CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN BODY/THEATRE/INTERCULTURAL /PERFORMANCE DYNAMISM

‘Intercultural theatre’ comes in many guises but its chief characteristic is the conjunction of theatrical elements from different cultures, hence the ‘inter’ (Pavis 1996). That theatre has been the object of much recent critique (Bharucha 2000). Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins begin their *Women’s Intercultural Performance* (2000) with the following telling words:

‘Intercultural projects that originate in the west tend to focus on aesthetics first and politics second. Interculturalism all too frequently is perceived to become “political” only when a critic complains about (mis)representations of otherness or appropriations of culture’. Much of the focus of intercultural theatre has been on the conflagration of east and west, the use of Japanese, Chinese, Indian performance elements or narratives in theatre by western directors. Again, this work leaves intact a geopolitical imaginary that distinguishes, in a seemingly unproblematised way, between ‘them’ and ‘us’, between an ‘other’ and a ‘self’.

In the background the contemporary city, the place (or the stage) of our everyday performance. A contemporary city is becoming more and more Hybrid. All the Indian cities create innumerable cites of hybridity from advertisement to films.

Paul Virilio moves away from a static reading of the city, and analyzes it in terms of rhythm, speed and movement in order to understand its complexity. The very notion of boundary is challenged by information, communication and technological time, which pass through physical boundaries - “the urban wall has given way to infinity of openings and ruptured enclosures.”
Body, is a way to improve and specialised various functions-the computer is an extension of part of the brain, the telephone extends the voice, the wheel extends the legs and feet. Language extends experience in time and space while writing, extends language. Man has elaborated his extensions to such a degree that we are apt to forget that his humanness is rooted in his animal nature. Man has shifted evolution from its body to its extensions and in doing so has tremendously accelerated the evolutionary process. Today all kind of prostheses, internal or external, physical or metaphorical, make it possible to alter the bodies we are born with, changing in this way the architecture of the body, our perception and, by extrapolation, what form architecture may take in response to such a body. The body thus becomes a surface to mold, to alter; it becomes a border zone of identity between one and the other, between one culture and another, between real and virtual. When the body is no longer a given physical, social or political measure, the relationship of subject to place changes, and does the relationship of body to building. In this scenario the body becomes a battlefield, itself a place of change, hybridization, be it scientific or anthropological-cultural. A body that presents new analogies with the social body in which it develops and changes. And if the themes of the mutation which takes place around and inside our bodies are technology, physical or metaphorical prostheses, genetic engineering, global structures of communication, fragmented and multiple identities, the physical place of this mutation, besides the virtual space of the computer, is the contemporary city.

The city is the place where the shifting identity of the human body changes. It is also the place where the body becomes a social body. A city within city.
Over the last two years and in fact over the last decade, contemporary Indian theatre was marked to a significant degree by deep paradoxes. In order to make this better understood, we will endeavor to explain Indian theatrical reality, by first presenting the global context (and not 'only the cultural context) within which contemporary Indian theatre exists. Included in this global context, of course, is the fact that India who’s long and rich cultural history - primarily an urban one - is made up of a dense mingling of different languages and traditions. Its present reality is dominated by what is known as a global market consumer society where the majority are villagers.

Therefore, the paradoxes at present determining to such a great extent Indian contemporary theatre are due to the context. We shall define some of the most important ones; the relatively large number of professional theatre institutions within which many permanent troupes operate (The relatively large number of actors, singers, dancers and musicians hired on a permanent basis ,having generally been trained at the higher education level (complete training in an academy).

A relatively modest annual production - in terms of quantity - of new plays (thirty premieres at most).

The relatively restricted "mobility", if not the absence of mobility, of the companies from the capital, that rarely perform anywhere but on the stage of their own Theatre. The more creative and ambitious potential of contemporary Indian theatre (potential of actors, directors, playwrights, organizers) does indeed try to remedy the state of national theatre. Over the last two years and during the last two seasons, a whole series of individual efforts have resulted in several particularly interesting theatre events.
The most active elements of the theatre world did not, of course wait for the State to organize another and or better quality theatre life for them) but took things into their own hands. In changing the theatre organization model they also changed the theatre aesthetics (of the corpse, as Brook put it), against which they had fought for years.

Theatre festivals such as the NSD International Theatre Festival, Mahindra Theatre Festival and Prithvi Theatre Festival have certainly played an important part in the "new wave", opening contemporary Indian theatre to the outside world.

However, independence in 1947 generated a process of decolonisation of tour life, arts and cultural modes. Senior directors like Habib Tanvir in Hindi, Sombhu Mittra n Bengali in the North and B.V. karanth and Kavalam Narayana Panikkar ir the South, took the lead to have an encounter with the tradition, and to match the intensity" with which the modern theatre had arisen with violent rupture from the indigenous theatre. This encounter has given rise to ‘new ’ contemporary theatre with some distinctive features. The emergence of new theatre has been prompted by quest for identity and search for roots. It has also led to the creation of two streams in modern theatre. Several senior directors and playwrights continued to work in naturalistic idiom, though only occasionally that they tried to bring in elements of experiment in their productions. What later became modern theatre in India began in the colonial cities set up by the British as commercial ports: Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. These cities had an urban middle-class audience with values and tastes shaped by the English-style education they received, and by the need to work with the British in administration and commerce. Much of the theatre in this era copied the British drama that toured the country, and therefore took on to some extent the aesthetics, dramaturgical structures, and even the architecture of Western drama. Until the development of modern theatre in India, most performance did not take place on a proscenium stage,
nor did it depend upon ticket sales, but upon patronage. The proscenium which was adopted for much of the modern theatre separated the participants from the observers; ticket sales put an emphasis on theatre as a commodity, making it available to a smaller, and wealthier, group of people. After India gained political independence in 1947, a number of playwrights felt the need to develop a theatre that did not follow British models, but was in some way Indian. Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, along with Habib Tanvir, Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad, members of what is often referred to as the "Theatre of Roots" movement.

The question of ownership of cultural hybrids is not an issue in monoculturalism. The dominant culture takes the position that inventions and discoveries from other cultures are not significant until they are assimilated into the dominant culture. It has been said that though the Chinese invented paper, gunpowder, printing and the magnet, it was the Europeans who truly utilised them. Similarly, while acknowledging the Arabs and the Hindus as pioneers of the numeral system, little attention has been given to how the discovery was made and much has focused on the extent to which mathematics has been applied to modern science. The gaps in the history of mathematics perpetuate the myth of a dominant culture. The essentialist model of culture is most prominent in monoculturalism as it only allows one cultural narrative. To portray a sense of unity, foreign elements are assimilated within the official history and if that fails, the alternative accounts are marginalized.

World theatre references theatre from around the world in an apparently politically and historically neutral manner that is, in fact, belied by the specificities of the ‘theatres’ discussed under that heading. in every contribution challenges the assumption of a politically and ideologically unimplicated theatre. But it also frequently leaves intact the notion that theatre is sited in unitary, homogeneous geopolitical sites, referencing nations and
ethnicities in ways that suggest that they have been unaffected by the flux of people, pressures of differences, and diasporic movements that go hand in hand with current forms of globalization.

Europe’s colonization of India was not merely confined to some territorial space but also to colonize India’s sense of time, the present being merely corruption of past. India is not a nation, but a group of nations naturally or unnaturally bought together under one single state. The very concept of a nation state is a cultural concept ingrained in a particular culture. In other words the theory of a nation state is intrinsically relate to what we may call the modern western culture. Even though each culture secretes its own political system the traditional culture of India could not establish its own political system as it was simply superceded by the modern cultural trends in general and western cultural trends in particular. The fact is that any culture without its own political order hardly deserves the name of culture. The present one world democracy one world market one science and one technology the technocratic complex is all powerful. The domination of technological world is such that we do not accept the statuesque may eventually starve or disappear from the map. Moreover the achievements of science and technology have to be interpreted as the confirmation of the western model. At the same time the world of audio visuals is in the danger of succumbing to the bulldozer of technocratic homogenization.

More recent explorations in the field of live performance have helped expose western audiences to Indian Asian inspired materials and have prepared the way for a more ready appreciation of Asian techniques and perceptions. Contemporary channels of communications travel and trade have certainly assisted in this process.
As a result the plays of British are valued in India particularly in Bengal the theories of Arthaud and the experiments of Grotowski, Eugino Barba, Peter Brook, Richard Schecner, familiar to urban Theatre artists in India. In particular contemporary Indian Theatre ventures are exploring the dilemma of coping with contemporary sociopolitical and economic realities in the midst of a culture with centuries old tradition.

The transition to a market place economy the imposition of institutional structures foreign is the usual way of organizing life and the formula of a modern nation-state bought on a social personal and artistic crisis for many.

“My generation was the first to come of age after India became independentant of British rule. It therefore had to face a situation which tension implicit until then had comeout in the open and demanded to be resolved with apologia or self justification tension between cultural part of the country and its colonial past between the attractions of western modes of thought and our traditions and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common platform of political freedom was achieved.”

*Karnad 1989, 93*

These tensions have led contemporary theatre practioners to a re-examination of their own performance tradition including those in order to ‘confront what is Indian’ about our own culture. *(Bharaucha 1984, 258)*

Deshpande Panikkar, Jain, Kaur, Mehta, Mitra, Nath, Raina, and others amplify illustrate the range of differing views on whether and how contemporary Indian Theatre should return to its cultural roots.
When trying to achieve intercultural communication the realisation that a particular gesture or posture may have a particular meaning for oneself and an entirely different one for another person is an essential basis to start out from. As we move on to speech and behaviour the individual differences increase, making it even more important to be very sensitive and clear from the beginning. The aspect of "(cultural) awareness" was an issue which we discussed in the final round of our workshop.

Interculturalism is sometimes an unequal partnership. Especially in an international context you may meet a 'confusion of body languages' which often leads to misunderstandings. We tend to interpret the other's body language and behaviour from the perspective of our own social and cultural background and this may be a major reason for mutual misunderstandings. The practice of merely watching the other's actual movements - without taking a judgmental attitude but with an awareness that pictures and interpretations are rooted in ourselves and our personal, social and/or cultural background - might have a liberating effect on our meeting the other on a basis of mutual understanding.

Even though the root of interculturalism begin with colonization where the colonies of eastern empire in the east and the Amercian colonization and lot of invasions all around the world had made immense changes in different cultures. Slavery, war, cultural, invasion and modern development have transformed bodies. Still this change is going on with global americanisation.

From the point of view of the colonizer specifically, fears and curiosities sublimated fascination with the strange or the primitive are expressed in concrete physical and anatomical images.

In general the post colonial body disrupts the constrained space and signification left to it by the colonizers and become a site for resistant
inscription. The post colonial subject is often preoccupied with refusing colonially determined labels and definition especially those which operate in the name of race and gender.

The derogated body is maimed degraded infiltrated with disease or figured as grotesque, it also frequently denied freedom. There is also the metamorphic body like the Australian aboriginal dreams which is a spirit with transformative powers. The metamorphic body of the dreamer supplies a surrealistic flame that stresses the persistance and resistance of aboriginal culture.

Transformations of the post colonial body are theatrical through rhythmic movement such as dance which brings into focus the performing body. Hence the cultural identity of each body varies and when different cultures meet, the dypamin of the body related to each culture, blend into common performance behaviour, clearly identifying each cultural attitudes and body images in performance. Peter brooks Mahabharata is such a performance where diverse cultures meet, for the common theme of war, inside the great epic of Mahabharata. Peter Brook assimilated, the Indianness, into Mahabharata through different races and genders to flower the theme of the epic wrote thousands of years back. The Indian body or Theatre rooted in Natyasastra and ritual theatre performance was introduced to the western proscenium theatre since the British Empire began to rule in India. After the British colonization, Indian body and mind was submitted to changes regarding the urge for freedom plays which proclaimed freedom to the nation was staged in INA camps and other areas where freedom fighters, joined hands Indian body projected in the name of freedom.

In Soyinka’s plays which urge freedom for the tribe, proclaims the pessimism that the forefathers of the tribe will awake from their soil to guice the everlasting freedom for them.
The modern Indian theatre had its origin from its enthusiasm to perform ‘desi’ or traditionally blended theatre performances and also in protest against the western proscenium theatre. After 1960 whole over Indian, there were lots of researches regarding the traditional theatre of India. The body of the actor contributes much to the performance, which explains the body in a different way.

The body in the plays of these masters of Indian theatre needs a profound study as plays were a turning point in the history of Indian theatre. Apart from the earlier performance the modern versions i.e. play performance of these plays are analysed.

Secondly, the Indian body had been submitted to lot of changes from past to the present. As every culture and body changes through time, Indian body also received changes or variations as a result of political changes economic variations environmental changes natural hazards, global changes, colonization, multimedia innovation, etc. It reflects the concerns of war, population, natural happenings etc in its expressions. It strives for its identity and existence.

Body of city takes urban spaces as a point of departure for exploring contemporary India; these spaces reflect the complex interrelationships between globalization, local traditions and redesigned living spaces. This is the place where contemporary art production, spiritual body techniques, folk art and crafts, cinema and pop coexist. The cities are an ideal place to observe how traditional approaches are translated into contemporary forms of expression, and how they infiltrate and affect cultural practice in the "West". Indian cities offer a cornucopia of images: from brilliant billboards along the streets and facades, Bollywood posters in taxis, buses, restaurants and shops, to film, a steadily growing number of magazines, and the new omnipresence of the TV screen. This iconography of everyday Indian life is the subject of the exhibition
*Indian Popular Culture.* India’s modern popular imagery results from the major cultural and technological shifts during the nineteenth century. Mass production of images, new means of visualising myths and religious legends generated new fields of tension in the sacred, erotic, political and colonial landscapes. The prevailing eclecticism of visuality frequently led to an arbitrariness in piling up images from diverse visual sources, developing an ambivalent language of collage and citation that further facilitated the seizure of new aesthetic and cultural content. In addition, it explores and reveals the colonial context and mutual reciprocity in the construction of identities with reference to gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, religion and power. The strategic role of popular Indian imagery from the nineteenth and the twentieth century, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed. The new popular imagery grew out of major cultural and technological transformations that occurred in the nineteenth century, which included the impact of the pedagogy of the colonial art-school; the exposure to European images circulating in the Indian market; the advent of new art materials; new techniques of engraving including, lithography and oleography and the great influence of photography as well as the proscenium stage. The colonial art-school’s emphasis on perspective and realism endowed the idealised, traditional imagery with more tangible and sensual presence. This combined with the newly introduced photography and the proscenium theatre in the usage of eclectic yet powerful iconic and narrative formations enabled a depiction that heightened corporeality and individuality. These factors engendered a new class of popular cultic, mythological and nationalist imagery. Its mass production and circulation became a potent instrument in creating and negotiating interstices between the sacred, the erotic, the political and the colonial modern. The prevailing eclecticism of visuality also led to the piling up of images from diverse visual sources on one picture plane which effectuated an ambivalent language of collage and citation which further facilitated seizure of aesthetic and cultural meaning.
In India the present day outburst of the visual image as evident in advertising companies on billboards, calendars, stickers, magazines, posters, in TV broadcasts and bollywood films and the proliferation of material all over the Indian cities - in restaurants and shops, on the roadside and over the facades of buildings, in taxis, trucks and buses, has played a major role in shaping the Indian population’s identity in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and power as well as changing their personal and social values - along side the social function of the body. All this factors rule the Indian body and visual politics in a performance. When the Indian body is presenting itself for an Intercultural performance it is encompassed with all this new cultural changes which makes it hybrid. Even the food culture has changed. The emotional viewpoints have changed, visual politics and gestures have changed. The journey of the Indian body from the past to present has quite transformed in to a new body politics. The subject the Indian body and mind addresses presently, is different like in Manjula padhmanabhans script *The Harvest*. It is not because of the political changes or social changes but a new body culture has knowingly or unknowingly entered in to the Indian body context.

The fundamental difference between inhabiting the real city and its virtual counterpart is the lack of a body. The absence of several basic social functions of the body, such as individual recognition, gestural communication, and corporeal discipline in the virtual world is a fundamental design issue: the key feature of many designs is either to re-create these functions or to explore new modes of interaction made possible by their absence.

Understanding the social function of these physically-based qualities makes it possible to evaluate the impact, both positive and negative, of their absence in the on-line world. In some cases, their absence may be beneficial, making new forms of modes of communication possible; in others, where the absence of a quality is detrimental, it may be possible to reconstruct its function - possibly in
a very different form - on-line. Indian visual sense and visual perception have come to a drastic change which in turn reciprocally affected the body politics and Body dynamism of Indian performance and performers.

The Indian context of Theatre has far more changed and transformed as is the Indian body. The different aspects of Indian body Hybridization due to the hybrid global culture is evident in Indian Theatre. The hybrid culture of the body creates new meanings and trigger points in performance. The Indian body has shaped in to a different form of energy or body dynamism radiating the new politics of performance related to social economical global vistas of performances. As in plays of new directors like Roysten Abel, Abhilash pillai etc.

In this age of cyber-virtual spaces which will gradually evolve in to a more clear emotional ceremonial live space which is filled with ancestral energy of traditional body and primitive primordial instincts of performance energy. The future Indian body in Theatre is or will be a replacement of the virtual cyber space to a more poignant natural space of tribal energy, also it will be a resistance to the global culture. The Indian body will be a resistant body which resists the global culture which in an assimilated form created lots of changes in Indian daily life. In some contemporary play performances the body dynamism tend to relate to the western cultural hybrids, civilization but it mostly tends to resists the global culture in search of identity and existence.

This journey or exploration will lead the Indian body to a new space a new body a new form of thought and gesture which is not hybrid but the real soul of Indian diverse culture as Ratham Thaiyyam and Kavalam narayana panicker already explores. Ninasam Thetare Institution in the village of Heggodu, Karnataka, India explored the adaptation of Chinnu Achabe’s Things Fall Apart collaborative with siddhi tribe of African origin.
This production must be ranked as a significant intercultural encounter in so far as an African text was adapted to Kannada for a predominantly illiterate Indian tribe—the first venture of its kind in Indian Theatre.

As Richard Schechner points out

“Quite simply I would like to show that the borrowing and stealing and exchanging from the cultures is not necessarily an enriching experience for the cultures themselves. Interculturalism can be liberating but it can also be a continuation of other cultures.”

Rustom Bharaucha says

“Through a predominantly local work also in its concrete embodiment of an essentially socialist vision—a socialism of actions rather than words we find a strong example of how cultures can be adapted and meaningfully projected to enhance the consciousness of people. In its decentralized assertively small structure we find a conscious resistance not only to the cultural monoliths based in New Delhi ….”

It is the contemporary body the Indianness the Indian body seeks. This strong Indianness blended with the identification of the new hybrid culture or the inevitable global culture creates a new resistant body and also a body which explores the reality of global culture and its renovation is happening in the Indian body and culture.

This reciprocilisation of culture creates a vast enormity of body diversity.

Indian body cannot be to a great extent cannot be considered a common body. In the variety in diversity culture life style geography and language Indian body is different but at points they share some commonality related to social and Indian culture as a whole with its values and way of life. Indian aspects of the body vary in accordance with regional cultures.
The body dynamism in most productions of contemporary Indian Theatre showcase with the hybridity of global culture. When two cultures meet with in the national identity or different interaction invites accommodation contestations and transformations of consciousness.

Indian body is now in a condition of ‘mixed salad’ a term coined by Bharaucha. From this tradition to post colonization to americanisation and global change Indian body is a mixture of the whole. So the actors body carries the changes infected upon him as a city, his work nature environment, visuals in the city, virtual space and a consciousness of his tradition. This actor comes to a space of Intercultural performance and tries to communicate to the other body with this acquired hybridity. This is clearly portrayed in Estaphanos 1800 B.c on the alienation of the characters are compensated through typing messages in mobile phone and social networking sites.

A feeling of insecurity or alienation occurs when a man is aloof from cultural system or identity or his collective group beliefs rituals and traditions. This alienation provokes an enquiry or quest for his own identity and existence.

The increased accessibility and use of Indian Theatre have occasionally resulted in a subtle exploration of its tradition and contemporary.

The manipulation of ‘cultural’ tourism and the ambivalent ethics of cross cultural borrowness with reference to Richard Schechner’s writings on Interculturalism and the use of ritual in Theatre is one evident fact that Interculturalism is not always used in the true spirit and sense. The contemporary Indian performance sometimes blindly believes in this mixed perception. True that Indian performance clutches to this borrowness which creates a false body dynamism in some Theatre performances. Interculturalism happens also in somebody’s mind where a cultural overlap
is created which will affect a change in body, voice, movement and gestures. For example Hollywood films may affect Bollywood (body, body language, gestures, costumes visuals etc) and Bollywood can affect the audience and it will be changed in to a social criteria which will become popular. This changes in the society can affect the body of Theatre. Indian Theatre is undergoing such a change which makes it hybrid.

“My Interculturalism has bought me home”

Rustom Bharaucha

Intercultural performance can sometimes be of no identity but it is a quest for identity. If the actor in an Intercultural performance has got a cultural identity then only the intercultural exploration is meaningful. The scope of Intercultural performance is vast but there must be a true way of exploration not making a mixed salad. It is the exploration of two identities two cultures together at the same time but it is different.

It is not juxtaposing the opposite but it is the symphony of the opposites through fruitful exploration and experiencing. Presently Interculturalism is a market in the global performance industry. It is sometimes a meaningless experiment creating vibes of unwanted energy but it must be rooted on an industry and coexistence of different cultures. The exploration must be truthful and innovative creating a new body writing on space. The infinite realms of powerful performance which address the global society to preserve ones own cultural identity. It is not to hijack of culture but certain institutions in the name of does the ‘culture hijack’ and market the body and performance in a very random exploiting cultures in a business like way. This should not be the Indian Intercultural concept.

Are we poised to make cultural hybrids in the name of Interculturalism? India should firmly stand rooted on its lore which we have acquired years
ago. It is the root of a particular culture of a particular region on which Indian bodies seeks energy.

The Indian performance/body must be open to exploration but still be rooted in its ‘Indianness’ which is very much essential for the pure and unobstructed exploration in Intercultural Theatre. A body which does not feels, see, or experience will not be able to perceive that particular culture of body which is part of culture. Once he doesn’t experience it, it dies out, but still there is a probability of this consciousness in his brain somewhere which gradually comes out in space which is related to his DNA or genes in an Intercultural space. Indian performer must be considered with a new purpose and resolve.

Richard Schechner and Linda Hess panoramic study of the Ramalila in Ram Nagar awakened area studies shows new complex and evocative study of Indian performance. This and subsequent versions of Schechner’s essay (1985) explore the multivocality of public festival performances have helped to lead a new generation of scholars to innovative way of studying Indian performance.

The interpretation and use of culture have to be confronted within specific historic and social condition.

“As an Indian I grew up in a post independence India exposed as I was to the remnants and contradiction of colonism inspired by and resistant to my predominantly western education. I can perceive the intricacies and use of Interculturalism only from my own historic space”

**The future Indian body is a resistance against hybridity of popular culture or global culture. The Indian body will ceremoniously gather to create a new resistant culture and a resistant mechanism and a body dynamism or body images which will challenge the city culture to save**
or cherish the memory of which the result is a resistant ritual
behavior.

The Estaphanos work explores or studies this mechanism of the Indian
body in Intercultural context. The crave for the Indian body to overcome
the hybrid nature and create a body dynamism of its own is evident and
it is explored in this work. It is not only understanding the Indian body
mind-culture in the present but also it is a resistance against the hybridity
which the Indian body had undergone through the ages till the present.

Hence Indian body in the future context will build up a resistant
body dynamics which will be a great revelation to the Indian Theatre
though it is already being practiced and expressed in Indian theatre
performances and groups. Indian exploration of Interculturalism must be
truthful and more socialistic in way of exchange in way of collaboration
, and in way of acceptance because as Bharucha had said- the strongest
resistance to cultural domination lies in creative work.

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