plays among themselves as social documents and works of art. I also underline why Tagore's symbolic theatre gave way to Sircar's defiant third theatre, while Soyinka's dramaturgy moved from intermingling European and Yoruban elements towards a more ritualised, mythopoeic theatre. I follow this up with an evaluation of the rationale and the success of the intercultural dialectic in cross-examining the Indian plays and the Nigerian plays separately and against each other. In Part Two of Chapter Six, I review whether the preceding inquiry validates the intercultural scaffolding and determine if it brought out the ground-breaking facets of the plays that a customary postcolonial study may not have revealed.

If the research shows the likenesses of literary responses of cultures going through similar experiences even as it emphasises the uniqueness of each culture and experience, it would affirm that the scaffolding it utilised could be transposed to single and comparative studies of intercultural literatures worldwide. If the project successfully throws light on how cultures and dramatic traditions can be intermarried to both portray and ameliorate intercultural societies, it can be concluded that the new intercultural dialectic can be applied to studies of intercultural encounters in literature in general, and comparative East–West, pre-colonial, colonial, or postcolonial literary studies in particular.

My book is an updated version of my doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Pune, India under the guidance of Professor Prashant Sinha.

CHAPTER ONE

COLONIAL ENCOUNTER AND THE INTERCULTURAL DIALECTIC

1.1 Introduction and Literature Review

The Oxford English Dictionary defines culture as "A particular form, stage, or type of intellectual development or civilisation in a society or a group characterised by distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlooks, et cetera."[1] The definition signposts that culture is intimately linked with a regional social group and is, therefore, a phenomenon that is both individual and collective, abstract and real, a process and a state. It affirms that culture manifests itself in certain behavioural patterns and modes of social intercourse as well as in set mental attitudes and relaxation methods. As it presents culture as an experience and a product of a society, the definition spotlights the link of culture with history. Though it accepts that cultures are in a state of flux, the definition does not throw any light on how cultures are formed. Instead, the definition encourages gradation of cultures by stating that cultures are in "stages" or "types" of "development." The definition does not celebrate difference as arising because they are the expressions of various groups of people; it perceives differences as happening because cultures are in different stages of growth. It is for this reason that this definition is not satisfactory.

Culture is humanity's fabricated environment in which social structures, individual relations, art, and religion take form. Within a particular geographical region, culture becomes the generation of a system of values and active meaning on a people. Culture is a specific way of life and manifests itself in a nation's institutions and the day-to-day behaviour of its people. Though a people's cultural manifestation includes their songs, dances, and oral and written literatures, culture is more than art. While art is part of a culture, the latter also includes rituals, ceremonies,

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[1] William R. Trumble and Angus Stevenson, eds., *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Fifth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 575.

social customs, and more in its scope. It is the ethos of a nation, the character of a country, and the spirit of a people.

Fanon defined a nation's culture as the "expression of a nation—its preferences, taboos, and patterns…a sum total of its appraisal." Calling it the condition that results after "continuous renewal, he saw it as a fusion of various independent elements that originate from within and without."[2] Hence, a national culture, though it may seem contradictory, is international, and bears the mark of many cultures upon it. When the circumstances of the cultural coming together are neutral, cultures can choose what they will take from each other. As that is rarely the case, a tumble of change occurs when one culture approaches, interacts, or pushes itself on another. In the process, a culture lends its own elements and takes elements from other cultures. As the boundary between culture and politics disappears, cultures become part of the political power game. Power equations and internal compulsions ensure that osmosis does not take place between cultures, but encounters do.

Culture is immanent and historical; it determines the identity and character of a people. Cultural encounters, however, create upheavals and generate modifications that keep happening over time; these changes to identity and character are neither always visible nor always peaceful. As the dictatorial forces of colonialism unleash one culture onto another based on the premise that the former is supposedly superior because it is the coloniser's culture, it leaves a scar on the colonised culture that is irrevocable. Since colonialism is always socially unequal, politically loaded, and economically directed, a recovery of the state of innocence or a return to the pre-colonial cultural state becomes impossible for the culture or cultures of the colonised. However, this does not mean that the indigenous culture gets exterminated. The inherent, internal powers of the civilisations of India and Nigeria made their survival possible, their varying resilience accounting for the differences in the impact of the imperial culture on them, in the fight back they put up, and in the degree and nature of their unavoidable interculturalisation.

Both India and Nigeria underwent a long nightmare of colonialism and all that it signified. Colonialism is never just geopolitical occupation; it is a complex phenomenon with socio-cultural and eco-financial ramifications. It is the thrusting of an alternate way of life on a subjugated people—directly and surreptitiously. From the commercial angle, colonialism is the setting up of a "political economy, which ensures a one-way flow of benefits, the subjects being the perpetual losers in a

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[2] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963) 196.

zero-sum game and the rulers, the beneficiaries."[3] It is the cancellation of laissez-faire capitalism for the colonised nations by the colonisers, who champion it for themselves. The colonising country turns the colony into an unrestricted source of raw materials as well as a forced market for her goods with the intent of reaping unconstrained profits. It is not by chance that the formation of the East India Company in 1600 led to the formal rule by the British monarch from 1858 to 1947 in India. Similarly, the Royal Niger Company's rule from 1886 preceded direct crown rule from 1900 to 1960 in Nigeria. The methods of operation in both countries were similar; the coloniser first broke the colonised nation's economic self-dependence and destroyed her industries, before making these into excuses for further similar inflictions. The coloniser's objective was clear—the colonies were to become dependencies and satellites. Though the economic consequences of colonialism were nearly immitigable themselves, far more significant were the intellectual repercussions of the imperial ravaging of indigenous cultural institutions and historical models.

Fanon describes colonialism as the disruption

> in spectacular fashion of the cultural life of a conquered people. The cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of native reality, by new legal rules by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs…The area of culture [is] marked by fences and signposts; every hegemonic effort is made to bring colonised persons to admit the inferiority of their culture.[4]

The coloniser uses its superior position as the master to inflict cultural trauma and create a "cultural cringe" in its subjects, so it can control the culture and the thought processes of the colonised. Not only does this leave an enormous scar on the minds of the colonised, but it also facilitates the financial plunder and economic pillage of the colonies. As Ashis Nandy expresses it, "a colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonised through socio-economic rewards and punishments to accept new social norms and cognitive categories, [hence] they become overt indications of oppression and dominance."[5] In other words, the coloniser does not just use force to perpetuate itself, it uses culture. Colonialism not only distorts relationship and destroys institutions, it also makes it difficult

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[3] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 30.
[4] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963) 190.
[5] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 24.

for the colonised to rise above its colonised status. The coloniser alters the cultural priorities of the colonised completely, turning the "modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds."[6]

The coloniser propounds a structure of lies and myths to spiritually kill the colonised by destroying their pride in their own culture, past, and history. To break the back of the African's self-esteem and to justify himself, the coloniser erects fables of an old Europe against a supposedly young Africa. Europe is mythologised as eternally giving, reasonable, and logical, while Africans are portrayed as primitive, lascivious, and irresponsible. This is brought in as a prelude to the theory of the white man's burden of civilising the colonies. Colonialism fans feelings of superiority in the coloniser, so he can project his insecurities upon the ruled. The coloniser now begins to believe that he is divinely ordained to play the role of pioneer, protector, and promoter. To allow the falsehood to take root, the colonial master keeps himself aloof, faceless, and most importantly, white. He becomes warped psychologically by the myths he propounds to establish and maintain the empire. However, the effect of these myths on the colonised psyche is far worse.

Even though the British unleashed similar myths on colonised India as well as Anglophone Africa, the effects on each were different. Nigeria, with its strong emphasis on the folk, oral, and the rural traditions was easier to condemn as supposedly uncivilised. With India, the imperialists found it a little difficult, as they could not deny that it had a well-chronicled civilisation, even if different from theirs. Also, Britain could not wish away the existence of recorded books and epics or the plethora of monuments, sculpture, and art in India, many of which were older than her own. Hence she emphasised India's present depravity and disintegration as evidence of her presumed cultural superiority and supposed Indian inferiority. The aim was to turn Indians and Nigerians into weak or decadent figures by the internalisation of these false myths, so Britain would find it easy to dominate the colonies.

Such falsehoods kept the coloniser and the colonised apart. The fictions also found their way into the two schools of thought that came into being in British India: the Orientalist and the Anglicist. While the Orientalists pushed for the conducting of Indian affairs in Indian languages, the Anglicists advocated the use of English. The two schools were not fundamentally different, since both had the welfare of England and the longevity of the British Empire in mind. As in Nigeria, there was

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[6] Ibid. xi.

no disagreement on the supposed need for Britain to govern, the dispute centred around the manner and form of governance. The two schools were merely points on the continuum of the same colonial attitude.

The introduction of the English language and the English educational system aimed to serve many purposes in India and Nigeria. It was a deft political stroke, taken as per the needs and priorities of the empire. If the school favouring English education won the debate in India, it was because the coloniser thought it would better facilitate the smooth running of the day-to-day business of the empire. Further, it could pre-empt the rebellion of the colonised by seeming to be a caring step. Its proponents believed that this move would potentially bridge the gap between appearance and reality in political practice, as well as convince the colonised of the supposed superiority of the coloniser's culture.

Through the use of English, the British educational system introduced the hegemonic control of British structures on the minds of the colonised. The fact that the spread of English education and the growth of the empire went hand in hand was evidence of the success of this strategy. As anticipated, the cultural consequences of English or British education were both far-reaching and detrimental. It helped the colonisers impose their culture and conditioning, harmonising with the ecopolitical domination they had achieved. As the authorities had envisaged, the imposition created deep feelings of alienation and marginalisation within the colonised society. It not only implanted an aggressive West inside colonised minds, but it also took away confidence and originality from the colonised, leaving diffidence and imitation in their stead. The cultural invasion of the mind through British education did prevent cultural resistance from developing for a substantial period of time. Even if English itself did not become the first language, it established itself as a second language. In truth, English became the language of the cultural encounter.

The English language was a deracinating, deculturing tool in Africa as well. Like English education, the English language created a sense of peripherality in the minds of the colonised about their perception of themselves in the world. The two together caused dislocation to occur both within and without. While English education successfully shattered traditional communication patterns, it could not offer itself as a substitute. Also, it created an English-educated elite class that fulfilled an important requirement for the British imperialists by becoming the class that acted as middlemen, if not stooges, for the empire. Jean-Paul Sartre described the process of creation of the "elite" class thus:

> They picked out promising adolescents, they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases…. After a short stay in the mother country, they were sent home whitewashed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers, they only echoed.[7]

In his 1835 minutes, Lord Macaulay had said the same about his goals for India, declaring that the British would create an English educated class in India through English education, who were "Indians in blood and colour, and English in tastes and opinions," and who would be prepared to do battle on behalf of Anglicism against the norms and forms of Eastern life.[8]

English education ensured that the colonised were permanently scarred. The transformation of the ideas of history, time, and development that colonialism created was "caused by the conflict, not of the colonist self and colonist other, but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness."[9] The coloniser's real victories were secured not so much through military and technological superiority as through the creation of hierarchies in the colonised that encouraged them to displace the traditional order, as it did not seem to be able to coexist with the new.

The colonisers were not satisfied with the physical plundering and control of the colonised nations. As Fanon so rightly points out, the coloniser's aim was to

> empty the native brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it takes the pastness of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance—cultural estrangement, [so as] to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness.… If the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.[10]

The introduction of English education created anxieties in the colonised where there were none before. As Gauri Viswanathan tellingly put it,

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[7] Jean Paul Sartre, "Foreword," Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963) 7.
[8] Bureau of Education, *Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781–1839)* edited by H. Sharp (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1920) 107–117.
[9] Homi K. Bhabha, "Foreword," Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Ann Marksman (London: Pluto Press, 1986) vi.
[10] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963) 169.

English education ensured that the colonised willingly stayed in the position of takers or children. Thus, the English literary text became a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state, as well as a mask that successfully camouflaged the economic exploitation of the colonised. The tool was especially potent because it was masked.[11]

English studies were not just a strategy of social information and control, but also a way to propagate British literary and artistic canons. As the colonised users of the English language soon discovered, English education turned them into exiles in their own countries. The grafting of Western theories onto indigenous minds involved not just the coercing of black skins to don white masks, as Fanon metaphorically expressed it, but was also the forcing of what Bhabha termed as mimic personalities or split personalities and dualities onto ordinary Indians and Nigerians. Since the British rejected these hybrid men as ruthlessly as they did the native, the flawed colonial mimesis was pivoted on one unshakeable premise: being Anglicised is not akin to being British.[12]

British or English education produced "colonial cringe" in the colonised. They became so ashamed of their past and their traditions that they began to covet English culture and emulate its conventions. This mindset enabled British culture to percolate to the very deepest levels of indigenous consciousness. Before the intellectual process that it prompted could take on an intercultural form, the consciousness of the colonised had to go through an extended traumatic process that progressed from mimicry to rejection to realisation.

English education unveiled British intentions and disillusioned the minds of the colonised on another level as well. The colonised became aware of British double standards—what they read about and what they were going through were two different things. Having glimpsed a new world, they hated that they could not have it. Acutely aware that the British denied them what they celebrated in their own literature, the colonised became intensely aware of the inferiority of their position and the hypocrisy behind it all. It did not take them long to realise that however good and original their literary output, they would always be considered to be offshoots. Since the metropolitan use of the language was the norm, indigenous usage of English would always be a variant.

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[11] Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary studies and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 16.
[12] Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism,* eds. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005): 85–92, 88.

As Mannoni pointed out in *Prospero and Caliban*, Prospero did not just create a dependency and inferiority complex in Caliban, he broke Caliban's very will to be free. The colonised Caliban and Ariel found themselves trapped as much by Prospero's language of magic as by the sense of their own inferiority. The good news was that they could not be prevented forever from realising that Sycorax's culture, even if different from Prospero's, was a culture and their own. If Prospero's lessons could not be unlearned, neither could Sycorax's be denied. So, if colonialism was the tale of Prospero's oppression as an archetypal authoritarian, disguised as a benefactor, who enmeshed a people in the coils of his system, the tale of the anti-colonial struggle was the story of the freeing of Ariel, the colonised artist/elite, and Caliban, the colonised common man. Caliban turned Prospero's tool against Prospero himself by transforming Prospero's language and investing it with meanings and intentions that Prospero never intended or imagined.[13] To coax and coerce Prospero to give them their freedom, however, Ariel, the gradualist, and Caliban, the extremist, had to come together.

Though it took time, anti-colonial movements developed in both the Indian sub-continent and in Africa. The missions of the movements were to wrest effective, native, authoritative voices from the surrounding echoes. The nationalists had to fight the exile of the mind that the British system had inflicted upon them, as well as expose the gap between professions of and the actual cultural practices of colonialism. Since indigenous tradition was, in spite of the coloniser's best attempts, still very much alive, the project of nationalism was to arouse subjects from a passive acceptance of the ruler's culture to an aggressive assertion of their own. The nationalists had to forge the instruments of colonial resistance from the ideological space located in the contradictions of colonialism.

The meek could inherit the earth, but could not do so by meekness alone. Nationalism had to turn British education "from an unmediated propagation of British cultural power to a tool of native assertion."[14] Since colonial resistance emerges from the culture of the colonised, the prospects and the mental make-up of people in a society define the boundaries of its movements of resistance. Even though constrained by the psychological limits set by the colonising culture when it began, the movements of resistance outgrew them. Eventually, they turned the West into a vector that interacted with indigenous tradition. As

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[13] Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1956).
[14] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) 7.

the resistance that began as a reaction to Anglicisation grew to value indigenous culture for its own sake, it became the return of the "I" of the colonised in the scheme of things.

As colonialism operated by eradicating pride and belief in indigenous history and the past, the anti-colonial movement took upon itself the onus of creating a resurgence and revitalisation of traditional institutions. Glorification of the past was an essential part of the empowering process of the colonised to come to terms with the present. Nationalism thus became the discovery

> beyond the misery of today and beyond self-contempt, resignation, abjuration, [of] some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitate[d] us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others … [and it was] with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past…. The claim of a national culture in the past rehabilitate[d] that nation and serve[d] as the justification of the hope of a future national culture.[15]

Valorising the past played a vital part in the process of colonial resistance and nationalist struggle. Not surprisingly, the Negritude movement in Nigeria and the Swadeshi movement in India uncritically affirmed indigenous culture in direct proportion to the coloniser's glorification of British culture. The turn inwards and backwards was a historical necessity and integral to the decolonisation process. The colonial mind, under the impetus of the anti-British nationalist movement, swerved from a blind imitation of Anglican culture to a radical condemnation of it, finding satisfaction and a sense of retribution in the scandal that it gave rise to. Having been hurt so long, the colonised felt great pride and some pleasure in rejecting and hurting the coloniser. As a rejoinder to the coloniser's refusal to accept the colonised and his culture as his equal, the colonised now rejected the master and his civilisation outright. Often the indigenous elite, who came to spearhead the movement, nursed the memory of racist rejections and imperial insults. As the colonised nations would eventually come to realise, the fetishisation and championing of mummified fragments of native culture was neither a solution nor a real service to their indigenous civilisations.

The assumptions of the Swadeshi and Negritude movements were both simplistic and extremist, but they did succeed in creating an upbeat mood in the people. The greatest irony was that since the movements were reacting to British myths, they could not evade being influenced by them.

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[15] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963) 169.

As the coloniser had alienated the colonised on the grounds of their colour and race, those very same attributes were now raised and exalted into autonomous values. Even though the Anglican values they sought to replace conditioned the movements, they gave the colonised a sense of identity and belonging.

Liberation movements are always complex because they reach out to the future by tapping the country's potential cultural energy, reactivating historic memories while, at the same time, working to overthrow the coloniser. The movements deglamourised and demystified foreign culture on the one hand, while paradoxically demanding foreign goods, science, and industry—or making their lack a reason for rebellion— on the other. The liberationists even used their British education, previously viewed as a means of enforcing Anglicisation, as a tool for resistance.

Indian nationalists popularised past legends, historical sagas, and old triumphs as strategies of revival. They created a cult of India as a Mother Goddess, who demanded selfless and total devotion. The Swadeshi movement of 1905, when this cultification process was in full swing, spread like wildfire through the Indian state of Bengal, the hotbed of the Indian nationalist movement. The movement also had an economic facet since Swadeshi agitators burnt and rejected all things British. Though sparked by and protesting the division of Bengal along communal lines into a Hindu and a Muslim Bengal—a move that physically embodied the British divide and rule policy—the movement took the first steps towards the revitalisation of domestic industries and products. The movement died out in 1908; India had to go through another forty years of British rule before Swadeshi (meaning [swa-] of one's own, [desh-] country) turned into Swaraj (meaning [Sw-] self [raj-] rule). Though it was not possible to erase all things British, economically or culturally, as the Swadeshi movement advocated, it roused the national consciousness against the economic plunder of colonialism while hinting at the way to defeat it. Culturally, the political movement led to religious rebirth and revival. However, Swadeshi only confirmed the coloniser's notions of the colonies as the other. The image of India amongst Indians as the eternal, spiritual, and ancient member of the East, complementing the supposedly younger materialistic West, became firmly entrenched in Indian minds. However, the crisis facing India at that time could not be resolved through a cult, even if it was a nationalistic one.

The challenge for India, caught as it was in the tension between self-definition and self-consciousness, was to evolve a model of autonomy beyond victimhood and a theory of nationhood that combined continuity and presence. India's capacity to resolve ambiguities was put to the test as

it struggled to co-opt British culture and grow a mature, self-critical, consciousness out of its colonial experience. The challenge before Indian intellectuals was to help India capture the difference of the West within its cultural domain; however, the moment had not yet arrived.

African nationalism, too, celebrated the coming to consciousness of a new African persona after a period of blind imitation of Western culture. Born out of the need to rehabilitate African ancestral and cultural values and avoid the dangers of a decultured Africa, the Negritude movement was a pan-African defence that Africans erected against European assimilation policies while simultaneously attempting to correct the brutal twist of black history. The Negritudinists based their movement on the premise that "if the coloniser bases his right of conquest on a civilising mission, then he must be fought on his own ground and shown that the Negro is in no way his intellectual inferior."[16] The African Negritudinists, therefore, asserted that their lack of technological prowess did not signify their inferiority, but their difference. They tried to prove that their religion was monotheistic, their pre-history democratic, their folklore ancient, and their society richly communal, and they declared that their pre-dominant characteristic was emotion, in contrast to Western rationality. The aim was to show that they were equal to, if not better than the West. The irony was that their every pronouncement was a retaliation against Western propaganda and prejudices, and hence limited by them.

This was not what Africa needed. As Henry Louis Gates put it:

> What we need to establish for Africa is not [an] aesthetic[s of] thoughts and feelings, [but the use of] all objective means possible [to] reconstruct the very paradigmatic base of such thoughts and feelings. To reconstruct effectively, one needs to deconstruct—especially old myths and metaphysics about, as well as in, Africa.[17]

However, the nationalist movement, instead of deconstructing myths, created new ones. When the need was to accept one's past and roots without rejecting the West; the Negritudinists, like the Swadeshis in India, tried to escape into the past on the one hand, and mould themselves as an obverse to the West on the other. Even if the nationalists' attempt to substitute the present with the past and allow racist invectives to cast their long shadows on their worldview were unwelcome developments, the

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[16] Claude Wauthier, *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa: A Survey* (London: Heinemann, 1978) 75.
[17] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Negritude, Structuralism and Deconstruction," *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 122.

nationalist project did have salutary consequences. It created a strong sense of identity and a resurgence of national pride that helped offset the negative impact of colonial humiliation. Most importantly, the nationalist movement galvanised the minds of the colonised and re-energised their intellects. It forced the intelligentsia to take a stand and contribute to the national recovery. It became the artist/writer's responsibility to go beyond the opposites of nationalism and create a manageable concept of the West for their countrymen.

        The writer, as a premier man-of-culture, always determines the graph of his or her nation's thoughts, reactions, and responses. As a spokesperson and sensitive representative of the community, the writer records the anxiety and torment as well as the anger of the people about the colonial experience. Even if s/he elects to record it in a foreign language, s/he invests the language with native meaning and uses it for national purposes. In helping the community evolve the capacity to cope with the oppressive anxieties of entrapment, s/he uses the relevant West as a subculture that is meaningful and important in itself, though not all-important. S/he accepts the coloniser's influence as a necessary evil that has come to stay and that could be used, if need be, after reconstructing it according to national requirements. Even while evolving a national voice, the writer attempts to proceed beyond the limitations of nationalism into the broader spectrum of an eclectic internationalism, as only that can drive the process of decolonisation. In the colonial era, in particular, the writer opts to make it his or her intellectual task to invent a counter-discourse that is multicultural and contains inbuilt textual strategies that expose and reduce the dominant discourse to a subordinate one in the philosophical arch of an authentic interculturalism. As s/he sets out to both portray and ameliorate the national situation, an intercultural writer does justice to his or her intellectual task when s/he incorporates indigenous values without sounding archaic, while including the West in the cultural arc without seeming derivative.

        Independence came to India on August 15, 1947, and to Nigeria on October 1, 1960. However, the intercultural writer's work and responsibilities did not cease with independence. Even though freedom had come, the scars of colonialism were still alive. The coloniser's culture, power games, and institutions had stayed on, but in a new avatar. Perhaps the most harmful legacy of British colonial rule was internecine feuding. Not surprisingly, therefore, both India and Nigeria broke into civil war soon after independence. As a result of the colonial policy of divide and rule, free India was split into India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). The Partition, unfortunately, did not imply that Hindus and

Muslims were able to live in harmony with each other in newly independent India. As Independence preceded Partition, the nascent nation of India had to deal with the massive refugee crisis that followed the division. Described by the United Nations as the most massive migration of human population to date, the Partition and the refugee crisis put a severe strain on the resources and energies of independent India's new government. Not only did it have to cope with the aftermath of the Partition that left half a million people dead and twelve million homeless, but also with the anger of those displaced who often indulged in rioting. These riots created new divisions in the body polity that did not heal quickly.

The Biafran war in Nigeria from 1967–70, although sparked off by the attempted secession of Eastern Nigerian provinces as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra, was similarly the result of the economic, ethnic, and religious tensions between different sects that the British had enhanced during their rule. About three million people died in the Biafran war, with as many dying from disease and starvation in the war-torn regions. The achievement of independence notwithstanding, the displaced hostility and anger against the coloniser manifested itself in suicidal behavioural patterns and secessionist conflicts in both countries.

The coloniser had not only created divisions along tribal and religious lines within Indian and Nigerian societies, but had also created class divides. The divisions between the internal groups were so sharp that both countries exhibited distinct tendencies to flee reality into past historical structures which had long since lost their vitality. At this juncture, the need of the hour was to recognise contemporary realities for what they were. Even though a colonial deprogramming was necessary, the solution did not lie in the bringing back of old, dead, and outmoded exotic hegemonic systems. The new individual, who had come into being with Independence, could not live off the past. A forward-looking leadership that could bring in new thinking and help in uniting the past and present was necessary.

Neocolonial manoeuvres were more than a little responsible for preventing the rise of such a new leadership. Neocolonialism, or rule by remote control, allowed the former colonisers to dictate events in the colonies through offering money, aid, and technology. Operating through native agents, neocolonialism was a means of exercising power without responsibility; it was the act of ruling over a people without seeming to. The purpose of neocolonialism was to turn the freedom of the newly emergent nations into a farce, with colonial liberation becoming nothing better than a nominal flag of independence. Cold war power politics added

a new dimension to the challenges before newly independent India and Nigeria. The struggle for power between NATO and the Eastern Bloc meant that both groups tried to interfere in the lives of the newly emergent nations to prevent them from joining the opposite side. As neocolonial power politics operated through the greed and weakness of native proxies, it institutionalised corruption and caused deep frustration among the people. Neocolonial forces tried to undermine both India and Nigeria, but met with varying levels of success in the two countries. While India put up a strong fight through the political policy of non-alignment, Nigeria fell an easier prey to their machinations. If neocolonialism struck deeper in the latter, it was because of a weaker leadership. However, both nations passed through a deep sense of ennui caused by the anguish of shattered Utopian dreams of freedom.

In addition to civil war and neocolonial power struggles, the nascent India and Nigeria also had to contend with the raging conflict between the impetus to modernise rapidly and the urge to return to traditionalism. While the people were not ready for the former, a return to the latter was both reactionary and impossible. On the one hand, the new nations had to cope with the disappearance of community ties, the breakup of the traditional extended family system, and the advent of crass commercialisation that colonialism had brought in and neocolonialism had encouraged. On the other hand, the countries had to fight the problems of illiteracy, superstition, and tribal warfare that were the legacies of pre-colonial history. As a result, the circle of the people's frustration kept expanding.

The challenges before the post-Independence intellectual were many and multi-levelled. At the physical level, there were the problems of poverty, suffering, and disease. At the political level, there were the crises of neocolonialism, corruption, and civil war. At the emotional level, there was the pain of shattered aspirations. At the intellectual level, there was the problem of cultural clashes. To resolve all these differences and problems was not easy. The onus for finding a solution lay not only on the political leadership but also on the intelligentsia. The intellectuals in general, and the writer in particular, had to rise above the divisions and keep alive the unity, patriotism, and national spirit of the anti-colonial movement, so that a solution to the challenges could be found.

A nation's ability to tackle neocolonial threats and respond to post-Independence challenges was in direct proportion to the quality of the post-Independence intellectual's understanding of national realities. The writer's duty in the post-freedom era was to be a source of intellectual illumination. As a champion of truth who perceived events from the

external and the eternal angle, s/he portrayed the play of forces in society and culture through her or his work. S/he had to expose the downward plunge of standards and morals, as well as uncover the wanton corruption and the social hypocrisy within. S/he could not dwell too long on the sins of the colonisers, as that would absolve people of their responsibility for the current chaos. S/he also had to make the country see itself as others saw it, for which s/he could choose to use the English language. "Writers will need to abrogate an available discourse when trying to reveal an experience that is outside the norm of the discourse. They will need to make "English" into 'english' by rejecting the hierarchy within which the English language is privileged."[18]

The post-freedom writer had to be aware of his (or her) nation's cultural baggage before s/he could cross over to other shores in the new interconnected world that the country was now a member of. Without getting culturally swamped, the writer needed to use Western philosophies and cultural constructs, including language. Whether directly or in translation, the writer had to use the English language for specific purposes. In the context of the continuing encounter of the opposing forces of tradition and modernity, the mission of the post-Independence writer was the same as in the colonial era. The job was to evolve an intercultural discourse that could truthfully express the continuing intercultural play of forces that the nation was living through. Often educated in English, if not trained abroad, the writer had to look for and find tools through which s/he could stay true to the intercultural society and her or his soul. Put differently, interculturalism had to and grew to become the guiding light for his or her writing and thinking.

Many socially sensitive Indian and Nigerian writers picked drama as the form in which to express themselves. Working on the principle of conflict and its resolution, theatre has always been the most social of literary genres. As theatre was a crucible for the interaction of forces in space and time, socially minded writers could use its density of signs to portray intercultural conflicts within society. What is more, the medium had the potential and the ability to evolve as an interface in response to social needs. Not surprisingly, the dramatists of both colonial and post-freedom India and Nigeria advanced new forms of theatres to portray the state of flux, ambiguity, and ambivalence in their societies.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), of pre-Independence India, was one of the first Indian dramatists to turn his theatre into a playground of intercultural forces. Hailed as the Leonardo da Vinci of the Indian

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[18] Makarand Paranjape, "The Invasion of Theory: An Indian Response," *New Quest* 81 (May–June 1990): pp. 151–61, 153.

renaissance, he had the ability to forge a rich creativity at a time when British rule in India had created a clash of cultures. Tagore elected to present his thematic propositions through a symbolic framework. He was open to innovation and had strong social sympathies. In *Red Oleanders* (1925), Tagore articulated his views on nation and governance, conflict and freedom using his unique theatrical idiom.

Tagore firmly believed that intercultural synthesis would aid India's search for wholeness in the context of its exposure to Western thought for over two centuries. Even when advocating syncretic interculturalism, Tagore operated with a consciousness of India's needs. While his plays presented his disapproval of some aspects of European civilisation, such as its mechanisation, his nationalism was never narrow-minded or conventional. He was concerned about India's holistic development, and his love for his country was not limited to just seeing her free. His synthesising attitude was that of a man who wished to rise above the national without being derivative. Hence, he distinguished and judged each situation from an intellectual angle and sense of justice. He could see that if Indians refused to acknowledge the achievements of Europe, it was because she had relegated India to the status of a dependant colony. Similarly, the British propagated theories of their exclusiveness due to their need to establish their own superiority to justify their rule. Tagore's interculturalism was an outcome of his own perception of the wrongness of such attitudes, as well as of his realisation that no civilisation was self-sufficient or could survive if isolated. Quick to perceive the dangers of nationalism and notions of cultural purity that gave rise to the Swadeshi movement internally and led to world wars on the global stage, Tagore's plays, especially *Red Oleanders*, underscored the need for integration and synthesis.

Tagore received a mixed critical response. Among the biographical critics, Nihar Ranjan Ray,[19] G. D Khanolkar,[20] Krishna Kripalani,[21] Hiranmay Banerjee,[22] and Kshitis Roy[23] made quality

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[19] Nihar Ranjan Ray, *An Artist in Life: A Commentary on the Life and Works of Rabindranath Tagor*e (Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1967).
[20] G. D. Khanolkar, *The Lute and the Plough* (Bombay: The Book Centre, 1963).
[21] Krishna Kripalani, *Modern Indian Literature*: *A Panoramic Glimpse* (Bombay: Nirmala Sadanand, 1968); *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1980).
[22] Hiranmay Banerjee, *Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Government of India, 1981).
[23] Kshitis Roy, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Life Story*, trans. Lila Ray (Delhi: Directorate of Publication Division, 1961).

contributions. Also, Humayun Kabir,[24] K. R Srinivasa Iyengar,[25] Masti Venkatesa Iyengar,[26] Annaiah Gowda,[27] and Probhat Kumar Mukherjee[28] threw considerable light on the link between Tagore's life and his art. Literary historians who provided a good understanding of Tagore's contribution include Sukumar Sen,[29] Sushil Kumar Mukherjee,[30] P. Guha Thakurta,[31] Amar Mukherjee,[32] Som Benegal,[33] and Kironmoy Raha.[34] Among critics who focussed on Tagore's interaction with the West are Sujit Mukherjee,[35] Priyaranjan Sen,[36] and George Catlin.[37] The work of Alex Aronson,[38] Ira Zepp,[39] Ernest Rhys,[40] and the joint research of

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[24] Humayun Kabir, *Rabindranath Tagore* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1962)

[25] K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *The Adventure of Criticism* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962); *Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Introduction* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1965); *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1983).

[26] Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, *Rabindranath Tagore* (Bangalore: B. B. D. Power Press, 1946).

[27] H. H. Annaiah Gowda, *Anjali: The Tagore Lectures* (Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1976).

[28] Probhat Kumar Mukherjee, *Life of Tagore*, trans. Sisir Kumar Ghosh (New Delhi: Indian Book Company, 1975).

[29] Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1960).

[30] Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, *The Story of Calcutta Theatres: 1753–1980* (Calcutta, K. P. Bagchi, 1982).

[31] P. Guha Thakurta, *The Bengali Drama: Its Origin and Development* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930).

[32] Amar Mukherjee, "The Dramas of Rabindranath Tagore," *Modern Review* 85 (June 1949): pp. 477-83.

[33] Som Benegal, *A Panorama of Theatre in India* (New Delhi: ICCR, 1967).

[34] Kironmoy Raha, *Bengali Theatre* (New Delhi; National Book Trust.1978).

[35] Sujit Mukherjee, *Passage to America: The Reception of Rabindranath Tagore in the United States*, *1912–1941* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1964).

[36] Priya Ranjan Sen, *Western Influence on Bengali Literature* (Calcutta: Academy Publishers, 1965).

[37] George Catlin, *Rabindranath Tagore* (Aurangabad: Marathwada University Press, 1965).

[38] Alex Aronson, *Rabindranath through Western Eyes* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1943).

[39] Ira Zepp, ed., *Rabindranath Tagore*: *American Interpretations* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1981).

[40] Mary Lago and Ronald Warwick, eds., *Rabindranath Tagore*: *Perspectives in Time* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

Edward C. Dimmock et al.[41] as well as that of Mary Lago with Ronald Warwick,[42] detail the West's response to Tagore. By and large, the inability to grasp Tagore's unique milieu and the intermixed traditions that acted on him handicapped the Western scholar in particular. However, critics like Edward J. Thompson[43] did break new ground.

Tagore's socio-political philosophy was the focus of the study of Rajendra Verma,[44] Sachin Sen,[45] and Sasadhar Sinha,[46] while his heroines were the centre of attention for Biman Bihari Majumdar,[47] B. R. Ananthan and M. G. Hegde,[48] as well as Sanjukta Dasgupta and Chinmay Guha.[49] Mohit Kumar Ray,[50] Debashis Banerjee,[51] and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya[52] discussed Tagore's relevance in the twenty-first century, while Arnab Bhattacharya and Mala Rengananth's tome,[53] along with Christopher Balme's[54] publication, focussed on the politics behind Tagore's reception.

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[41] Edward C. Dimmock et al., *The Literatures of India: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1974).

[42] Ernest Rhys, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1915).

[43] Edward J. Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life and Work* 1921, Revised by Kalidas Nag (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1961); *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet & Dramatist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926).

[44] Rajendra Verma, *Rabindranath Tagore: Prophet Against Totalitarianism* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1964).

[45] Sachin Sen, *The Political Thought of Tagore* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, 1947).

[46] Sasadhar Sinha, *Social Thinking of Rabindranath Tagore* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962).

[47] Biman Behari Majumdar, *Heroines of Tagore: A Study of the Transformation of Indian Society: 1875–1941* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukyopadhyay, 1968).

[48] B. R. Ananthan and M. G. Hegde, eds., *Rethinking Tagore: A Collection of Critical Studies on Rabindranath Tagore* (Belgavi: Rani Chennamma University, 2013).

[49] Sanjukta Dasgupta and Chinmoy Guha, eds., *Tagore: At Home in the World* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013).

[50] Mohit Kumar Ray, *Studies on Rabindranath Tagore* Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2004).

[51] Debashish Banerji, *Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century: Theoretical Renewals* (New Delhi: Springer, 2015).

[52] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation* (New Delhi: Viking, Penguin Books India, 2011).

[53] Arnab Bhattacharya and Mala Renganathan, eds., *The Politics and Reception of Rabindranath Tagore's Drama: The Bard on the Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[54] Christopher B. Balme, *Decolonising the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-colonial Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Tagore's works generated a lot of magazine and journal articles in his lifetime and immediately after Independence, most of which were consolidated into books to mark his centennial and sesquicentennial anniversaries. Except with articles devoted to news about the staging of his plays in India[55] and abroad,[56] Tagore's work as a dramatist did not receive as much attention as his contributions to other literary genres. However, Guha Thakurta,[57] Lila Ray,[58] Nabaneeta Deb Sen,[59] Sombhu Mitra,[60] and Samik Bandopadhyay[61] did publish scholarly articles on *Red Oleanders* as dramatic literature. From the millennial journal articles that focussed on Tagore's dramaturgy, papers by Michael Collins,[62] Utpal Banerjee,[63] and Sourav Gupta[64] are noteworthy.

Tagorean scholarship went through various upheavals. First welcomed with awe for his originality and perhaps for his Nobel Prize, his drama was later dismissed as repetitious. While twenty-first–century critics have shown more interest in his plays than those who came before, he is still primarily seen as a poet even when writing for the stage. The agreement seems to be that Tagore is a closet dramatist. Regardless of the

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[55] "Drama," *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 July 1925; "The Bookman's Table," *Bookman* 69, November 1925; Gilbert Norwood, "Plays." *London Mercury* 14 July 1926; "Drama." *Saturday Review of Literature*, 18 September 1926.

[56] Jaygopal Banerjee, "*Red Oleanders*: An Appreciation," *Calcutta Review,* Third Series (17 October 1925): pp.139–156.

[57] P. Guha Thakurta, "Rabindranath- the Dramatist," *The Visva-Bharathi Quarterly*, Tagore Birthday Number (May–October 1941): pp.110–116.

[58] Lila Ray, "The Plays of Tagore," *Indo-Asian Culture* 6.4 (1957): pp.79–90.

[59] Nabaneeta Dev Sen, "The Lotus with the Thunderbolt: A March from the Spring Festival to the Harvest Dance: Some Notes towards a Fresh reading of *Raja* and *Raktakarabi*," *The Visva-Bharathi Quarterly* 41.1–4 (May 1975–April 1976): pp. 139–163.

[60] Sombhu Mitra and Samik Bandyopadhyay, "Building from Tagore," *The Drama Review* Theatre in Asia 15.2 (Spring 1971): pp. 201-204; "*Raktakarabi*: Producer's interpretation," *Natya: Theatre Arts Journal*, Tagore Centenary Number (1961): pp. 60–64.

[61] Samik Bandhopadhyay, "Bengali Theatre: The End of the Colonial Tradition," *Seagull Theatre Quarterly* 12 (1996): pp. 53–57.

[62] Michael Collins, "History and the Postcolonial: Rabindranath Tagore's Reception in London, 1912–1913," *The International Journal of the Humanities* 4.9 (2007): pp. 1–17.

[63] Utpal K. Banerjee, "Symbols and Metaphors in Tagore's Drama," *Indian Literature* 54.5 (2010): pp. 124–140.

[64] Sourav Gupta, "Analysing contemporary response to Tagore's philosophy of 'Indian' Theatre: A Selective study of productions in West Bengal," *Journal of Bengali Studies* 2.1 (Spring 2013): pp. 7–18.

bulk of Tagorean scholarship, a critic is yet to emerge who has paid adequate attention to Tagore's interculturalism or to the way he united philosophic and dramatic conventions of the East and the West, even while making innovative departures within them. More analysis is required on how Tagore could deal with deep, conflicting issues in plots that were both life-like and imaginative, and that combined wit and philosophy with song and dance. Tagore's success in combining these elements into a virile theatre capable of tackling modern and contemporary predicaments, as well as old and eternal human issues, needs critical dilation: a project that this book has taken upon itself to fulfil.

As touched upon earlier, India came face-to-face with new problems and new challenges with the dawn of independence on August 15, 1947. Badal Sircar (1925-2011), whose literary career came into bloom in the post-Partition era, was intensely sensitive to and painfully aware of India's social crises and the agonising trauma of decolonisation. Deeply conscious of neocolonial power struggles and agents, he consistently chose to reach out to his audiences to alert and awaken them. His plays bore the imprint of the bittersweet experience of a struggling nation as well as the mark of an independent, synthesising mind. Bent on enriching the content and presentation of his plays so that his message would reach home, he refused to subscribe to any "ism." Hence, Sircar determinedly refrained from rejecting any relevant traditional elements— such as the Indian folk forms of Jatra, Tamasha, or Terrakutu—or any relevant Western philosophies—whether absurdist, existentialist, or utilitarian—on the basis of their place of origin. As Sircar saw it, India in the 1980s needed an intercultural theatre or a third theatre that could act as a rallying point. While his drama was born out of and voiced postcolonial angst and ennui, it sought to offer relief from the political impotence, governmental hypocrisies, and artistic cant of the period through its outspokenness. His theatre, therefore, adopted a radical tone as well as a rebellious posture and was as impatient with liberal as with conservative establishments. India's impoverished masses were both the subjects and objects of his theatrical activity. In Sircar's perception, the crisis of aesthetics in the theatre was what was preventing it from serving the cause of the people. Public theatre, he could see, had exhausted the use of the traditional means at its disposal and needed to look for new means of expression. As Sircar had a syncretic mindset and was desirous of using theatre as a tool for social change; he founded an experimental and original theatre style that was neither traditional nor imported but intercultural, and which, above all, was an answer to post-Independence India's contemporary needs. One play that was conceived in the third