## Contents

**List of Illustrations** viii  
**Acknowledgements** ix  

1. Introduction: British Asian Theatre on the Map 1  
4. Tamasha Theatre Company 1989: Authenticity and Adaptation 71  
5. Tamasha Theatre Company 1989 – *East is East*: From Kitchen Sink to Bollywood 95  
8. New Writers from 1977: Kureishi, Bancil, Bhatti and Khan-Din 166  

**Conclusion** 188  

**Notes** 192  

**Bibliography** 196  

**Index** 215
1
Introduction: British Asian Theatre on the Map

British Asian theatre from 1976

This book takes as its historical starting point the publication of the Arts Council sponsored report by Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (1976), which was the first official sign that the theatrical work by practitioners from ethnic minority communities in Britain was to be considered a part of British culture. While there was, of course, a great deal of theatrical activity from the Asian community prior to this date, the report heralded a radical reconceptualisation of the relationship between Asian practitioners positioned on the ‘margins’ and the ‘centre’ of British theatre.

If we look at the historiography of British theatre from that time, the presence of Asian artists and their contribution to that tradition has largely ignored. It is only recently that a number of excellent works specifically exploring Black and Asian theatre have been published, including Gabrielle Griffin’s *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* (2003), *Alternatives Within the Mainstream* (2006), edited by Dimple Godiwala, *Staging New Britain* (2006), edited by Geoffrey Davis and Anne Fuchs, and *British South Asian Theatres: A Documented History* (2010) and *Critical Essays on British South Asian Theatre* (2010), both edited by Graham Ley and Sarah Dadswell. It should also be noted that Jen Harvie’s *Staging the UK* (2005) contains a fascinating discussion of ‘Bollywood in Britain’, focusing on the work of Tamasha.

Although there is an increasing wealth of published works by British Asian writers, there is no doubting the key role played by pioneering anthologies in those early years such as *Black and Asian Women Writers* (1993), edited by Kadija George and *Black and Asian Plays Anthology* (2000), with an appendix of published plays by Black and Asian...
playwrights compiled by Susan Croft of the Theatre Museum as well as the Salidaa (South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive) archive in bringing visibility to the work; indeed it is worth noting that of the more than 100 plays produced by Tara Arts since 1977 only three have been published, none of which include their pioneering ‘Binglish’ work at the National Theatre. I am delighted that electronic access to the scripts of the productions discussed in this book, and relevant archival material relating to those productions are now available through the Tara Arts website. The publication of these scripts not only provides a vital resource for playwrights and practitioners but also for those wishing to study, critique and evaluate the cultural, sociopolitical and theatrical impact of British Asian theatre on British theatre and beyond.

This book focuses on the three major British Asian theatre companies over the past 30 years; Tara Arts, Tamasha and Kali with a further chapter devoted to British Asian playwrights. It will not only examine the key productions of those producing companies and writers but crucially pay attention to how and why the work was made by examining the dramaturgies, rehearsal processes, productions and critical receptions as well as the social, cultural and political contexts. In short, this book will ask whether British Asian theatre over the last 30 years amounts to more than just ‘a bunch of darkies on stage?’ (Verma 1994b: 2), as Jatinder Verma, Artistic Director of Tara Arts, has provocatively conjectured.

‘The arts Britain ignores’

Naseem Khan’s groundbreaking report, The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain published in 1976, for the first time officially recognised that a cultural incursion located on the borders of British theatre was taking place, an incursion that included the performance practices of the South Asian community in Britain. The report’s official recognition not only served a valuable postcolonial purpose in providing visibility and documentation for the artistic endeavours of ethnic minority groups but also attempted to overturn the actual position of those marginalised groups in relation to the ‘centre’. For the first time this document contained the view that ‘ethnic arts’ should not be regarded as an exotic extra outside of British theatre but should be understood, funded and fostered as though they were part of British theatre – not, of course, that these things necessarily occurred (my italics).

Before 1976, theatre companies from minority communities in Britain were classed as ‘ethnic theatre’, a term derived from ‘ethnic minority communities’ theatre’ and a category that was criticised as it ‘diminishes
the work to the level of exotica and pushes it out onto the peripheries of British life’ (Khan 1980: 69). Indeed, the report criticised not only the conceptual approach to ‘ethnic minority’ arts but also the funding strategy. Most local authorities were found to make no separate provision for ‘ethnic minorities’ in a ‘colour blind’ approach to funding, which led to ‘effective discrimination’ (Khan 1976: 6) as those communities had little or no knowledge of the possible availability of such funding. The report also crucially insisted on the recognition of the creative potential inherent in cultural difference as well as the heterogeneity of different ethnic communities that ‘have certain talents, tastes, traditions that need consideration for them to develop’ (Khan: 6) in relation to arts funding.

Critics of the report pointed to the fact that it did not recognise a ‘crucial distinction […] between Black and white immigrant communities whose creative abilities were perceived very differently by British society […] Black creativity is underlined by a racism that is historically specific’ (Owusu 1986: 56). Although grouping ethnic minority communities together in the report was intended to engender a sense of solidarity between them it was also criticised as it ‘contributed […] to the formulation of a blanket category of “deprived people” which allowed members of funding bodies […] to add women, gays, disabled people and the unemployed to the melting pot’ (Owusu: 56) which continually locates and positions these groups on the margins. Indeed, these criticisms are still the subject of debate in current funding that has the effect of annexing them and creating internal competition for limited resources. Furthermore, theatre companies from minority groups have also been charged with the job of bringing in a ‘new audience’, an Asian one in respect of the companies we are discussing, a role that in some respects conflates their function with an element of social work.

The report called for positive steps such as the creation of a Minority Arts Agency to be established as a service agency and funded by the Arts Council and Race Relations Commission so that it could:

a) maintain an up-to-date register of groups and individuals
b) advise groups on venues, grant sources, possible personnel
c) publicise the activities and needs of minority groups amongst local authorities, regional arts associations and all other bodies covered in these Recommendations
d) give general advice to ethnic minorities arts groups and organisations and to individual artists (Khan 1976: 143).
While these tangible practical measures were taken to record and facilitate minority groups’ access to the arts and arts funding, it must also be recognised that the report did not articulate the ways in which minority groups would engage with funders. However, the Minority Art Advisory Service (MAAS) committee did come into being with Khan at its head and the report was rightly credited for making ‘African, Asian, Caribbean and other ethnic artists and arts organisation around the country […] an incontrovertible fact’ (Verma 2003).

In this way, *The Arts Britain Ignores* recognised that in the 1970s the historical disadvantages faced by ‘ethnic minority arts […] lack of premises to rehearse, lack of comparable back up that is afforded to equivalent native British groups, lack of acceptance within the arts structure’ (Khan 1976: 5). The repositioning of ‘ethnic arts’ such as Asian theatre in Britain as part of British theatre had direct political and practical implications in beginning to destabilise these funding boundaries. The report realised that, beneath the seemingly egalitarian approach of local authorities not making dedicated provision for ethnic artists, was the fact that they were ignored.

The exposure of this wilful ‘ignorance’ by funding bodies such as the Arts Council paved the way for British Asian theatre companies, especially those trying to ‘find local writers and sometimes look at the British setting’ (Khan 1976: 71) such as Tara Arts, to access funding for the first time. Indeed, it is worth noting the paradox that grew up in the 1980s and 1990s as the Arts Council and other funding bodies such as the Greater London Council and other Metropolitan County Councils ‘made a virtue of Ethnicity: the more “different” you were, the more likely you were to gain funds’ (Verma 1989b: 773). This meant that while there was a positive benefit in the recognition of Asian theatre in Britain with funding set aside for it, this also had the paradoxical effect of keeping that work marginalised and corralled in an ethnic ghetto.

Since the Khan report there have been a great number of Arts Council initiatives and conferences to promote diversity in the British theatre, key among them being the Eclipse Report that gave rise to the Decibel initiative. The catalyst for *The Eclipse Report – Developing Strategies to Combat Racism in Theatre* (2002) developed from the conference held on 12–13 June 2001 at Nottingham Playhouse was the Macpherson report of 1999. The Macpherson report was a response to the police’s handling of the murder inquiry into the death of Steven Lawrence, a black teenager stabbed to death in 1993 in an unprovoked racist attack while waiting for a bus in Eltham, south-east London. The report damningly
concluded that the failure of the police was largely due to ‘institutional racism’:

Institutional Racism consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999)

The aims of the Eclipse conference were:

- to discuss and devise strategies to combat racism in theatre
- to explore ways of developing our understanding and knowledge of African, Caribbean and Asian theatre (Arts Council 2001: 4).

The relevance of the conference is amply demonstrated by reproducing some of the (limited) evidence put to the conference:

- Out of 2,009 staff employed in English theatre only 80 (4 per cent) are African Caribbean and Asian (The Arts Council of England Annual Statistics 1999/2000)
- The Boyden Report found that only 16 out of 463 (3.5 per cent) board members of English producing theatres were African Caribbean and Asian (The Boyden Report on the Review of Theatre in the English Subsidised Sector 1999)
- An Arts Council of England survey of 19 arts organisations found that out of 2,900 staff, 177 (6 per cent) were either African Caribbean, Asian or Chinese, with 100 of those staff working in the area of catering or Front of House. One was employed at senior management level (The Arts Council of England 1998). The African Caribbean and Asian artists' workshops, however, fully endorsed the definition of institutional racism as being relevant to the theatre sector in this country (Arts Council 2002: 9).

Peter Hewitt, chief executive of the Arts Council at that time, said the report recognised that institutional racism in the theatre was endemic with a ‘distinct lack of representation of Black and Asian communities at board level, on the staff, in the programming and in the audiences of regional theatres’ (Hewitt, quoted in Akbar 2002). A number
of recommendations were made in order to address these issues, from confronting stereotypes, recognising the existing skills of ethnic minority artists and providing training for development, recruitment policies and recognising the fact that at that time there was no artistic director from an ethnic minority running a building.

The aim of the Decibel initiative that grew out of Eclipse was to ‘promote and strengthen the infra structure of culturally diverse arts in England’ (Arts Council 2003), that included profiling and showcasing the work of culturally diverse companies and artists, both established and emerging, in order to promote work that ‘reflects the cultural society of this country in the 21st century’ (ibid.). However, while there was no doubting the good work such initiatives have done, the latest Arts Council report from Sir Brian McMasters clearly shows that there is still a great deal of progress to be made.

In his report ‘Supporting Excellence in the Arts – From Measurement to Judgement’ (2008) McMasters was asked to consider how ‘public subsidy can best support excellence in the arts’ (5). It was a wide-ranging report that had many positive recommendations concerning the ‘Arts’ in their widest sense in relation to encouraging excellence, engaging audiences and limiting funding bureaucracy. However, I would highlight his key finding in the section on ‘Diversity’ in the report that states that ‘we live in one of the most diverse societies the world has ever seen, yet that is not reflected in the culture we produce, or in who is producing it’ (11). Indeed, while the report recognised that some improvement in the support of BME (Black Minority Ethnic) companies had occurred it recommends that funding bodies should not only prioritise diverse work but also ‘act as the guardians of artists’ freedom of expression, and provide the appropriate support to deal with what can be a hostile reaction to their work’ (ibid.); particularly pertinent in respect of the reaction that greeted Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s play Behzti (2004) discussed in Chapter 8.

‘Race’, ethnicity and hybridity

Any discussion of British Asian theatre has to recognise that it takes place within the context of a range of cultural issues relating to ‘race’, identity and representation. Naseem Khan’s report recognised that culture is dynamic and processual rather than fixed and static since ‘cultural expressions spring out of social conditions, they should change with conditions otherwise merely the effect is preserved without the cause’ (Khan 1976: 8). As we shall see, British Asian theatre has not
only been concerned with the reproduction of culturally ‘traditional’ forms from the South Asian subcontinent such as Kathakali but has also focused on the contemporary frame and the emergence of new and dynamic forms as a result of this hybrid cultural location.

British Asians in Britain belong to what Stuart Hall describes as ‘cultures of hybridity’ that are defined as such because they have had ‘to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of “lost” cultural purity or ethnic absolutism’ (Hall 1992b: 310). In response to the need for the postwar reconstruction of Britain during the 1950s there was a rapid rise in the number of immigrants from Commonwealth countries, in particular from the Caribbean and the newly partitioned India and Pakistan that came to be symbolised by the arrival of the Windrush in 1948. As a result of this the 1970s saw the emergence of a ‘second generation’ of ‘British Asians’, those of Asian heritage born or largely brought up and schooled in Britain.

While much is made of the perceived ‘culture clash’ for young Asians growing up in Britain it is important to remember that the term ‘Asian’ describes a heterogeneous membership differentiated according to class, caste, region, religion and gender. This as Avtar Brah points out could create ‘as many possibilities of intra-ethnic as of inter-ethnic “clashes of culture” ’ (1996: 41) and also rather underplays the possibilities of cultural fusion, as described in the following chapters. In this respect British Asian theatre also undermines the concept of ‘cultural diversity’ as a societal model because it insinuates separate and discreet categories of cultural designation that remain fixed and intransigent, impervious to time and circumstance, and disavows notions of fusion, syncretism and hybridity.

The hybrid provenance of British Asian theatre is realised in its content and form because the work is made by those who ‘bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped’ (Hall: 310) and these ‘traces’ are both British and Asian. Indeed, it is because British Asian theatre is a product of the syncretic notion of a ‘culture of hybridity’ that it contests the construction of the nation as a culturally homogeneous space. It is the insistence of theatre companies such as Tara Arts, Tamasha and Kali that they are a part of British theatre while simultaneously performing what is perceived as their ‘difference’ or ‘Asianness’ within their work that is ‘provocative’ in this respect.

It must be made clear at this stage that in using the term ‘Asian’ in a specifically British context, I am referring to work performed in Britain by companies, writers and performers of South Asian descent with their
British Asian Theatre

The attendant range of diasporas, histories, religions, customs, practices and experiences. This definition is derived from the particular history within which the signifier ‘Asian’ came into operation in the postwar British context as it was applied by British administrators in colonial Kenya to describe citizens of newly independent India and Pakistan. Indeed, the postcolonial history and diaspora of the Kenyan Asians who arrived in Britain in the 1960s was dramatised in Part II of Tara Arts’ Journey to the West trilogy, and is discussed in Chapter 7.

Hall rightly emphasises that ‘race’ is a constructed discourse rather than one built on ‘essential’ characteristics. However, while the discourse of ‘race’ is often mobilised as a discriminatory practice it can also be a locus of resistance for those on the receiving end. This was the case with adoption of the term ‘black’ in the 1970s as a positive signifier for both the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities in Britain. Historically, in contrast to the ‘United states, black theatre in Britain did not evolve alongside fringe theatre during the protest years of the 1960s largely because there was no strong “Civil Rights” or “Black Power” movement to which it could attach itself to offer a public voice and gain an audience (Peacock 1999: 173).

However, in the late seventies and early eighties marginalised non-white ethnic groups coalesced behind the political signifier ‘black’ to create a new identity. The very act of creation and operation of a ‘black’ identity was predicated on the fact that Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities were ‘not [...] culturally, ethnically, linguistically, or even physically the same but that they are treated as “the same” (i.e. non-white, “other”) by the dominant culture’ (Hall 1992b: 308) in order to provide a locus of cultural resistance and the collective solidarity. However, this political solidarity fragmented in the 1990s precisely because it homogenised the very different ethnic groups contained within it and therefore disavowed their particular cultural differences.

If ethnicity is the term that denotes a group of people with a common set of cultural markers such as language, custom, religion and tradition then ethnic minority groups are so termed because they are a distinct population in a larger society whose culture is different from their own. However, as Naseem Khan’s report pointed out these groups are still ‘part of’ British theatre and by extension Britain and therefore their difference, as well as ‘sameness’, should be inscribed within it. Ethnic minorities in Britain are, of course, a focus for a racism which has taken a necessary distance from the crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority [and] now seeks to present an
imaginary definition of the nation as a unified cultural community. It constructs and defends an image of national culture – homogeneous in its whiteness yet precarious and perpetually vulnerable to attack from enemies within and without.

(Gilroy 1992: 87)

It is this imaginary claim to homogeneity that British Asian theatre also contests.

Racist discourse attempts to stereotype the ‘other’ in a way that ‘reduces, essentializes, naturalises and fixes difference’ (Hall 1997: 258), in this case utilising the power of the white ethnic majority to exclude, marginalise and oppress the Asian ethnic minority. This discourse is heavily imbricated in British colonial history especially in relation to the Indian subcontinent and the British Raj. British colonialism involved the cultural as well as economic oppression of India exemplified by Thomas Macaulay’s infamous ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835) in which he declared an intention to create a ‘class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect’ (Macaulay quoted in Ashcroft et al. 1995: 429). Benedict Anderson in his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1983) points out that the significance of Macaulay’s intention was of a ‘long range (30 year!) policy, consciously formulated and pursued, to turn “idolators”, not so much into Christians, as into people culturally English’ (1983: 91). It is this historical disavowal and denigration of Asian cultural difference as a result of this lengthy phase of cultural imperialism that British Asian theatre attempts to redress.

Edward Said describes in his book *Orientalism* (1978) how the West created, through a range of discourses, a conception of the Orient that was profoundly racist in character and concerned with maintaining the superiority of the Occident to the Orient. Said’s powerful critique of the West was itself criticised by postcolonial theorists for failing to recognise indigenous rebellion to this totalising western discourse or to provide a site of agency from which it might be contested by subjugated peoples. One of the reasons that British Asian theatre has such an important postcolonial role to play is precisely because it does perform back.

It is the insistence on the representation of ‘other’ ethnicities on stage by companies such as Tara Arts, Tamasha and Kali that means they eschew a ‘colour blind’ approach to casting. In spite of the range of Arts Council initiatives discussed earlier there remains a general lack of representation for minority ethnic groups in the arts and the British stage in particular. In the theatre this seems to have stemmed from
a mistaken desire, outside BME companies, to wilfully ignore, or be ‘blind’ to, the ethnicity of the actor.

While there have been a number of recent instances of high profile non-white performers playing lead roles these were largely straightforward examples of ‘colour blind’ casting. This principle may appear laudable but it fails on two significant levels; it attempts to disavow the ethnicity of the performer and refuses to acknowledge the cultural difference between the performers, and it does not begin to address the causes that lead to the discriminatory practices against actors from minority communities.

Indeed, ‘colour blind’ casting examples are remarkable because of their infrequency and paradoxically the critical reception tends to foreground and problematise the ethnicity of the (non-white) performer. In contrast Tara Arts’ casting policy is to have all-Asian casts while Kali and Tamasha insist on Asian actors playing Asian roles. They actively foreground the non-white ‘difference’ of the performer and insist on the presence and representation of the Asian actor on the British stage.

In recent times religion has come to the fore in relation to ethnicity, starkly exemplified in the response of the Sikh community to Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s play Behzti (2004), which was cancelled as a result of violent protests before the end of its run at Birmingham Repertory Theatre because it was felt to be disrespectful to Sikh religious beliefs. This foregrounding of the religious aspect of ethnicity led one commentator to ask:

is this new religious identity part of an overarching plural identity, or is it exclusive and separate? Put more bluntly it is a choice between either wanting religion to be a part of an identity or only being defined by religion and arguing that it is more important than any national identity.

(Manzoor 2005: 22)

It should also be remembered that the construction of an overarching allegiance to religion can also be placed on the Asian community. After the events of September 11 2001 in America and more recently attacks in London on 7 July 2005, racism towards Asians in general has become driven by religion rather than race.

It is important that we remember in any discourse on the nation – especially because we are examining that discourse from the point of view of a minority community, in this case a British Asian one – that it equally effects the construction of the indigenous white population
in Britain. As the British Asian playwright Hanif Kureishi explored in *Borderline* (1982) and makes clear in *The Rainbow Sign*:

It is the British, the white British, who have learnt that being British isn’t what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces; and a new way of being British after all this time. Much thought, discussion and self examination must go into seeing the necessity for this, what this ‘new way of being British’ involves and how difficult it might be to attain. (Kureishi 1986: 38)

Kureishi’s belief that there must be a ‘new’ construction of national identity is supported by Avtar Brah’s concept of ‘diaspora space’ that emphasises that the British site is ‘inhabited not only by those who have migrated and their descendents but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous’ (Brah 1996: 181). In this way British Asian theatre should be read as an indigenous rather than intercultural theatre practice for the reasons eloquently set out by Jatinder Verma below:

Christiane Scholte: How, if at all, would you position yourself within the group of Western proponents of intercultural theatre directors such as Peter Brook or Richard Schechner?

Jatinder Verma: I do admire their work and I follow their work. But I suppose if I positioned myself, then my journey is a contrary one. With Brook and Schechner, if you like, they were part of a mainstream, part of a dominant culture to be more specific, who brought into it some questions to what that dominant culture meant. So they brought into it influences from outside. I start from a position where I’m not in a dominant culture. If anything I have a kind of vexed relationship between the centre and the margin. So I am starting from the margin. So inevitably, my concern shifts in terms of its angle of vision. Plus, of course, added to that is that if I start from the margins, I’m also working with people who are on the margins. It’s not as if I am bringing in actors from India or Africa as such. I’m actually working with actors here who in their existence represent this kind of marginality. And so the dialogue is not, if you like, a configuration of outsiders who are commentating on the dominant. It’s *insiders* who are looking at the dominant from another perspective.

(Davis & Fuchs 2006: 317; italics mine)
Asian language on the British stage

When Asian theatre companies augment English scripts with Asian languages they fracture the limit of what we understand the constituency of ‘English’ spoken in Britain to be. The sound of Asian languages on the British stage is politically potent as a means of amplifying ‘marginal’ voices and insisting on their acceptance especially if we accept the reasonable democratic rationale that Asian languages ‘form part of the linguistic map of modern Britain […] and cannot be expected to be absent from modern British theatre’ (Verma 1996: 198). Their theatrical representation therefore has political implications as it gives a voice to a previously silenced constituency. Jatinder Verma recognised in his recent interview with Contemporary Theatre Review that in the early years of Tara the languages utilised in the rehearsal room did not manifest themselves on the stage and responded with ‘Binglish’, discussed in Chapter 3, while Kristine Landon-Smith at Tamasha directly addressed this by drawing on the ‘cultural context’ of the actor, discussed in Chapter 5.

It can be seen in the work of British Asian theatre that the use of Asian languages within performance contests the ‘centrality’ of English in British theatre. It will be seen in the ‘Binglish’ texts of Tara Arts that the non-Asian speaking audience are purposefully ‘left out’ or at least behind the Asian speaking audience at times throughout the performance. However, it should be remembered that these Asian languages are structurally supplementary to the performance because ‘“the word” in theatre is never entirely literary, but mediated through the bodies and voices of the actors in a specific mise-en-scène wherein the meaning of a particular theatrical representation is shaped enunciated and embodied’ (Bharucha 2000: 68).

This means that while the words may not be understood by a non-Asian speaking audience the ‘sense’ may still be conveyed through the signs described above. Furthermore, the employment of a range of Asian languages exemplified in the work of Tara Arts, Tamasha and Kali, such as Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati and English demonstrates the plurality of the signifier Asian and inscribes difference within it. This theatrical performance of difference destabilises homogeneous notions of the ‘Asian’ that can lead to stereotype and reflects the fact that ‘postcolonial literatures are cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between “worlds” a gap in which the simultaneous process of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practice’ (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 38). This play between abrogation and
appropriation, the rejection of English and the remoulding of English, can be seen clearly in the practice of British Asian theatre. This is one of the ways in that the hybrid form of British Asian theatre demonstrates that as a result of ‘postcolonial experiences…[it]…refutes the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience’ (Ashcroft et al.: 40).

Although the performance texts contain a range of Asian languages as well as English they have all been transliterated into roman script, obviously in some measure because of the unavailability of the technological means to print scripts in the Devanagari or Arabic script, but also because while British Asian actors may understand and speak Asian languages they may not necessarily be able to read them. Some of the phonetic sounds that make up Hindi and Urdu have no equivalence in English and therefore the literary replication of these sounds in roman script has a recognised degree of imprecision.

The majority of South Asian languages – Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi – derive from ‘Sanskrit, the classical language of Ancient India’ (Snell 2004: x) which is also related to the root of European languages. While Hindi and Urdu are both influenced by Persian they have very different scripts, the Urdu based on Persian and the Hindi on Devanagari inherited from the Sanskrit. Indeed, the representation of the Asian languages in scripts for performance is understandably more focused on reproducing the phonetic sounds for the actor than in technical accuracy in rendering an Asian word into roman script with literary accuracy.

It should also be remembered that India is a diaglossic society in which ‘a majority of people speak two or more languages’ (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 38) and this facility pertains not only to Asian languages but also of course to English as well as a result of colonialism, diaspora and more recently globalisation. It is worth noting that on the British site these languages are also intersected by English accent and dialect so that in plays such as *East as East* written by Ayub Khan-Din the cultural hybridity of the characters is performed as these Asian characters not only speak English with Asian accents but Urdu with northern accents. British Asian theatre also performs new grammatical particularities that apply to Asian languages when spoken that have not been present in English. An example of this is the use of echo words to generalise meaning so that while *pani* means water in Hindi, if a speaker says *pani-vani* the meaning changes from water to more generically ‘something to drink’.
The importance of language in this context is perhaps best revealed by an anecdote told by Jatinder Verma that illustrates the repercussions of its disavowal. In this speech made at Brunel University entitled ‘Braids and Theatre Practice’ (2001) we see the impact that the rupture of language can have on the diasporic subject. When he first came to Britain aged 14 he wanted to write to his father who had remained in Kenya. The difficulty in this lay in finding an appropriate way to address his father in the letter in English. While the first line ‘Dear Papaji’ that started the letter was straightforward the second line in which he wanted to say ‘How are you?’ was more problematic. In Hindi there are two words for ‘you’, the honorific \textit{aa} and the more informal \textit{tum} but of course in English there is only one. If he addressed his father with the English ‘you’ it would ‘reduce’ his father to equal status to that of his son; this would have constituted an unintended insult. The upshot of this linguistic difference was that he did not write to his father for six months.

**Tara Arts Theatre Company (1997–present)**

The catalyst that led to the formation of Tara Arts was the murder of an Asian youth, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, killed in a racially motivated attack by whites in Southall, West London on 4 June 1976. Jatinder Verma, in his final year of university at that time, described how the ‘mixture of anger and of trying to understand what’s happened and of trying to say something, led us to make our theatre’ (Verma 1996a: 284). This political imperative has consistently manifested itself in the work of Tara Arts underpinned by the company’s insistence on looking at the world from a marginal position with a desire to speak for the ‘migrant’ (Verma 2004: 84) and the ‘outsider’ (Verma 1996a: 285).

Since the inception of Tara Arts in 1977 there have been three major theatrical movements in the company’s history that are mapped in this book. Chapter 2 examines their early work from 1977 to 1984 that concerned itself with a range of subjects including the postcolonial reworking of historical events on the Indian subcontinent in \textit{Inkalaab, 1919} (1980), the presence of Asians in Britain long before post-war immigration in \textit{Vilayat or England Your England} (1981), to young Asians growing up in contemporary Britain in \textit{Chilli in Your Eyes} (1984) but all primarily underpinned by a theatrical methodology of text-based realism.

Chapter 3 examines the period dating from the first production of the \textit{Miti Ki Gadi [The Little Clay Cart]} in 1984 that heralded the creation
of Jatinder Verma’s unique hybrid performance methodology ‘Binglish’ and led the company to the ‘centre’ of the British theatre establishment at the National Theatre in the early 1990s with adaptations such as Molière’s Tartuffe (1990) and Rostand’s Cyrano (1995), transposed to an Asian setting. Chapter 7 looks in detail at the creation and performance of the epic Journey to the West trilogy (2002) that married the ‘Binglish’ performance methodology to an overt postcolonial mission to document and dramatise the stories of the Asian diaspora from India to Kenya and then to Britain over the course of the last century as well as the company’s subsequent work and direction. Tara’s return to a scaled-down approach to ‘binglishing’ European classics after the trilogy is briefly discussed alongside new artistic forays such as A Taste for Mangoes (2003) at Wilton’s Music Hall and Tara-in-the-Sky (2007) in Trafalgar Square.

Tamasha Theatre Company (1989–present)

Kristine Landon-Smith and Sudha Bhuchar formed Tamasha Theatre Company in 1989 to mount Untouchable, which, alongside their other adaptations of Indian novels, House of the Sun (1991) and A Fine Balance (2006), will be discussed in Chapter 4. The chapter will also examine their experimentation with intercultural performance in Women of the Dust (1992) and the company’s research-based methodology exemplified in Balti Kings (2000).

Chapter 5 begins with East is East (1996), Tamasha’s popular and critical success, which realised the intracultural aims of the company by ‘opening the door to the crossover of Asian culture into the British mainstream’ (Bhuchar and Landon-Smith 2004b). We shall see how Tamasha draws on the term intracultural defined by Rustom Bharucha as concerning itself with the ‘dynamics between and across specific communities and regions within the boundaries of the nation state’ (Bharucha 2000: 6) in the context of the regional differences within India. Tamasha are applying the term in the British context to the ‘dynamics’ between different ethnic communities as opposed to geographical regions. This chapter will also detail Tamasha’s experiments in form with the staging of a Bollywood film in Fourteen Songs, Two Weddings and A Funeral (1998, 2001), the West Side Story-inspired dance-led drama Strictly Dandia (2004) as well as the exploration of verbatim theatre in relation to the Asian experience in The Trouble with Asian Men (2005). It will also examine the unique methodology developed by Kristine Landon-Smith drawing...
on the ‘cultural context’ of the actor utilised in the creation of *Lyrical MC* (2008).

**Kali Theatre Company (1990–present)**

The catalyst for the creation of Kali Theatre Company was the murder of Balwant Kaur who was killed at the Asian Women’s refuge in Brent, West London on 22 October 1985 and led to Rukhsana Ahmad writing *Song for a Sanctuary*. The politics behind the foundation of Kali by Rukhsana Ahmad and Rita Wolf shared many parallels with Jatinder Verma beginning Tara Arts in response to the racist murder of Gurdeep Singh Chaggar in 1976; in the case of Kali it focused specifically on South Asian women writers.

The influence of Kali Theatre Company since its inception in 1990 is clear from its verifiable claim that of ‘all the new plays by British Asian woman playwrights presented since 1988 in the UK, nearly a third have been presented by Kali and of the plays by new writers, over 75 per cent were presented by Kali’ (Kali 2009). Chapter 6 begins with an examination of the inception of the company and the inaugural production of *Song for a Sanctuary* by Rukhsana Ahmad. In 1992 Rita Wolf moved to the United States and Rukhsana Ahmad became Artistic Director until 2002 at which time Janet Steel assumed control and has been in the post.

The brief of the company has not changed significantly since 1990: it is ‘to create opportunities for Asian Women in the field of theatre and especially to give them a voice in the field of new writing’. Kali has not only supported and developed the work of new South Asian women writers but also produced a diverse range of work over that time. That diversity is exemplified in the three productions explored in Chapter 6: *River on Fire* (2000) by Rukhsana Ahmad that looks at issues of religious tolerance in the context of the contemporary politics of the subcontinent, *Calcutta Kosher* (2004) by Shelley Silas set in the ‘dying’ Jewish community of Calcutta and *Deadeye* (2006) by Amber Lone which focuses on the family pressures on British Asian women in contemporary Northern Britain.

**New writing**

Chapter 8 looks at new writing by British Asian writers who have been produced outside of these companies. It examines the work of four key second-generation dramatists over the past three decades, including
Hanif Kureishi’s *Borderline* (1982), set during the ‘Southall’ riots, whose production at the Royal Court signalled the arrival of British Asian concerns on the main stage. Parv Bancil’s *Crazyhorse* (1997) looks at the issues of an alienated and dramatically ignored British Asian underclass while *Made in England* (1998) examines the appropriation of Asian culture by the mainstream. This chapter will discuss Gurpreet Bhatti’s *Behzti* (2004) and the reasons why it gave rise to a national debate on censorship as well as her earlier work *Behsharaam* (2001). Finally, there is a return to the work of Ayub Khan-Din’s with *Rafta Rafta* (2007) a gentle Northern family comedy produced by the National that repeated the ‘crossover’ mainstream success achieved by *East is East* (1996).

Jatinder Verma describes finding a very obscure local history document in 1989 that recorded the appearance of an Indian performing troupe who came to England in the early nineteenth century. He wondered, justifiably in the light of the critical lack of interest at that time in postwar British Asian theatre, whether ‘their history will be our history […] unsung, unrecorded, forever trapped in the memory of those who lived at the time’ (Verma 2003: 2). One of the aims of this book is to ensure that it does not.
Index

aardass, 180
Abhinaya, 46, 53
abrogation, 12–13
Achut, 73
agitprop, 42
Abhurya, 46
Ahmad, Rukhsana, 16, 120–3
alaaq, 51
Allen, Jim, 177
All in Good Time, 184
Ancestral Voices, 35
Anderson, Benedict, 9
Antīkā, 46
appropriation, 13
Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain, The, 2–8, 18, 188
Arts Council, 5, 9, 18, 73, 131, 165
Arts Theatre, 164
Ashcroft, 28, 49
Asian language, 12–14, 22–3
Asian Women’s Writing Collective, 120–1
Asian Youth Movement, 169
ATC (Asian Theatre Co-operative), 122, 171
authenticity, 49, 76–7, 93, 109, 118
Balidaan, 20
Balti Kings, 15, 71, 82–8
Bancil, Parv, 170–6
Battersea Arts Centre, 131, 147, 174
Behsharaam, 17, 190
Behzti, 6, 10, 17, 176–83
Bells, 123
Bend It Like Beckham, 183
Bhabha, Homi K., 101
Bhangra dance, 37, 43
Bharucha, Rustom, 15
Bhatti, Gurpreet Kaur, 10, 17, 176–83
bhavai, 45, 65
Bhuchar, Sudha, 15, 71, 92
see also Landon-Smith, Kristine
Binglish language, 47–49, 66–70, 145–6
Binglish theatre, 45–70, 143–166
Miti Ki Gadi, production of, 49–51
Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 10, 97, 137, 176
Black Album, The, 69–70, 188
Black and Asian Women Writers, 1
Black Theatre Cooperative, 171
Black Theatre Season, 50
Bollywood, 1, 101–105
Bolt, Ranjit, 60
Bombay Dreams, 105
Borderline, 122, 167–70
Brah, Avtar, 7, 11, 169
Brahmachari, Sita, 114, 115, 118
Brahmins, 65, 72
British colonialism, 9
British Council, 72
‘Britishness’, 100
British Raj, 9, 120
Brook, Peter, 11, 103
Buchner, 62
Bush Theatre, 132
Calcutta Kosher, 16, 131–6
Called to Account: The Indictment of Anthony Charles Lynton Blair for the Crime of Aggression Against Iraq-A Hearing, 109
Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre, 46, 65
Captain’s Malt, 120
Carib Theatre, 171
Carter, Ruth, 89
Centre of Indian Arts, The, 24
chaand, 152
Chaggar, Gurdip Singh, 14, 16, 120, 159

215
Index

Chand, Meira, 76
Chandran, V., 163
Chaos, 123
Chapman, Gerald, 34
Chekhov, Anton, 62, 72
Chilli in Your Eyes, 14, 20, 36–44
Civil Rights movement, 8
Clarke, Anthony, 30
colonialism, 13
colonial mimicry, 25
colour blind casting approach, 3, 9–10, 21
Colour of Justice, The, 109
Commission For Racial Equality, 18, 183
Common Stock, 122
Commonwealth Immigrants Act, 143
community theatre, 19
Coronation Street, 122
CrazyHorse, 17, 171–4
cultural authenticity, 117
cultural context, 12, 16, 116–19
cultural diversity, 7
culture clash, 7, 98
culture of hybridity, 7, 13
Curse of the Dead Dog, The, 170–1
Cyran De Bergerac, 15, 49, 68–70
dalit, 72, 76
Decadeye, 16, 136–42
Decibel initiative, 4, 6
Devanagari script, 13
diaspora, 13, 15, 145
see also Binglish diaspora
diaspora space, 11
Diwali, 20, 33–4, 105, 107
EastEnders, 181
East is East (Khan-Din), 17, 71, 95–119
Eclipse Report – Developing Strategies to Combat Racism in Theatre, The, 4–5, 6
Enemy of the People, An, 163, 164
England Your England, 14
English language, 12, 23, 27–9, 48
ethnic arts, 2–6, 4
ethnicity, 6–11
ethnic minority communities theatre,
Exodus, 145, 146–7
Eyre, Richard, 59
Falling, 132
Family Way, The, 184
fatwah, 68
Fine Balance, A, 15, 71, 78–80
Forest, Waltham, 59
Fourteen Songs, Two Weddings and A Funeral, 15, 95, 101–5
Fuse, 20, 34–6
garba, 65, 105–6
Genesis, 145, 148
ghazal, 139–40
Gill, Ravinder, 170
Government Inspector, Ala Afsur (Gogol), 68, 69
Greater London Arts Association, 18, 73
Griffin, Gabrielle, 1, 126
Gupta, Tanika, 166
gurdwara, 177–80
Hall, Stuart, 7, 8, 13
Harijaans, 72–3
Heer Ranja, 67
henna artists, 152
Hindi language, 12, 13, 14, 47
“hot seat” exercise, 84, 113–14
Hounslow Arts Co-Operative (HAC), 170–1
House of the Sun, 15, 71, 76–7, 81
Hum Aapke Hain Koun (Who Am I to You), 101, 104
Hussein, Iqbal, 144, 146
Hytnier, Nicholas, 177, 187
Imagined Communities (Anderson), 9
Inkalaab, 23, 26–7, 29
institutional racism, 5
intracultural, defined, 15
jamadar, 92
Jeyasingh, Shobana, 55, 61
Joint Stock, 167, 170
Journey to the West trilogy, 143–60

PROOF
Kali Theatre Company, 16, 120–42
Kapoor, Shobu, 92
Kapur, Anuradha, 62, 68
Kathak, 55, 65
Kathakali, 7, 163
Kaur, Balwant, 16, 120–1
Khan, Naseem, 8, 19, 188
Khan, Shaheen, 83, 86
Khan-Din, Ayub, 183–7
Kiddush, 135
King and Me, 167
Kitchen, The, 88
kitchen sink drama, 95
Kotak, Ash, 178
Kshatriyas, 72
Kureishi, Hanif, 166–70, 188
Labour Government, 143, 174
Landon-Smith, Kristine, 12, 15–16, 71–120, 189, 190
language theatre, 23
Lion’s Raj, 19, 22, 23, 30, 31–2, 35
Little Clay Cart, The, 14, 57–62
sutrardhar in, role of, 58–9
see also Miti Ki Gadi
Lone, Amber, 16, 136–42
Look Back in Arger, 22
Lyrical MC, 16, 95, 113–19
Macaulay, Thomas, 9
Macpherson report of 1999, 4
Made in England, 17, 174–6
Mahabharata, 32, 156
Manzoor, Sarfraz, 183
Marriage of Figaro, The, 163
Mayes, Sue, 83, 85, 90
mazdoors, 91–4
McMasters, Sir Brian, 6, 105
Merchant of Venice, The, 163
Milan Centre, 19
mimicry, 101
Minority Art Advisory Service (MAAS), 4
Mistry, Rohinton, 78
Miti Ki Gadi, 14, 22, 49–57
National Front, 37, 168, 169, 176
National Theatre, 2, 15, 59, 163, 184
Natyasasthra, 45, 53–6, 66
Naughton, Bill, 184
Navratii, 105
New Constitution, 120
Newham Monitoring Project, 37
Non-Fiction Theatre Company, 107
Odyssey-Ramayana, The, 148
Orientalism, 9
Osborne, John, 22
Outskirts, 167
Patel, Harish, 184
Powell, Enoch, 143
prakrits, 56
psychological realism, 103
pundit, 130
Punjabi language, 12, 13, 23, 37, 47–8
purvaranga, 66
Rafta Rafta, 17, 183–7
Ramayana, 33–4
Ram Lila folk, 62
rangapuja, 65–6
rangoli artists, 152
REACT youth theatre, 115
Revelations, 148
River on Fire, 16, 128–31
Riverside Studios, 73, 88, 122, 148
Rostand, 15, 68–9
Rowlatt Act, 26
Royal Court Theatre, 97, 122, 167, 168
Royal Court Young People’s Theatre, 30
Royal National Theatre, 49, 50, 59, 62, 64, 144
Rushdie, Salman, 68, 183
Sacrifice, 20–2, 23, 188
Saggar, Sunil, 19
Said, Edward, 9
Saidaa, 2
salwar kameez, 169
Sanskrit language, 13, 56
Satanic Verses, The, 68, 183
Sattvika, 46
‘second generation’ Asians, 19, 33–44, 37, 169
Sepoy’s Salt, 120
Shabbat, 135–6

PROOF
Index 217
Shah, Naseeruddin, 68–9
Shudraka, 22
Sikh Human Rights Group, 177
Silas, Shelley, 16, 131, 132
Sock ‘Em With Honey, 131
Soho Theatre’s Writers Attachment Programme, 137
Song for a Sanctuary, 16, 120, 121, 123–8
Southall Youth Movement, 169
South Asian language, 13, 47, 124
Special Patrol Group, 168
Staging the UK, 1, 101
Steel, Janet, 16, 131
Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 5
Strictly Dandia, 15, 95, 105–7
stylised gestures, 54
Sulkin, David, 30
Supporting Excellence in the Arts-From Measurement to Judgment, 6
subraddars, 58–9, 62, 155
tabl, 52
Tagore, Rabindranath, 20
Tainted Dawn, A, 105
Talawa, 171
Talking to Terrorists, 109
Tamasha Theatre Company, 15–16, 71–120, 189, 190
Tara Arts Theatre Company, 14–15, 18–71, 143–166
see also Binglish theatre
Tara-In-The-Sky, 15, 160
Tartuffe, 15, 59, 62–8
Taste for Mangoes, A, 15, 160–1
Temba, 171
Tempest, The, 163, 164
Thatcher, Margaret, 25
Theatre Royal Stratford East, 76, 77, 97
Throw of the Dice, A, 161
TIME (Tamasha Intercultural Millennium Education)
Conference, 113–14
translated man, see Verma, Jatinder
Tricycle Theatre, 109
Trouble with Asian Men, The, 15, 95, 107–13
Tully, Mark, 82
Tulsidass, 33
twinspronged stance, Tara Arts, 39
Uganda Railway and Migrant Labour, 24
Ungrateful Dead, 171
Untouchable, 15, 71, 72–8
Urdu, 13, 47, 66, 67
Urnf of Ashes, An, 128
Vacika, 46
Vaishayas, 72
verbatim theatre, 15, 107–19
see also Lyrical MC; Trouble with Asian Men, The
Verma, Jatinder, 2, 11, 12
see also Tara Arts
Vilayat, 14, 35
Wallinger, Louise, 107
Waterman’s Arts Centre, 163, 174
Webber, Andrew Lloyd, 105
Wesker, Arnold, 88
West Midlands Arts Association, The, 18
Wilton’s Music Hall, 160, 161
Windrush, 7
Wolf, Rita, 16, 122, 123
Women of the Dust, 15, 71, 88–94
Yes Mensahib, 19, 23, 24–5, 28–9