

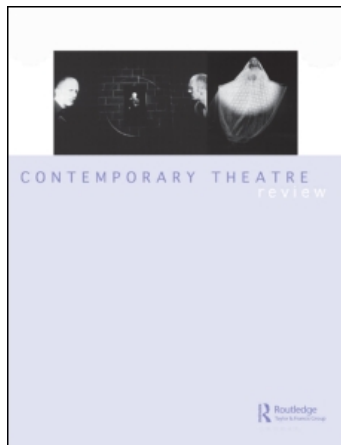
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Binglishing Britain: Tara Arts: *Journey to the West Trilogy*

Dominic Hingorani

In the following three boxes is a brief synopsis of the three parts of the *Journey to the West Trilogy* that are referred to in the main body of the article.

The roots, or more appropriately routes, of Tara Arts' 25th Anniversary Trilogy *Journey to the West* (2002) could be said to lie with Jatinder Verma's journey from Kenya to England aged 14, on Valentine's Day 1968. The rising level of Kenyan Asian immigration to Britain at that time had been triggered by the increasingly restrictive 'Africanisation' policies that came into force against those Asians unwilling to take up Kenyan citizenship after Kenya gained independence from British rule on 12 December 1963. In Britain, Enoch Powell's dire warnings of 'a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre'¹ symbolised the apocalyptic tone of the 'non-white' immigration debate. The Labour government's Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 was passed in just three days and 'had the effect of treating Kenyan Asians with valid British passports as "aliens"'.²

In the light of this, it is fittingly ironic that the work of Tara Arts over its 25-year history has indeed been purposefully incendiary in its desire to contest and even recast the borders of the British nation, as well as British theatre practice. Tara's determination to 'look at Britain through the eyes of migrants'³ has situated their work aggressively on the margins or borders of the discourse of the nation. In these terms, I would argue that the work of Tara Arts and *The Journey to the West Trilogy* in particular provide a counter-narrative located in the performative moment of the nation that in Bhabha's work 'disrupts the signification of the people as homogenous'⁴ and results in the nation being 'marked by discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference'.⁵

The *Journey to the West Trilogy* (from here the *JTW Trilogy*) maps an Indian diaspora to Kenya and Britain over the course of the last century. *Part I* follows the 32,000 Indian workers who were transported

1. Enoch Powell, Conservative Party Front Bench Spokesman on Defence, 'Rivers of blood' speech on 20 April 1968 in Birmingham reported in *Sunday Times*, 'Explosive race speech by Powell' (21 April 1968), pp. 1–2.
2. R. Jones and W. Gnanapala, *Ethnic Minorities in English Law* (Stoke-On-Trent: Trentham Books, 2000), p. 15.
3. Jatinder Verma in an interview with Majudar Krishnendu, 'Killing that set off a career in the theatre' *The Mauri Asian Post*, (April 1998), p. 10.
4. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 148.
5. *Ibid.*

to Kenya at the turn of the last century to work as indentured labour for the British to build the East Africa Railway. *Part II* is focused around the experience shared by Jatinder Verma of the Kenyan Asian 'exodus' to Britain in 1968, while *Part III* interrogates a hybrid British Asian identity in contemporary Britain in the light of this diaspora. While the postcolonial provenance of the *JTW Trilogy* is in part a straightforward attempt to recover and make visible an Asian history overwritten by and inextricably linked with colonial power, it also attempts to give agency to a subaltern Asian voice through the methodology that underpins the theatrical realisation of the work.

The *JTW Trilogy* signalled a change of emphasis for Tara Arts as they focused on re-connecting with the Asian community from which they had sprung in 1977. Perhaps a tacit admission that while Tara Arts had

Journey To The West Part I

Dhows, Deserts and Dirty Tricks 1896 – 1901



The workers' journey from India to Africa on the dhow. (© Stephen Vaughan 2002)

In desperation, Fateh, a Sikh from the Punjab, leaves his famine struck home and accepts an offer of work from the British colonial power. He is employed as indentured labour and transported to East Africa to build a railway covering 581 miles from Mombassa to Lake Victoria. In return for this labour, he and the other 32,000 workers are promised five acres of the land. Almost 2,500 workers were killed during the construction of the railway and *Part I* makes visible the colonial exploitation by the British who callously refused to honour their land promise after the work was completed. *Part I* also celebrates the pioneering spirit of these Asian workers, exemplified in Fateh, who 'wants to climb mountains' and their tenacity in the face of disease, man eating lions and attacks from the indigenous population. In contrast to a more rigidly stratified and differentiated life in India, *Part I* marks a more socially inclusive approach to caste and religion as a result of the diaspora.

Fateh, although still married, forms a relationship with Majisa, a Massai tribeswoman. Tragedy strikes as Majisa is murdered but *Part I* ends on an optimistic note as Fateh finds a baby abandoned at the end of the railway tracks. He adopts the baby and names it Kala Singha (Black Lion), who 'born on the waters between India and Africa' symbolises the racial ambivalence and irreducible hybridity of the Asian identity as a result of diaspora.

6. Iqbal Hussein, *I Will Be A Text*
 [Dramaturgical notes]
 Tara Arts Archive
 [TAA] Trilogy
 Background Files, ref#
 TB28, p. 1.

found critical acclaim and a mainstream profile at the Royal National Theatre in the early 1990s with shows such as *Tartuffe* and *The Little Clay Cart*, they had lost touch with and indeed, failed to carry with them their constituent Asian audience. For Jatinder Verma 'the project was about artistically rebuilding a bridge with the Asian community'⁶ and this was to be achieved methodologically by going out and interviewing members of the community and documenting the stories of their experience of living in and then leaving Kenya in the 1960s as source material for the performance.

It should be remembered that when work began in 1997, the only strand of the *JTW Trilogy* decided was *Exodus*, which examined the Kenyan Asian migration to Britain in 1968. This was to be performed in 1998 at Battersea Arts Centre to mark the 30th anniversary of that

Journey To The West Part II

Rifts, Refugees and Rivers Of Blood - 1968



The chorus of Asian women washing saris in Kenya. (© Stephen Vaughan 2002)

Part II opens in post independence Kenya and is centred on the friendship of three teenagers; Rangit, Sita, and Liaquat who are descendants of the workers of *Part I*. Their romantic entanglements in *Part II* mirror those of Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Nargis in the popular Bollywood films of the 1960s. The religious plurality and almost idyllic cohesion of the Asian community in Kenya suggested in *Part I* is continued and symbolised in *Part II* through the close friendship between Sikh, Hindu and Muslim. However, *Part II* also depicts the rising animosity of the African people to the insularity of the Asian community who 'live in Muindi (Asian) areas, love within Muindi homes...watch their films in Muindi cinema's'.

The play then shifts to Britain as Rangit, Liaquat and Sita arrive as part of the Asian 'Exodus' in order to beat the impending legislative deadline restricting Kenyan Asian immigration. Rangit takes a job on London Underground, continuing the journey motif, where he encounters racism from his white colleagues. As Rangit's mother, Daljeet, forms a Union we also see the increasing politicisation of the Asian community in the face of oppression; the play draws on the actual Grunwick dispute of 1976. As the old ties between the three friends and those of the Kenyan Asian community start to fragment, Rangit strikes up a friendship with a white girl called Helen. This relationship meets resistance from Rangit's own community as well as outright hostility from her family who warn him to 'get his wog hands off her'. This warning goes unheeded and results in Rangit being stabbed to death in a racist attack at the end of the play. This echoes the killing of Gurdeep Singh Chaggar in Southall in 1976 by white youths; this murder was the catalyst that led to the formation of Tara Arts.

Bhangra, Bollywood and British Bulldog - 2002

Kamaal listening to stories of the Asian diaspora on his Grandfather's lap. From a production of Revelations that became JTW Part III. (© Nick White 2001)

The genealogical narrative link continues in *Part III* as the protagonist, Kamaal, is the son of a Hindu mother, Sita, and Muslim father, Liaquat, whom we met in *Part II*. We follow Kamaal on his journey, by road this time, to scatter his grandfather's ashes at Hadrian's Wall on the border of Scotland and England. This is a metaphorical as well as literal journey on which Kamaal attempts to reconcile his desire to 'belong...in a team, a group, a gang, a tribe' with his hybrid Asian identity that makes him 'part Hindu part Muslim, part Indian, part Pakistani, part African, part English.' This contemporary strand of *The Trilogy* addresses the fragmentation of the Asian community in which 'our own radio stations have banned the word Asian from the airwaves so you're either Hindu Muslim or Sikh', which in *Part I* and *Part II* had signified cohesion.

The journey takes Kamaal through three fictional places. The first, Caxton Gibbet, symbolises the notion of a disavowed Asian identity. Kamaal's guide there, Alhar, advocates a path of cultural assimilation that Kamaal rejects in the light of his own Muslim heritage. His next stop is ColeyBingham, 'the free Islamic state of Coventry, Leicester and Birmingham', which advocates a separatist stance justified by the racism faced by the Asian community. Kamaal again moves on, as this would mean denying his Hindu identity. A mystical encounter with a roadside cook reminds Kamaal that the identity that unites us all is that of a shared diasporic origin from Africa which will 'allow us to rise over the closet of nations'. Kamaal finally reaches Hadrian's Wall, a tangible reminder of England as a once colonised nation as well as coloniser. As Kamaal scatters his grandfather's ashes he determines to accept and celebrate his hybrid identity as he determines to 'make this England, our England, full of all your long journey's West'.

event. However, as the relationship between Tara Arts and the interviewees developed, the decision was taken to focus the *JTW Trilogy* solely on the East African diaspora.

In order for that initial contact to be made in 1977 invitations were circulated in Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati to a range of societies and meeting places in London, Leicester, Birmingham and beyond. Those who came forward for interview were recorded on digital video and transcripts were made with the emphasis on getting as much detail of life in Kenya as possible: schooling, housing, entertainment, marriage as well as the relations with Whites and Africans. The leaflet circulated to prospective interviewees was overt that the final result was to be



Figure 4 The cast of the *Exodus* production with some of the interviewees at Battersea Arts Centre © Tara Arts 1998.

7. Jatinder Verma, 'Advertisement for interviewees' [TAA] Trilogy Background Files ref# TB19.
8. Ravin Ganatra, Actor, in an interview with Dominic Hingorani for Tara Arts' 25th Anniversary Report (21 April 2001), p. 3 [TAA].
9. Jatinder Verma, *Journey to the West Trilogy Part II* [TAA].

fictional rather than straightforward documentary as the 'play will be based on the stories people tell us but it will *not* feature their names'.⁷

The actors' duties included conducting the interviews; this also facilitated their process, as they were able to build characters 'based on real evidence, real research, first hand experience'.⁸ As the research developed between the interviewees and actors it became more practically interactive as they learnt skills such as making Gujarati and Punjabi rotis as well as learning nursery rhymes, card games and Swahili songs of that time. Indeed the naïve misconceptions of the Kenyan Asian immigrants to Britain dramatised in *Part II* who believe 'an underground train from Heathrow ... will take you straight to Manchester'⁹ was based on the real reminiscences of the interviewees.

While *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Revelations* (the work-in-progress titles for the three parts of the *JTW Trilogy*) played community venues and colleges as envisaged, a major shift in policy occurred in relation to the *JTW Trilogy* tour, which was to go to more high profile middle scale venues such as Contact Theatre, Manchester, Birmingham Repertory Theatre and West Yorkshire Playhouse. However, it must also be read that this change in policy successfully raised the *JTW Trilogy* profile and attracted a larger audience in a way that the 'return' to the community could not. The *JTW Trilogy* also attempted to democratise the stage through an additional innovation of a 'stage share'. Local youth groups were invited to share the stage with Tara Arts and perform a piece of their own devising, of up to 15 minutes in length, immediately prior to the main show. Outreach workers from Tara Arts oversaw these shows generating a further opportunity to achieve their goal of rebuilding links with local communities.

While the *JTW Trilogy* employed systematic documentary research it was to be devised and performed in the 'Benglish' theatre form developed by Tara Arts through the 1980s and 1990s. The aim of a Benglish performance is to 'directly challenge or provoke the dominant

10. Jatinder Verma, 'The Challenges of Bilingual: Analysing Multi-Cultural Productions', in *Analysing Performance: A Critical Reader*, ed. Patrick Campbell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 193–202 (p. 194).
11. Review in *Eastern Eye* (30 October 1998).
12. Nick Curtis, 'Making a meal of it', *Evening Standard* (26 October 1998), p. 53.
13. Hussein, *I Will Be A Text*, p. 6.
14. Verma, *Journey to the West Trilogy Part II* [TAA], p. 27.

conventions of the English stage¹⁰ by employing an anti-realist approach that draws on the second century BC Indian treatise on acting, *The Natyasastra*, as well as Indian folk theatre traditions. So it can be seen that part of Tara Arts' 'counter narrative' is within the form of the performance itself.

The Bilingual performance is constantly dismantling the borders between Asian and British, language and language, actor and musician and in the case of the *JTW Trilogy*, auditorium and front of house. Building on the front of house success of the performance of *Exodus* at Battersea Arts Centre in 1998 at which there was 'the distinct aroma of beedees and dhoop sticks ... as you are greeted with statues of Greek Gods dressed in saris and salwars',¹¹ the *JTW Trilogy* performance began as soon as the audience arrived at the theatre building and they entered the chaandi (silver) bazaar. To create the bazaar, Tara Arts invited stallholders to sell Asian fashions and crafts and had live demonstrations by rangoli and henna artists in the foyer of the theatre. Asian caterers also provided food especially tailored to provide for an audience watching all three parts of the *JTW Trilogy*, which would entail spending over seven hours in the theatre.

One problem inherent for Tara Arts in collecting such an embarrassing wealth of documentary material was evident in a criticism of the *Exodus* production at Battersea Arts Centre that 'it feels as if the story of every single one of the 150 people interviewed is being recounted'.¹² However, the *JTW Trilogy* rewritten by Jatinder Verma addressed this problem by linking the narrative thread of all three parts by an invented genealogy between the main protagonists, shifting the focus away from the particular and onto the epic.

Even so, the director was consciously on his guard in case the material gathered encouraged the actors to work in a naturalistic style rather than the epic theatre style epitomised in a Bilingual performance. To this end he insisted the actors study Valmiki's epic *The Ramayana* and *The Odyssey* 'to provide the company with another vision which contrasted with the realism of the Exodus story'.¹³ The application of this rehearsal methodology realising intertextual connections to Asian myth can be seen in *Part II* when Ranjit's mother, Daljeet, has to take a job in England and is told that for reasons of 'health and safety. No saris in the work place'.¹⁴ As the official slowly gathers in the seemingly never-ending sari the resonance of the episode in the *Mahabharata* in which Dussashan, younger brother of Duryodhana, attempted to disrobe Draupadi is clear. In the legend, Draupadi appealed to Krishna for protection and he made sure her sari did not unravel before Dussashan fell exhausted at her feet. However, with no Krishna to intervene this time, Daljeet is stripped of her sari and left standing centre stage metaphorically naked in slacks and a blouse.

The overt theatricality of the Bilingual performance is realised through the use of music, stylised movement and stage imagery as well as the text. This performance style can also utilise mask, a sutradhar (narrator), a chorus and it allows the actors to directly address the audience and play multiple characters. The provenance of Bilingual allows a theatrical exploration of a British Asian sensibility that is 'not

15. Verma 'The Challenge of Bilingual' p. 194.

16. Ibid, p. 198.

17. Jatinder Verma, in Jane Plastow, 'Jatinder Verma: Encounters with the Epic – An Interview', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 14:2 (February 2004), 82–87 (p. 84).

18. Jatinder Verma, 'The Challenge of Bilingual', p. 198.

19. Hussein, *I Will Be A Text*, p. 24.

20. Ibid, p. 24.

21. Ibid, p. 2.

quite English'¹⁵ in a British locale. I would argue that the Bilingual performance is actively playing with the creative conceptual space between the two terms, British and Asian, in order to destabilise the constructed borders of both binaries as it puts them into theatrical play.

The Bilingual text of the *JTW Trilogy* is made up of an array of languages including Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, Swahili and English, introducing the audience 'to a greater auditory experience and, by implication, challenging them'.¹⁶ In the early years of Tara Arts they performed in English but Jatinder Verma questioned this practice as 'in rehearsal ... we go between Hindi, Punjabi and whatever else *and* English, and yet why don't we bring those on stage?'¹⁷ Indeed, the political implications of Tara's theatrical employment of Asian languages because they 'form part of the linguistic map of modern Britain ... and cannot be expected to be absent from modern British theatre'¹⁸ are clear as they attempt to destabilise the dominant use of English and replace it with a hybrid form. While this hybrid linguistic confection may challenge the Asian-speaking members of the audience, it is positively provocative for the non-Asian speaker who may or may not be able to follow what is happening on the stage.

The provocative nature of the linguistic Bilingual methodology is evident from this reflection of a work-in-progress performance during which the Asian-speaking members of the audience 'understood the "in jokes" – for whom "gora khuta" (white dog) meant something'.¹⁹ The corollary to this was 'observing the non-Asian children at times I felt that they were left out, but then I thought how regularly Asians are left out of the "mainstream"'.²⁰ This deconstructive operation in the Bilingual performance purposefully gives the non-Asian language speaking audience members a powerful experiential understanding of marginalisation.

Furthermore, the actors were 'encouraged to use languages other than English which they have grown up with'²¹ in improvisations, which formed the basis of the final scripts, thus illustrating how the Bilingual process particularly draws on and utilises the cultural background of its British Asian performers as a resource and means of creativity in a way that can be methodologically incorporated into the performance only in Bilingual. As we have seen, the use of Asian languages in the Bilingual performance is therefore not only a marker of difference but also a political methodology that mobilises the performance to contest notions of centre and margin.

The *JTW Trilogy* text is certainly 'Bilingualised' to the extent that the audience hear a range of Gujarati, Punjabi and Hindi. There are many and various colloquial terms of endearment, from the honorific 'ji' to the less respectful 'paghul' (madman). Usually, however, if an Asian word is used that is crucial to the sense of a scene it is subsequently 'translated'. The following scene takes place on the dhow in *Part I* as the boy, Amar, learns of the sanitary provision on board the dhow:

MEHTA: [to AMAR] See that rope over there? Hold on to that rope and put your gaandh overboard.
 FATEH: What?
 MEHTA: Afraid?

AMAR: No!
 MEHTA: You will be when you're holding that rope and the sea rushes by under your arse!²²

22. Verma, *Journey to the West Part 1* [TAA] p. 9.

23. Terry Grimley, 'Journey through History', Review *JTW Trilogy Part I*, *Birmingham Post* (25 April 2002).

24. Jeremy Kingston, 'A Passage to India Packed with Pleasure', *The Times* (26 March 2002).

25. Verma, *Journey to the West Part I* [TAA], p. 8.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

27. M. L. Varapande, *Traditions of Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1979), p. 98.

28. Verma, *Journey to the West Part I* [TAA], p.1.

The joke is in many ways a result of the use of the colloquial word 'gaandh' but is carefully matched in the translation by a suitably colloquial use of the English 'arse'. The 'delayed' translation for the non-Asian speaker is a method utilised throughout the *JTW Trilogy* and perhaps the anxiety of one critic that he would 'have welcomed a glossary of unfamiliar terms'²³ probably reflects the discomfort of the non-Asian speaker who is slightly left behind, rather than out, of the Bilingual performance.

As I have argued, the form of the Bilingual performance is part of Tara Arts' political project to contest notions of 'Britishness' by activating a hybrid style that draws on Asian theatre forms. I will briefly examine some further performance conventions of Bilingual displayed in the *JTW Trilogy* such as the physicality of the actors, the role of the sutradhar, the chorus and the borders of performance.

The anti-realist approach of the Bilingual performance was epitomised by the actors' use of the set of seven ropes that hung down from above and were evenly spaced across the mid stage. The premium placed on the actors' physicality can be appreciated to the extent that they were taught circus skills in order that they could utilise the ropes that they 'entwined and climbed to great effect'.²⁴ The physicality of the actors is used to create stage imagery such as the dhow (Pictured Text Box *Part I*), in which they travel from India to East Africa that was made by stringing the seven ropes together. This allowed one of the actors to stand on the knot as if on the prow of the dhow suspended above the stage that then became the sea. The non-naturalistic physicality of the actors is exploited to develop the action as the dhow then moves through the water as the actors holding the other ropes simply rock in unison from side to side. This was simply, but effectively, developed so that the actors holding the ropes stamp out an increasingly high tempo rhythm while traversing the stage from side to side in order to create a storm as if the dhow is being rocked by a 'a wall of water'.²⁵

The sutradhar (narrator) whose 'breath peoples the story'²⁶ in *Part I* performs a didactic function in explaining who s/he is and what their role entails. The sutradhar in the *JTW Trilogy* follows the traditional description of the role as they speak directly to the audience and 'relate the story on stage with the help of the actors to his [rural] audience'.²⁷ The sutradhar tells a mythical story which introduces the role that the twin themes of 'taqdeer' (destiny) and 'will' play in the lives of the characters. This also serves to frame the epic factual and historical reach of the subject matter within an equally epic storytelling structure.

The Bilingual performance also destabilises the borders of performance between the actors and the musician, both spatially and functionally. The musician, who provides musical and vocal accompaniment and under-scoring throughout, is sent in *Part I* by the sutradhar to sit at the side of the stage 'to practice your singing'.²⁸ She takes her position cross-legged on the floor, a particularly Asian performance position, with the harmonium and dhol drum. The musician also plays the character of a

29. Ibid, p. 11.

30. Ibid, p. 11.

Sayyad (holy man) on the dhow who ‘wakes in the dead of the night and pours lota (pot) after lota of fresh water over his face’,²⁹ even though it is strictly rationed. When discovered, the captain threatens to throw the sayyad overboard as a punishment but is saved by a promise to ‘build for my fellows a mosque, a gurudwara, a temple, whatever people want’.³⁰ This symbolises the plurality and tolerance of the new diasporic Asian identity in contrast to life on the subcontinent.

However, rather than joining the other actors on the dhow, the musician plays the scene from her seated position down stage right. This is conventionally just off the designated acting area and hence gives the audience a more fluid and flexible understanding of the spatial, and functional, borders of performance. The theatrical freedom of this anti-realist style can then be exploited so that when the captain threatens to throw the sayyad overboard he does so by picking up the harmonium she is playing and gesturing that he will throw that rather than the musician herself.

The ability of the chorus to embody the hybrid operation of the Bilingual performance can be seen at the opening of *Part II* as the time jumps forward over 50 years through this episodic Asian grand narrative of diaspora from *Part I*. The chorus made up of Asian ‘women’, two of whom are played by men, are washing saris and as they are soaking, slapping and drying the saris a rhythm develops. They begin to sing the 1960s Bollywood hit, ‘Eena Meena Dika’ incorporating new Swahili words while doing the ‘twist’, a Western dance, dressed in saris in a dizzying display of diasporic cultural bricolage.

Underlying this hybrid Bilingual theatricality in the *JTW Trilogy* is a postcolonial approach that is unrepentantly partisan in its representation of history from the perspective of the Asian subject. In *Part I* we see the effects of white colonial oppression exemplified in the unsympathetic portrait drawn of the historical character Colonel Patterson, the white colonial overseer of the building of the railway, played with stereotypical ‘stiff upper lip’ and cut glass English accent in a pith helmet, brandishing a stick. Patterson insists on referring to the Asians working on the railway by number rather than name and even uses one of them as ‘bait’ to trap a man-eating lion in order to underline the message that ‘colonialism not only exploits but dehumanises and objectifies the colonised subject’.³¹ The performance of the *JTW Trilogy* also self reflexively demonstrates the importance of recovering and disseminating the Asian diasporic history. In *Part III* we see Kamaal as a child on his Grandfather’s knee listening to stories extolling the virtues of the East personified in Saladin and the stories of his ancestors who built the East Africa Railway which finally lead him to resist the assimilationist values espoused in Caxton Gibbet.

The anti-assimilationist stance of the *JTW Trilogy* is further dramatised in *Part II* through Ranjit’s Asian colleague on the Underground, Bob, who advises him that the best way to survive as an immigrant in Britain is to ‘bend into the wind and don’t walk against it’.³² Bob, whose real name is Bhupinder Singh, tells Ranjit that he had a ‘big bright green turban when I landed here from India . . . one week at work and on the first day off, I went straight to the barber’.³³ Obviously for Sikhs, wearing a turban and not cutting their hair is a crucial aspect

31. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 22.

32. Verma, *Journey to the West Part II* [TAA], p. 26.

33. Ibid, p. 26.

of religious observance and this shows the cultural price paid by ‘Bob’ for his ‘acceptance’. While *Part II* is sympathetic to Bhupinder’s motivation, it shows that the reality of his being ‘accepted’ by his colleagues means he must laugh while they call him ‘wog’ to his face. Indeed, theatrically the Bilingual performance is the antithesis of assimilation and acts as a model of cultural resistance by its insistence on displaying its signs of ‘Asianness’.

Furthermore, the pessimistic ending of *Part II* fatally wounds the concept of assimilation for Ranjit as it dramatises Bhabha’s assertion that ‘to be Anglicised is emphatically not to be English’.³⁴ The growing friendship between Ranjit and his white colleague Lesley operates as a symbol of a culturally hybrid future as she teaches him English slang and he translates Hindi film songs for her. After an evening out, Lesley and Ranjit are stopped by Pete, her brother, who orders Ranjit to ‘get his wog hands off her’.³⁵ When Ranjit tries to leave, Pete stabs him with a knife. The final elegiac tableau of the *JTW Part II* shows Ranjit slowly collapsing to the ground on a red carpet that has unfurled from the back of the stage. As he lies dying, snow begins to fall. This racist murder echoes the actual killing of Gurdeep Singh Chaggar in Southall in 1976 by white youths; this murder was the catalyst that led to the formation of Tara Arts as an oppositional site in order to resist racism and provide a theatrical expression for a British Asian voice.

The *JTW Trilogy* also critiques those within the Asian community as well as without it. Kamaal’s grandfather, Rafiq, whom he refers to as both Gramps and dada-jaan, supports a separatist vision of Asian identity espoused in *Part III* in ColeyBingham. However, this exclusionary construction of the Asian identity is equated in *Part II* as no better than the apartheid colonial practice of the British when ‘Patterson proclaimed the highlands white on the Mountains of the Moon’.³⁶ Indeed, Kamaal’s mother, Sita, reveals Rafiq ‘never accepted Liaquat marrying me’³⁷ because she was Hindu and he was Muslim.

The counter narrative of the *JTW Trilogy* constantly espouses a hybrid construction of identity. Fateh’s adoption of the baby, ‘Kala Singha’ (Black Lion), found at the end of the railway tracks resonates as a hybrid symbol of the Kenyan Asian diaspora through the remaining two parts of the *JTW Trilogy*. The *JTW Trilogy* addresses Kamaal’s desire ‘to belong’ in *Part III* by promulgating an overarching concept of a diasporic identity. *Parts I* and *II* have told the stories of those ‘roho tabu’ (wandering souls) who ‘lifted their feet out of their homes and now always roam’,³⁸ signified by the footprints on the *JTW Trilogy* programme and it is these people who symbolise the fluidity and hybridity of the Asian identity. An answer to the pessimism of *Part II* is provided in *Part III* by drawing on Stuart Hall’s concept of ‘cultures of hybridity’ so that Kamaal must ‘renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of “lost” cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism’³⁹ if he is to find peace at the end of his journey.

The lyrical final image of the *JTW Part III* is of Kamaal sitting high above the stage near the top of a rope picking stars from the firmament and this draws the three parts of the *Trilogy* together. As Kamaal plucks each star he reprises the lines of Fateh, Allaudin and Mehta from

34. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 87.

35. Verma, *Journey to the West Part II* [TAA], p. 48.

36. Verma, *Journey to the West Part III* [TAA], p. 20.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

39. Stuart Hall, *Modernity and its Futures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 310.

Part I so that the Bilingual performance models the postcolonial mission of *The JTW Trilogy* to recover those histories for future generations. Furthermore, Kamaal's final statement of intent to, 'make this England our England, full of all your long journeys west',⁴⁰ insists on the recognition of the Asian presence in British identity. In this way the *JTW Trilogy* provides a vital counter narrative that methodologically and theatrically is able to 'disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities'.⁴¹ After 25 years it can be seen that the radical approach of Jatinder Verma to 'confront ethnicity through drama and transcend the stultifying conventions of naturalism'⁴² evidently remains a powerful driving force behind the work of Tara Arts.

40. Verma, *Journey to the West Part III* [TAA], p. 31.

41. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 149.

42. Jatinder Verma, 'Bound by Traditions', *The Stage and Television Today* (12 April 1990), No. 5687.