The urban theatre which emerged under Anglo-European and local influences in colonial metropolises such as Calcutta and Bombay around the mid-nineteenth century marked the beginning of the ‘modern period’ in Indian theatre, distinct from classical, postclassical, and more proximate precolonial traditions. A Poetics of Modernity offers a unique selection of original, theoretically significant writings on theatre by playwrights, directors, actors, designers, activists, and policy-makers, to explore the full range of discursive positions that make these urban practitioners ‘modern’. The source-texts represent nine languages, including English, and about one-third of them have been translated into English for the first time; the volume thus retrieves a multilingual archive that so far had remained scattered in print and manuscript sources around the country. A comprehensive introduction by Dhawadker argues for historically precise definitions of theatrical modernity, situates some of its constitutive features, and connects it to the foundational theoretical principles of urban theatre practice in modern India.

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‘Modernity . . . is the appropriate inclusive category for designating those colonial and postcolonial formations in urban Indian theatre that are historically unprecedented and culturally transformative, and that bring clearly into view the new, really new theoretical preoccupations, institutional structures, and artistic practices of the post-1850 period.’

‘From the Introduction’