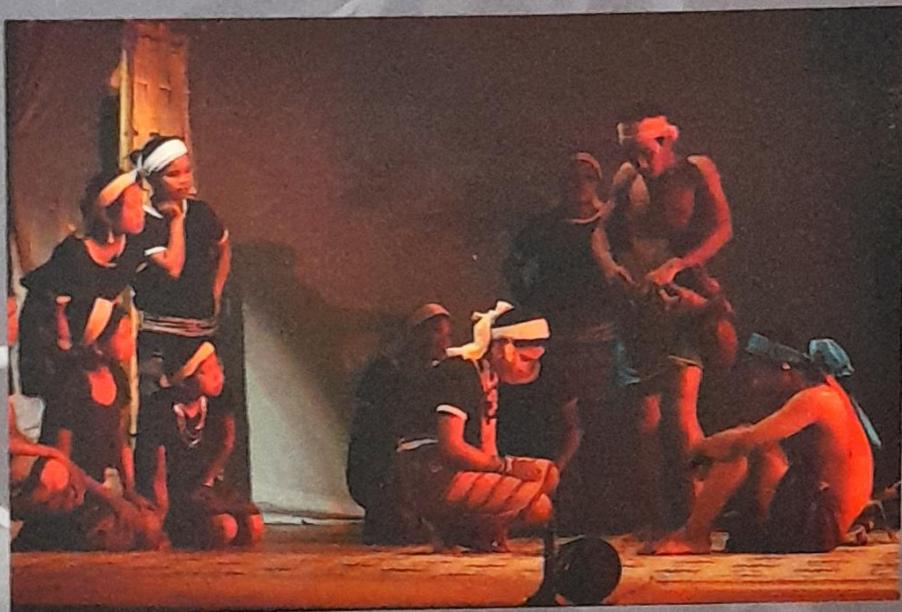


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Theatre and National Consciousness : A Study of Ngugi's Plays

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The real language of African theatre is to be found in the struggles of the oppressed, for it is out of those struggles that a new Africa is born. The peasants and workers of Africa are making a tomorrow out of the present of toil and turmoil. The authentic language of African theatre should reflect this even as it is given birth by that very toil and turmoil. Such a theatre will find response in the hearts and lives of the participants; and even in the hearts of those living outside the immediate environment of its physical being and operation.

(Thiong'o 2007: 60)

African theatre in the pre-colonial time did not take place in isolation. It functioned within the framework of ritual, religious festivals and other ceremonial activities: seasonal changes, harvesting, birth, marriage and death. Its purpose was to express the fears, hopes and wishes of the community as a whole. The plays had no proper script, no claim to authorship and sometimes not even a proper audience since the audience itself was fluid and indefinable, constantly merging with the performers. They were not performed in special buildings set aside for the purpose. Rather they were performed in the "empty space" (Thiong'o 2007: 37) among the people. "The 'empty space' among the people was part of that tradition" (Thiong'o