Kamaluddin Nilu

A Transformative Journey: Making *A Tempest* in Postcolonial India

This article is based on the author's production of Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* in India. Guided by the concept of transculturation, a key concern of Kamaluddin Nilu in the working process was to develop positions that could be considered parallel to those of Césaire. The topographical condition of present-day India is interpreted as 'internal colonialism', locked in differences within, and presented through a double-framed vision. The parallel to 'black subjectivity' was found to be the Dalits, who suffer from systematic discrimination and are segregated from the main social body. Further, when adjusting the text to 'India's world', the notion of a 'third space', benefiting from the performance matrix of the traditional ritualistic performance *Ram Lila* as well as a heterotopian space concept, was crucial. The intention to make a theatre production that could give the audience an opportunity to engage in a political debate on the hierarchical nature of Indian society was fulfilled. Breaking the established postcolonial political myth meant that the audience was faced with the unexpected. In such cases an indirect or parabolic performance mode of communication rather than a synergetic one becomes likely. Kamaluddin Nilu is an independent theatre director and researcher affiliated with the Centre for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo. He is currently a Research Fellow at the International Research Centre 'Interweaving Performance Cultures' at the Freie University, Berlin. He was Chair Professor of the Theatre Department at Hyderabad University in India, and Artistic Director of the Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT) in Dhaka.

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I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys.[1]

THIS REMARK belongs to Aimé Fernand David Césaire (1913–2008), a Martinican poet, playwright, and politician and one of the most influential authors from the French-speaking Caribbean region. It is striking, however, that the phrase also reflects typical social relationships in postcolonial India, characterized by hierarchy and separation, and it made me curious to explore his polemic and surrealistic text *A Tempest* (1969), which is a postcolonial revision of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The following article is based on my own experience of making *A Tempest* with the Theatre Department of Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication at the University of Hyderabad in India in 2014.[2]

A key concern in the transformative journey was to negotiate and develop positions that could be considered parallel to those in the textual body. 'Transculturation' was the theoretical road map of the process. The present situation in India can be understood as part of the wider notion of colonialist interpellation that remains implanted within the postcolonial structure. This topographical condition of 'India's world' is interpreted as internal colonialism, locked in 'the difference within'. The parallel of 'black subjectivity', as emerging from specific power relations and forms of domination, was found to be the Dalits that are outside the Hindu caste system and still segregated from the main social body in India, justified by conceptions of the 'pure' and 'impure'.

In order to adjust the text to the Indian reality, the notion of a 'third space' was crucial, and its development benefited from the performance matrix of the traditional ritualistic performance *Ram Lila* as well as from a concept of heterotopian space. It emerged from the reception of the perfor-

mance that the intention of staging *A Tempest* in a way that could give the audience an opportunity to raise questions and engage in a political debate on the hierarchical and fragmented nature of Indian society was fulfilled. However, it turned out that the communication between performers and audience, and within the audience, took place not during the performance, as intended, but only after it was over. The experience is that a synergetic performance mode of communication does not work when an established political myth is broken, and it is argued that communication in such cases is likely to be indirect or parabolic.

Negotiation of the Text and Indian Reality

In *A Tempest,* Césaire explores the relationship between Prospero the colonizer and his colonial subjects, and the play focuses on the plight of Ariel and Caliban in gaining their freedom from Prospero and his rule over the island.

The core element in *A Tempest* is the search for a new 'black subjectivity', earlier proclaimed by Césaire as *négritude,* which is an anti-colonial stance and a vision of a postcolonial future.[3] When Césaire turned to Shakespeare as the vehicle for understanding postcolonial history, the explicit aim of his adaptation of *The Tempest* was to demystify and demythologize the allegorical colonial tale within a contemporary political frame. Césaire remarks, as quoted by Robert Eric Livingston:

Demystified, the play [is] essentially about the master–slave relations, a relation that is still alive and which, in my opinion, explains a good deal of contemporary history: in particular, colonial history. . . . Wherever there are multiracial societies, the same drama can be found, I think. . . . The dominated can adopt several attitudes. One is Caliban's revolt. Another is Ariel's, whose path is more complicated – but is not necessarily one of submission; that would be too simple. . . . If you want me to specify . . . I'd say that there is Malcolm X's attitude, and then there is Martin Luther King's.[4]

It was a challenging and multifaceted task to adapt *A Tempest* to Indian conditions in terms of crossing borders and negotiating encounters between cultures, since this was the first time ever that a text by Aimé Césaire had been performed in India.

In order to explore the relevance and meaning of 'black subjectivity' in India and how it is bound up in the socio-cultural fabric within the contemporary political topography of the country, I began the working process with a number of brainstorming sessions with the actors and designers, as well as PhD scholars and some faculty members. The result was a reconstruction of Césaire's demystified text through the process of reinvestigation, revisiting, and reinterpretation.

'Transculturation' was the theoretical road map of the process due to the culturally and socially fragmented – and thus heterogeneous – political topography of India.[5] The intention was to recodify the hegemonic position of the postcolonial Caribbean text and to adjust it to the contemporary socio-political-cultural topography of India in a non-canonical way, implying that various forms of human suffering are reflected in the artistic expression, which hence can be called 'politics in aesthetics'.

The history of European colonialism can be described as a double-framed vision, as Homi K. Bhabha has observed: 'Colonial man as an *object* of regulatory power, as the subject of racial, cultural, national representation.'[6] Cultural theoreticians from previously colonized countries, including India, have considered Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a reading of colonial expansion, and Prospero emerges as the archetypical paternal figure of colonial domination and authority. As Paolo Frassinelli reminds us, *The Tempest* is an allegory of the colonial encounter and of master–slave dialectics, and he points to the transformative role of Caliban by quoting Césaire: 'Caliban is also a rebel – the positive hero, in a Hegelian sense. The slave is always more important than his master – for it is the slave who makes history.'[7]

I was haunted by Césaire's assertion, and it helped me to move into the abyss of the work. For me it is the mirror-reflection of the pre- and post-independence revolutionary

history of India. It is reminiscent of what Ernest Hemingway wrote in *A Farewell to Arms*: 'The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places.'[8]

During the brainstorming sessions, we found that in order to justify the approach within the socio-political fabric of post-independent India, we had to create a 'heterotopic' space that is 'absolute real' and 'absolute not-real' as the mirror of the production. In this regard, Césaire's theoretical work *Discourse of Colonialism* (1955) and his powerful poem *Corps Perdu* (*Lost Body* from 1950) were important in developing our understanding. *Corps Perdu* takes place at a watershed.

Metaphorically, it can be seen as a converging lens whereby the rays from the sources of *négritude* and antagonistic socio-political and economic conditions are brought together. The converging point is the form of domination in a postcolonial corpse. It is thus a quasi-image of Michel Foucault's *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*:

The mirror functions as a heterotopia in the sense that it makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal – since, to be perceived, it is obliged to go by way of that virtual point which is over there.[9]

'Freedom' is the ultimate notion of *A Tempest*: 'Freedom Hi-Day! Freedom Hi-Day!'[10]

Freedom and 'Internal Colonization'

'Freedom' is also the core of Césaire's literary corpus in general. As Robin D. G. Kelly explains, 'Césaire's life and work demonstrate that poetry can be the motor of political imagination, a potent weapon in any movement that claims freedom as its primary goal.'[11] It can be argued that freedom of the individual or groups to a large extent is a matter of ways of thinking about oneself and others. Césaire claimed that 'the circulation of colonial ideology – an ideology of racial and cultural hierarchy – is as essen-

tial to colonial rule as the police and the use of forced labour.'[12]

He further insisted that colonialism and racism remain fundamental problems in the modern world, and that these issues are still at the core of 'India's world'.[13] This topographical condition is interpreted as 'internal colonialism', locked in 'the difference within' and encircled by the image of a quasi-colonial mirror disco ball.

This internal colonialism has been possible due to the complex political anatomy characterizing Indian society, with its strictly hierarchical caste system based on conceptions of pure and impure as well as heterogeneous compositions of the population along ethnic, racial, religious, and lingual lines.

In post-independence India, the power structure and mechanisms of the state that were developed during the time of colonial domination still remain, merely with some alteration. According to Partha Chatterjee:

The postcolonial state in India has after all only expanded and not transformed the basic institutional arrangements of colonial law and administration, of the courts, the bureaucracy, the police, the army, and the various technical services of government.[14]

With this socio-politico-cultural fragmentation characterizing the nationhood of India, I realized at an early stage of the working process that I had to create a 'third space' in order to adjust the text to the Indian reality. In this regard, I was inspired by Homi K. Bhabha. His approach helped me to create a new performance text through the process of intervening and interweaving different cultural materials in order to make the text and the performance understandable and relevant to the (local) audience:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code.[15]

The decisive step in the working process was to negotiate the 'black subjectivity' of the

Caribbean with its counterpart in India, as emerging from specific power relations and forms of domination. Through intensive discussions we concluded that the parallel would be India's marginalized, oppressed, and segregated class-caste groups, mainly the Dalit but also tribes.[16]

These groups of citizens are alienated and detached from the main social body. They frequently encounter gruesome situations due to the rigid caste system and racial prejudice in contemporary India. They suffer murder, rape, torture, as well as being usurped from their own land by higher castes, local and corporate capitalists, local politicians, far-off religious gurus and authorities.[17]

During the discussions we found that the wrongdoers and oppressors justify their behaviour because they consider their victims as 'phobogenic objects', a concept deeply rooted in a racist mode of thought. It is a conflict between pure and impure. The two testimonies below illustrate the present situation.

As Smita Narula declared: 'Dalits are not allowed to drink from the same wells, attend the same temples, wear shoes in the presence of an upper caste, or drink from the same cups in tea stalls.'[18] Regarding the other broken mirror image, the tribal population in India, Subonglemba Aier, states:

Tribal people have always been there in our country (India) yet most of the people are unaware of their existence or are simply ignorant towards their existence and their rich cultural customs. Even before the British took over India, the tribal populations were looked upon as wild, barbaric, and unruly. Then they were treated as untouchables and this practice still exists in many parts of our country. Indian Independence in 1947 did not bring about any difference in their lives.[19]

The two testimonies strengthened our argument for establishing the parallel position of Césaire's Prospero–Caliban myth in the adapted play, in line also with the view of Richard Schechner, who claims that, 'Theatre places are maps of the cultures where they exist.'[20] This reflexive mode of the production is further guided by the metaphorical phrase, 'The sun of your native country is nothing more than a shadow', in the poem *Le Renégat* by David Diop.[21]

In the end, almost all of us agreed that the present situation in India can be understood as a part of a wider notion of colonialist interpellation that remains implanted within the postcolonial structure, which is centred on master-class caste relationships and with deeper and sharper religious and ethnic conflicts. This is a parallel to the politico-military dictatorial mode of power domination of the Prospero–Caliban myth: crisis of identity, conflict between oppressor and oppressed, violence, torture, and conspiracy. Theoretical support for this interpretation also came from Frantz Fanon: 'All forms of exploitation are identical, since they apply to the same "object". . . . Colonial racism is no different from other racisms.'[22]

Politics of the Performance Space

The intention behind staging *A Tempest* was to establish the theatre as a public place for raising questions and creating political debate on the diversified and hierarchical nature of Indian society, including interpreting the present within a framework of new historicity through the process of socio-cultural-political transformation from pre-independence to post-independence. The approach benefited from Césaire's statement on politics within the sphere of theatre, as quoted by Robert Eric Livingston:

Politics . . . is the modern form of destiny; today, history is lived politics. Theatre should evoke the invention of the future. . . . It must, accordingly, be directly comprehensible by the people.[23]

Since the work was political within an alternative theatrical frame, my opinion from the very beginning of the performance process was that an alternative to the colonial performance space was required, and hence that staging *A Tempest* in a proscenium theatre had to be avoided. Shakespeare has been rooted in India's public theatre since the 1750s, when the Old Playhouse was established in Calcutta. My argument was that such theatre spaces are the footstep of the

'imperishable Empire of Shakespeare'.[24] As underlined by the Shakespeare critic Parmita Kapadia: 'Initially, Shakespeare was simply transported to India and imposed on the colony.'[25] Building on the works of R. K. Yajnik, Kapadia elaborates:

The new theatre came full-fledged. There was no question of the model to be followed. India simply adopted the mid-Victorian stage with all its accessories of painted scenery, costume, and make-up.[26]

An additional reason why I wanted to avoid a proscenium theatre space was that such spaces are nowadays owned by the states or by local capitalists and corporate business communities. When owned by states, the notion is still to maintain control over the artistic medium.[27] Private owners on the other hand, would be inclined to encourage entertaining performances with high income potential.

It was not an easy task to convince the main team of designers and actors or the supporting staff at the university of the need for an alternative performance space for this production. I realized what the high level of social and cultural fragmentation typical of Indian social structure could mean in practice. The divide was manifested through the high level of rigidity in the discussions, reflecting the diverse social standing and related ideological baggage of the people involved. It turned out that I was trapped in the politics of a tug of war.

Some groupings insisted on creating the piece within a proscenium stage, in line with the 'mimic representation' way of staging Shakespeare in India since colonial times. They were apparently sceptical of making a piece with the notion of present caste, class, religion, and ethnic politics in India in an open-air non-theatrical venue with broad public access. Others were ready to support me, and gradually as our disagreements cooled down we were, step by step, able to crack our respective self-described socio-cultural-political blocks. Finally, all my team members were convinced and agreed that we should find an alternative to the colonial performance space.

Through further discussions, we figured out an idea of performance topology that emphasized space and its dimensions. In this regard, we found Michel Foucault's idea of theatre as a 'heterotopian site' relevant: 'The heterotopia has the ability to juxtapose in single real places several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves.'[28] The performance topology of several physical spaces made it possible to create a political space compressing the colonial and post-colonial phases into one, thereby also enabling us to express the dynamics of power relations.

With our interpretation of 'black subjectivity' and 'freedom' in the Indian context and the intention of staging *A Tempest* in a way that could give the audience an opportunity to raise questions and engage in a political debate on the diversified and hierarchical nature of Indian society, it was a crucial task to create the specificities of the 'third space', in Bhabha's sense of the word. 'The act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the you designated in the statement,' Bhabha states. 'The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a "third space." '[29]

Creating the 'Third Space'

In order to develop a 'third space', the traditional ritualistic performance matrix of *Ram Lila,* which is based on the Indian epic Ramayana, was explored. Among the various traditional performance types, *Ram Lila* was considered of particular interest due to its performance model, especially its 'heterotopian' space concept and its democratic characteristics, including the relationship between performers and audience. It is a community-based performance in which performers and spectators interact in an open-air space.

For our purpose, three major characteristics were considered relevant: the overall space to be open-air, with no fixed physical boundaries, and to contain several scattered spaces; there is to be no borderline between performers and audience, and always close

physical proximity between performers and audience, to allow for movement between different spaces according to the content of the episode in the performance, enabling frequent interaction between performers and audience; and that the performance should be initiated and owned by the community. It can be argued that the broader category of *Lila* is a democratic process and that was one major concern in our work, in contrast to the typical Western performance matrix. As Anuradha Kapur argues, '*Lila* in performance says something to us about ourselves.'[30]

On the basis of our previous decision to stage the play in a non-conventional theatrical place within the university campus and with the notion of a creating a 'third' or 'liminal' space, I had several sessions with the designers in order to determine the qualities of the site to be selected.[31] Clearly, this had to be suitable for serving as an approximation of both 'mythical' and 'real' on a contemporary socio-political axis in India as well as for the politics of mimic representation. David W. Hart describes 'colonial mimicry' as

a consequence of the desire of the colonized to be like the colonizer, through the power of decades and sometimes centuries of violence and cultural conditioning that enables imperial cultural hegemony.[32]

When linking the artistic space to the sociological space, we had to plunge into several questions. How to create a sociological space that could motivate the audience so that they could recollect and reinvestigate their own incomprehensible worlds? How was the artistic space to help them connect with their fragmentary spaces, time, and history as well as with the colonial decomposed mind and body? How would Césaire's visual poetics, encompassing several spaces in one theatrical place, be represented? How could we combine our time and history within the heterotopic space through the process of 'homeomorphism'?[33]

With regard to distributing such spaces, we found support in Michel Foucault's concept of 'heterotopology', which is a kind of contestation of 'both [the] mythical and real

of the space in which we live',[34] which thus reflects the coexistence of several incompatible spaces within a particular socio-political sphere.

In order to combine Césaire's *A Tempest* with the spatiotemporal narrative of post-independent India through a political dimension of the performance, it was crucial to maintain their parallel socio-political positions. The basic task was how, through imaginary surrounding heterotopia spaces, to ensure that the howling absurdity and madness of contemporary 'India's world' corresponded to the strands in *A Tempest*.

The 'Island' – from the Caribbean to India

The challenge was to figure out how such a psycho-physiographic condition could be created when the text was moved from the Caribbean to India through a transformative journey. What kind of imaginary spaces did Césaire portray in his corpus, and how could these be reflected in our performance spaces? How to combine these two spaces in order to create a 'third space'? In the search for the answer, Cathy Turner's political question about site-specific performances was crucial, including the distinction between 'what is "of" the site and what is brought "to" it'.[35]

We had intensive discussions in developing the ideas regarding the image of 'the island' in connection with our actual theatrical place. How could 'real' and 'not-real' and 'place' and 'no-place' be portrayed through visual non-sequiturs? How could we create such an ambiguous picture that the audience was able to interpret and connect every metaphor, symbol, and image on the basis of their own experiences and imagination? Thus the central question was what the performance place of the imaginary 'island' should look like. It is all about double images, which is also the core of the utopian performance realm in India.

The starting point for developing double images was Miranda's asking in *A Tempest*: 'Is our island a prison or a hermitage?'[36] This question brought us into discussions about how aspects of physical isolation in India's socio-political fabric could be reflected in the

Figure 1: The heterotopian performance space of *A Tempest*. The rock garden. Photo: K. R. Vinayah.

performance spaces. In the process of re-creating the image, Jan Kott's statement came to mind: 'The history of mankind is madness, but in order to expose it, one has to perform it out on a desert island.'[37]

This led us in the direction of what I term 'the imagination of the unimaginable'. How could we create a surreal image, a quasi-mysterious diabolic desert island? What was to be the closest representation of Prospero's firmly ruled colonialized land? We found that the madness of destruction, blood, and massacre of the Prospero–Caliban myth is akin to the concept of 'theatre of war' that Arundhati Roy has used to describe present conflicts between the oppressor and the oppressed in India.[38]

The next step was to select the actual performance site, a site that could embed all our concerns and at the same time contain the flexibility to control, transform, and distribute the spaces according to the performativity of the whole. Therefore it was imperative to create a condition where several incompatible spaces would co-exist in a single performance place, in line with the 'heterotopic' space concept. The designers

and I ended up with the rock garden, which is located between the North and South campuses of Hyderabad University, itself a 'placeless place'.[39] (See Figure 1, above.)

The 'Placeless Place'

The whole area is of around six acres of high and low ubiquitous rocky lands, surrounded by dense forest and bushes. At the ground level of the rock hill there is a shallow stream, a space of mire. The rock hill is barren and expressive of emptiness. On the top of the hill there is a lonely, naked umbrella-shaped tree, its branches clustering like a spread eagle, and which suggested the tree in which Ariel was imprisoned by Sycorax in the textual body.

By nature, it is magical and enigmatic. The landscape is like a dreamlike fantasy world, which I considered as a beauty of imperfection with an irregular rustic contour. Such a theatrical cartography was perfect for my intention to create a democratic and temporalized new performance space in which spectators could identify their own displacement. It can be considered as a

'politics of space', and so connected to the 'psychophysical' paradigm.[40]

I called the rest of the team members to visit the selected performance site. They were shocked and unhappy on seeing it. They were unwilling to work in this shabby, squalid public place. True, in the daytime it was used as a garbage dump and at night was occupied by junkies. It was argued that the place itself is a 'crisis heterotopia' within the 'heterotopology' of Hyderabad University campus. I stressed that the place was suitable for creating a multiple vision in line with my conception of 'politics in aesthetics' – a close reflection of Foucault's concept of 'different spaces':

The present age may be the age of space instead. We are in era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far of the side-by-side, of the scattered.[41]

I spent much time elaborating on the relevance of the site and its different spaces and on how the site itself, reflecting the text, was suitable for our intended democratic mode of performance. It was a struggle to convince and motivate the team members. Also the administration of the university had to be convinced about so unconventional a theatrical place.

Negotiations and Adjustments

After the performance site had been decided, we moved through the dynamic process of 'autopoiesis' in order to create the 'third space'.[42] With the new awareness of a specific performance site, the team members were encouraged to re-read and analyze *A Tempest* and to define the meaning of the text within their individual context as well as to figure out how their self-transfigurative materials and thoughts could be applied within the imaginative performance space. With Homi Bhaba's reminder that 'meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent', I gave the team room to be creative and innovative rather than copying others: 'They are now free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference.' [43]

At the beginning of this phase, the level of tension among the team members was still quite high. My assistant director, Akshat Arora from the Theatre Department, had an important role in reducing the tension by conducting comprehensive and interactive theoretical discussions on the basis of the text. These explored its meta-meanings and worked on contextualizing the text. Step by step the actors became customized and faithful to their work, and free of prejudice. As they excavated the text, they identified an endless series of colonial and post-colonial mirror images, not least through a parallel rereading and reinvestigation of the texts by William Shakespeare and Aimé Césaire. It was remarkable to see how they themselves finally recognized that the selected performance site was appropriate for making *A Tempest* a production that could focus on the contemporary socio-political configuration in India.

Before entering into the selected performance site, intensive physical exercises were crucial in preparing and developing the body and mind of the actors. The aim of this process was to make them spirited, flexible, and personalized for work in the rock garden. The central task was to strengthen the energy of the actors so that they would be fit to work in an enormous and unaccustomed performance place and its different spaces with the help of a biofeedback system. This had initially been practised by the yogi and subsequently further developed for the training of actors in Indian traditional theatrical forms such as *Kutiyattam*. It is a training process for self-regulation that involves the concept of body and mind integration in conjunction with space. Self-control is at the core of the system, and it gives support to the actors to create self-conditioning, self-consciousness, and self-regulation. (See Figure 2, opposite.)

There were two purposes of the training process. The first was to prepare the body and the mind conjointly in imaginative, creative, and intuitive ways for the use of specific imagery, objects, and materials within the physical surroundings. The second was to catalyze energy for action. The pro-

Figure 2: Body and mind integration in conjunction with space. Photo: K. R. Vinayah.

cess consisted of three progressive steps forming a transitory pathway. The aim was to create transmutable positions; to produce and develop a supplementary energy level, beyond the normal energy level of the actors; to contain the supplementary energy and incorporate it into the body and the mind; and to convert the psychophysiological condition into the physiographical spaces.

Besides working with the actors, I worked with the designers on the performance place in order to distribute spaces in accordance with our politico-artistic mode of operation. We wanted to keep the space open and naked without major modifications of its natural characteristics. The first task was to define the placement of actors and audience within the huge site in a way that was close to the *Ram Lila*. In this regard, the major challenge was to connect the several highly diverse spaces into a single performance place so that the actors could move freely between the spaces according to the line of the action.

Likewise, it was necessary to ensure that there was no physical obstacle between per-

formers and spectators so that they were free to form a short-lived community according to the development of the performance. For this purpose we did not want any permanent seating arrangement, except for a few chairs for senior citizens of the community. The intention was thus to create a festive atmosphere or 'artistic pilgrimage'.[44]

The Transformational Potential

The core of the conceptual framework for such a process is to create a total performance. In my view, this is an 'alchemical' process with deformation and transformation between body and space the central element, rather than merely transgression of the myth or poetics. It is like a magic game of transformations through the process of negotiations between actors, spaces, and spectators within the sociological space. This concept is very close to Max Reinhardt's idea the 'Theatre of the Five Thousand'. The core element of Reinhardt's idea was to bring together different rhythmic scores within a space. Erika Fischer-Lichte describes it thus:

Figure 3: Successful outcome of the 'caterpillar transformative game', as represented by Caliban.
Photo: K. R. Vinayah.

The performance is carried out as a mutual resonance between the rhythm of the actors and spectators and, in this sense, as a physical interaction between actors and spectators. It is rhythm which opens up the transformational potential and forms a community out of actors and spectators.[45]

The rhythm changes between self-transformation and mutual transformation, which implies transformations between micro and macro sociological levels. Fanon describes the transformative potential of the process: 'The colonized subject discovers reality and transforms it through his praxis, his deployment of violence and agenda for liberation.'[46]

My reading is that the world of *A Tempest* is all about transformations between self and surroundings characterized by dominance, hegemony, opposition, and negotiation. It is also interesting to observe that the four elements – earth, water, fire, and air – are recurring metaphors and images throughout the textual body and spaces. This inspired me to focus on fluidity when attuning the bodies and minds of the actors to the performance spaces. (See Figure 3, above.)

In order to make such a condition, we had to negotiate with the diverse spaces of the rock garden. For this purpose, I created a theatrical game which I called the 'caterpillar transformative game', to adjust body, emotions, and mind to the different layers of the existing physical spaces.[47] The transformative journey of the actors is a dialectic process of erasing and creating, like a *tabula rasa*. Transposition is the core of this performance process, which consists of three stages of progression: transmutation, transformation, and transfiguration.

Transmutation The actors become conscious about their self and understand how to modify and reshape the existing selfhood through the power of mind and emotion so that the psychophysical material forces can be developed. This is a locomotive process whereby the act or power of moving from place to place happens without following any particular direction or focal point. The process resembles the energy flows of the caterpillar, completely absorbed in what it does.

Transformation In this phase, the actors move towards understanding the inner self and developing perceptions, building on their transmuted self. It is a self-parabolic trajectory movement through which the

transmuted body is remodelled into another nature, substance, and condition – a neutralizing process within the realm of space and time, from 'having' to 'being'.

Transfiguration The final phase is about 'self-actualization' and consists of reconstruction and adaptation of self into 'creative self'.[48] Through this process, the actors move into the different layers of fictional (imaginary) body and spaces. The notion of the final phase is thus to elevate the bodies, minds. and emotions of the actors into a higher level of consciousness through a conditional reflexive mode.

Variance, variation, and variety are the crux of the whole process in order to ensure that the actors can move consciously in and between any regular and irregular conditions within the topology of our performance space. There are frequent dialectical changes between 'real' and 'not-real', which can be perceived collectively by performers and spectators. The chemistry of this transformative process is collective, so as to create the living momentum of the performance. According to Jill Dolan, 'The synergy of the actor's embodiment and the spectator's willing imagination creates possibility, the potential for new understanding and insight charged by the necessity of intersubjectivity.'[49]

The Audience Reception

From the beginning of the work process, my intention was to create the performance explicitly for the Hyderabad University community and the neighbouring village people. On the day of the premiere, however, unexpectedly many spectators were from various states of India as well as from other South Asian countries, Europe, and the USA. Most of them were theatre academicians and practitioners; and every performance day, there were thousands of spectators. There was a queue outside the rock garden hours before the show time. The local audience consisted mainly of faculty, students, administrative personnel, and employees from different sections of the university, but there were also people from the neighbouring villages.

Several questions were important. Why were people so interested in seeing the performance, and why were they so enthusiastic? Was it due to the alternative performance place or to the fact that this was the first time that a 'postcolonial revision' of *The Tempest* had been staged in India? Or was it the reflexive mode of the performance? Could the reason be the demystification of the anticolonial revolutionary history of India and its iconic signifier, Mahatma Gandhi? I was particularly interested in understanding how the deconstruction of the archetypes of India's politico-myth according to the existing socio-political contexts was received: 'Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message.'[50]

After the premiere, the Indian theatre director and scholar Anuradha Kapur came to me and said: 'It is an absolutely fascinating performance but I am not convinced about your decoding processes,' which I understood as the decoding of the anticolonial political history.

When she left I continued to think about the binomial nature of what she had said: 'absolutely fascinating', but 'not convinced about your decoding processes'. Why did she say both at once? Was it due to inappropriate 'procedural authorship' or to misapprehension of the process of denaturalization of the political history of India?[51] Was the problem one of Césaire's poetics in the present context of 'India's world'? After a while I got a clue as to how to open the 'dialectical knot' – the reference to Gandhi in relation to Ariel and the scene where Ariel was transformed into Gandhi after receiving his freedom from Prospero. The Gandhi-turned-Ariel moves away, singing his iconic hymn:

Vaishnov Jan to taynay kahyeeye
Jay peerh paraaye janneyray
Par dukkhey upkar karey teeyey,
man abhiman na anney ray.

[A godlike man is one,
Who feels another's pain
Who shares another's sorrow,
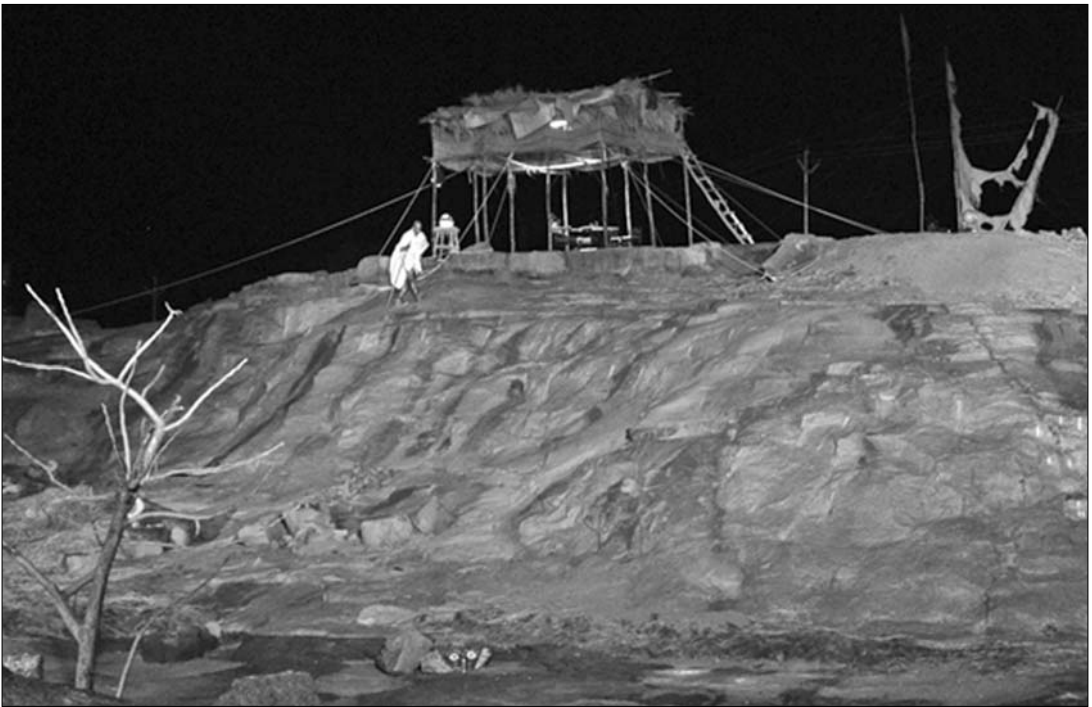And pride does disdain.][52]

Figure 4: Breaking conventional anti-colonial myth. Photo: K. R. Vinayah.

However, the previous condition between the oppressors and the oppressed remained. Immediately after the departure of Ariel-Gandhi, Prospero and Caliban violently confront each other:

PROSPERO: Caliban, it's you and me!
　　I will answer your violence with violence. . . .
　　I shall stand firm. . . .
　　I shall not let my work perish! (*Shouting*.)
　　I shall protect civilization!
　　　　He fires in all directions.
　　You and me. You–me . . . me–you!
　　What in the hell is he up to?
　　　　(*Shouting*.) Caliban!

In the distance, above the sound of the surf and the chirping of birds, we hear snatches of Caliban's song.

CALIBAN (*starts singing and playing drum*):
　　Freedom Hi-Day, Freedom Hi-Day![53]

After the Performance

Considering the response of the broader audience, I noticed that they were observing the performance very closely. I found that their physical expressions were tense, horrified, frenzied, anxious, and shocked. They appeared to be in a breathtaking situation due to the disturbing and intense characteristics of the production and the hyper-physicality, motion, and movement of the actors. However, the expected spontaneous verbal reactions from the audience during the performance did not occur. The interactions between the audience and the actors came only after the performance was over, when after the shows there were debates among members of the audience. Moreover, informal discussions continued on the campus while discussions also took place in a more formal setting in the classrooms of the university.

Thus, my intention to create a synergetic performance mode through direct communication between the actors and the audience did not work because the communication process turned out to be indirect or parabolic. In my view, the main reason was the particular and unexpected political notion of the play, implying that the conventional anti-colonial myth was broken so that common conceptions were challenged. My argument, therefore, is that the notion of synergetic

performance is applicable only under certain circumstances. The assumption is that direct communication between actors and audience will only take place when the spectators know the story and action line and they are 'programmed' to respond, as in traditional ritualistic types of performances with stock characters, as in *Ram Lila* and other modes of traditional performances.

Immediate reactions during performances might also be expected in the case of explicit, social, issue-based plays within the frame of theatre for development. When conventions are broken and new political myths are created out of established ones, spectators will normally need time to reflect on the content of the performance and its relevance to them. This is in line with Kierkegaard's argument that 'all communication of capability is indirect communication'.[54] As Thomas C. Oden further elaborates:

Parabolic communication starts with commonly experienced images presented in the form of a narrative, allowing the readers to compare that story with their own perceptions.[55]

The parabolic communication process implied that the spectators themselves created arenas for exchange. An interesting feature was that groups of spectators turned into political crowds and demonstrators. Clearly, the 'double reflection' in the performance of the pre- and post-colonial political anatomy of 'India's world' was understood differently by the different segments of the audience. They were giving their own views on the basis of their personal self-experience and self-understanding of 'India's world'. The discussions turned into a game between 'self' and 'inter-subjectivity'. As Bourriaud claims,

The role of art works is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist.[56]

The performance of *A Tempest* gave an opportunity to the audience to raise multifarious questions about 'India's world' in terms of freedom in its sociocultural-political

Figure 5: A symbolic representation of the postcolonial topography. Photo: K R. Vinayah.

hetero-topography, based on 'differences within'. It was not surprising, then, that the response of the spectators was enigmatic, depending on their respective status and position within the composite Indian social structure and their political and religious values, as well as on the different horizons and subjectivity of individual spectators.

Dalit colleagues and students at the University of Hyderabad arranged a reception party in my honour. It was a closed party with only members of their own communities invited, and took place in the middle of the night beside the lake on the campus. The discussions focused on several issues related to neo-colonial paternalism in India parallel to the Prospero–Caliban myth: crisis of identity, conflict between oppressor and oppressed, violence, torture, and conspiracy. The performance of *A Tempest* was considered a 'voice of the voiceless'. The party ended with a song in their own language, with the following meaning:

Prohibited from eating with members of other castes

Prohibited from marrying members of other castes

Separate glasses for Dalits in village tea stalls

Discriminatory seating arrangements and separate utensils in restaurants

Segregation in seating and food arrangements in village functions and festivals

Prohibited from entering into village temples

Prohibited from wearing sandals or holding umbrellas in front of dominant caste members

Devadasi system – the ritualized temple prostitution of Dalit women

Prohibited from riding a bicycle inside the village

Prohibited from using common village paths

Separate burial grounds

No access to village public properties and resources

Segregation of Dalit children in schools

Sub-standard wages

Bonded labour

Forced to vote or not to vote for certain candidates during elections

Prohibited from hoisting the national flag during Independence or Republic days.

Notes and References

1. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 43.

2. The full production *A Tempest* may be viewed at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzYOnRde1pw>.

3. 'Negritude' is a literary and ideological philosophy, developed by francophone African intellectuals, writers, and politicians in France during the 1930s. The core of the concept was a common racial identity for black Africans worldwide.

4. Robert Eric Livingston, 'Decolonizing the Theatre: Césaire, Serreau, and the Drama of Negritude', in J. Ellen Gainor, ed., *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama, and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 192.

5. The term 'transculturation' was coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1947 to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures.

6. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 129.

7. Pier Paolo Frassinelli, 'Shakespeare and Transculturation: Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*', in Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, ed., *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), p. 181.

8. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), p. 222.

9. Michel Foucault, 'Different Spaces', in James D. Faubion, ed., *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, trans. Robert Hurley *et al.* (New York: New Press, 1998), p. 179.

10. Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: TCG Translations, 2002), p. 66.

11. Robin D. G. Kelley, 'Poetry and the Political Imagination: Aimé Césaire, Negritude, and the Applications of Surrealism', in *A Tempest*, trans. Miller, p. vii.

12. Ibid., p. xi.

13. The term 'India's world' has been taken from *India's World: the Politics of Creativity in a Globalized Society,* ed. Arjun Appadurai and Arien Mack (New Delhi: Rain Tree, 2012).

14. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 15.

15. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 54.

16. Several terms have been used for people who, by birth, are considered impure and hence 'untouchable' according to the Hindu caste system. They are excluded from the fourfold Varna system. 'Dalit' is the self-chosen political term, popularized by the economist and reformer B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), and it is now in common use. Another political term is 'Harijan' ('Child of God/Hari' – that is, Vishnu), coined by the Gujarati religious guru and poet Narasimha Mehta and popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi considered them as the fifth Varna ('Panchama'). A traditional term is 'outcast', that is 'with whom no one will eat and from whom no one will accept water'. For further reading, see Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p. 173–99. The tribal people of India are non-Hindu, traditionally with an animistic world view, and have been described by various terms such as 'Adivasi', 'Vanavasi', 'Vanyajati', 'Adimjati', 'Girijan', and 'Pahari'.

17. Incidents are reported in Indian newspapers almost daily. For example: 'Dalit boy beaten to death for plucking flowers'; 'Dalit tortured by cops for three days'; 'Dalit "witch" paraded naked in Bihar'; 'Dalit killed in lock-up at Kurnool'; 'Dalits burnt alive in caste

clash'; 'Dalits lynched in Haryana'; 'Dalit woman gang-raped, paraded naked'; 'Police egged on mob to lynch Dalits'; 'Gujarat: seven of Dalit family beaten up for skinning dead cow'.

18. Smita Narula, quoted in *National Geographic News*, 2 June 2013. Available at < www.hrw.org>; accessed 10 October 2016. Narula is a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch and author of *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's 'Untouchables'* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

19. Subonglemba Aier, 'Tribal Discrimination: a Moral Analysis', *Indian Journal of Research*, II, No. 8 (August 2013), p. 216–17, available at: <www.world widejournals.com/paripex/viewinhtml.php?val=MTU yMA==&b1=Subonglemba%252520Aier&k=Subongle mba%252520Aier>, accessed 6 October 2016.

20. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), p. 161.

21. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), p. 116.

22. Ibid., p. 69.

23. Livingston, 'Decolonizing the Theatre', p. 183.

24. The term 'imperishable Empire of Shakespeare' was used by C. D. Narasimhaiah, member of the Indian Academy, in 1964.

25. Parmita Kapadia, 'Jatra Shakespeare: Indigenous Indian Theatre and the Postcolonial Stage', in Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, ed., *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 93.

26. Ibid.

27. The Dramatic Performances Act was introduced in India by the British Raj in 1876 as a reaction to the increasing practice of using theatre as a tool of protest against the oppressive nature of colonial rule. The act was not repealed after India's independence in 1947, and most states have introduced their own versions with certain amendments that have often tightened the control of the administration over the theatre.

28. Foucault, 'Different Spaces', p. 181.

29. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, p. 53.

30. Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods: the Ramlila at Ramnagar* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1990), p. 1.

31. The designers were all from the Theatre and Fine Arts Departments of Hyderabad University, including Rahul Kanthanya and Dharmendu Prasad, who were the main forces behind the work.

32. David W. Hart, 'Making a Mockery of Mimicry: Salman Rushdi's *Shame*', *Postcolonial Text*, IV, No 4 (2008), p. 7.

33. 'Homeomorphism' is a continuous stretching and bending of the object into a new shape.

34. Foucault, 'Different Spaces', p. 179.

35. Cathy Turner, 'Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance', *New Theatre Quarterly*, XX, No.4 (November 2004), p. 374.

36. Césaire, *A Tempest*, p. 13.

37. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 253.

38. Arundhati Roy, *Walking with the Comrades* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 3.

39. The term is from the Japanese philosophy of 'no mind' (*Mushin*) which encompasses the concept of non-attachment but carries a sense of fully existing within.

40. The German physicist and philosopher Gustav Theodor Fechner coined the term 'psychophysics' in 1860. He aimed at developing a method that relates matter to the mind, connecting the observable world and a person's own experience.

41. Foucault, 'Different Spaces', p. 175.

42. The term was initially coined by the Chilean cognitive biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, who described the self-generatinge process of living systems. Erika Fischer-Lichte used it as an 'auto-poietic feedback loop' within the realm of the aesthetic of the performative. The feedback loop is understood as a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process emerging as the defining principle of theatrical work.

43. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, p. 53, 55.

44. The term was used by Anuradha Kapur to describe performers and spectators being part of a seamless ceremony.

45. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 57.

46. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 21.

47. Resembling a transfiguration of the caterpillar into a free-flying butterfly.

48. 'Self-actualization' is a term that has been used in various theories in the field of psychology. It was originally introduced by the organismic theorist Kurt Goldstein to describe realizing one's full potential.

49. Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 97.

50. Roland Barthes, *Mythology*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), p. 1.

51. Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 24.

52. The song was translated by Khushwant Singh, Indian novelist, lawyer, journalist, and politician. *Vaishnav Jan to Tene Kahiye* was one of Gandhi's favourite *bhajans* (spiritual songs). It was written by Narsinh Mehta, a saint-poet of fifteenth-century Gujarat. The text of the song carries a potent message of empathy, humility, truth, equality, and spirituality which could equally be a message for everyone in present times of intolerance, hatred, and self-aggrandizement.

53. Césaire, *A Tempest*, p. 65–6.

54. Cited in Thomas C. Oden, ed., *Parables of Kierkegaard* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. xv.

55. Ibid., p. xii.

56. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presse du Réel, 1998), p. 13.