

**THE PLAYS OF VIJAY TENDULKAR AND GIRISH KARNAD:
CRITIQUING POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN SOCIETY**

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PREFACE

Indian drama in English and translation saw in the 1950s two playwrights shooting to fame and making a departure from the beaten track. They were Vijay Tendulkar (1928 – 2008) and Girish Karnad (1938 –). They took it upon themselves to revive Indian drama by going beyond the Arabian romances and Hindu myths staged by the Parsi theatre and the plays of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and T.P. Kailasam mostly leaning on the Western realistic plays of Shaw, Galsworthy and Ibsen. They succeeded in setting up an indigenous tradition of playwriting that sought to capture the contemporary Indian reality in conjunction with our cultural past and visions of a projected future.

The socio-cultural ferment of the country, in tandem with the global crises during the 1930s and 40s, called for changes in the aesthetic considerations of the playwrights of the time. Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), founded in 1943, advanced the initiative of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), formed in 1935, to create a "cultural awakening of the masses of India" (Dalmia 161). Reinterpreting our own cultural heritage became the way to go to the masses. After Independence, began the movement known as the 'theatre of roots' that tried to revive or adapt the Sanskrit and folk performance conventions for the modern stage. Girish Karnad stands out as the most powerful spokesperson for this new idiom of drama. There were other distinguished styles of playwriting that did not rely on 'indigenouness' and explored Western dramaturgy to relate to the local audience. Their 'anti-root' stand, however, did not ever undermine their outstanding contribution to the formation of a new Indian dramatic tradition. In fact, the co-existence of these two strands (or so to say, multiple strands) helped to enrich Indian drama after Independence in a great way. Among a host of luminaries in realistic and naturalistic genres, Vijay Tendulkar stands supreme for his sharp dialogue with reality.

While preparing a thesis on Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad, what strikes the mind foremost is their ability to negotiate the realities of the new-born nation-state and its society at multiple levels. In this respect, they prove more bold, scrutinising and insightful

than most of their contemporaries. Dramaturgically, they have nothing or little in common. Thematically as well, they independently perceive social realities. But what brings them together is their penchant for and skill of critiquing society and dispassionately exposing what is safely hidden there under norms and tradition. They seem to be relentless in their enterprise, without ever getting monotonous and didactic. Either in close-to-reality manner or in folk-mythological style, their plays draw eager reception and render the stage a space for self-examination of the urban audience. They are popular and at the same time highly thought-provoking. They smoothly talk to the audience over critical issues.

The plays of Tendulkar and Karnad seem to be sceptical of the given 'growth story' of the new-born nation. They scrutinise realities that are acknowledged and reveal that are not. The present study endeavours to examine their dramatic works in this perspective. It seeks to understand how they negotiate social realities with a view to offering an alternative/plural version of 'truth'. Critical works on Tendulkar and Karnad are on the rise, mostly in the form of essays in edited volumes or in scholarly journals. Surprisingly, the number of book-length studies on either of them is too insignificant. From the literature available on them, it can be argued that a sustained, full-length and comparative study of Karnad and Tendulkar is still awaited, even in thesis form. More importantly, not much attention has been paid to the enormous possibilities of re/reading their plays in their proper socio-historical contexts. Few scholars have adequately probed the machinations of power informing the works of Karnad and Tendulkar; or critics have barely touched upon the social, political, and cultural issues as addressed by the plays. Tendulkar's and Karnad's plays probe deep into the politics of meaning-making at multiple social and cultural levels. This probe renders their plays contextually and sub-textually significant. Therefore a critical reading of their plays is not possible without looking into the underlying dynamics of discourse, power and resistance. It would help reveal the alternative versions of realities hidden by dominant discourses and power. Further, it should reveal how their theatre is born of the society they live/d in and how it also critiques and influences that society. Hence the humble attempt.

Tendulkar and Karnad, each has written more than a dozen plays. My study, however, examines nine plays of Tendulkar and eight of Karnad, which are available in English translation or written originally in English and have a direct bearing upon the objective of my study. Moreover, I would not follow the chronology of publications for

the sake of an analysis based on thematic categorization. As regards documentation, I abide by the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Seventh Edition).

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Introduction

India's theatrical tradition has a lineage which is inarguably ancient and multivalent. Conceptualised nearly two thousand years ago, Sanskrit drama continued to dominate the Indian stage till the tenth century. Its decline, due to several socio-political reasons, coincided with the development of theatre (performance tradition) in regional languages. This new development showcased variety as it amalgamated a long array of techniques which was indigenous to numerous geo-cultural locales. They gave birth to a staggering variety of techniques of representation in tandem with the growth of regional languages and cultures, while simultaneously retaining some aspects of the Sanskrit stage. This tradition of regional theatres continued to flourish till the eighteenth century through the evolution of newer modes until the rise of the British power that resulted in a drastic political and aesthetic reorientation (Vatsyayan 184-85). A new theatre emerged in the nineteenth century under the colonial auspices. The Western models of representation gained prominence against the proportionate relegation of the indigenous theatrical tradition to the margin. This theatrical space, largely mediated by Western modernity, undergoes another significant change which is brought upon by the political independence of 1947. Under the post-Independence condition, theatre becomes a site of unprecedented reformulation that seeks to arrive at a national tradition of theatre. Through a mixed dramaturgy of representation, involving the 'return to root' and selective appropriation of Western style, the playwrights try to capture the peculiarities of the prevailing situation and shape a new tradition, working under this altogether new material, cultural, and institutional condition. Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad can be regarded as the two most representative and consistent vanguards of this new tradition, both in terms of form and content. The vast scope of critically understanding the nation in their plays, both at macro and micro levels, ensures a unique position for both the writers in this new movement. Through a well-coordination of the generic and thematic aspects, they critique the new socio-political condition after Independence and reckon theatre in India as a powerful force of (re)reading and (re)constructing society. This particular contribution of the two dramatists is to be the focal point of the present study. It seeks to understand their contribution to the theatre of negotiating the nation or the socio-political

realities at multiple levels. Their works are approached to assess how the plays penetrate into many a sphere of our social, political and cultural life and contest the given in society and politics.

Girish Karnad once stated, "I had no theatrical form to turn to. This is a problem many Indian playwrights face today. . . . A playwright needs a tradition he can call his own, even if it is only to reject it" (*Theatre in India* 334). He further stated, "We had never had any real tradition of playwriting at all; after Sanskrit plays, where are the texts? As for our folk theatre, it has been a tradition of performance, not of playwriting" (*Building* 179). The claim, which is endorsed by Mahesh Dattani (*Two Faces* 8), causes disagreement among those who approve of the concept of Indian theatre as an artistic continuum, evolving uninterruptedly from the time of Sanskrit plays to date. This debate is, however, adequately addressed by Aparna Dharwadker (*Communication; Theatres of Independence*). Modernity in the form of Western influence arrived in urban Indian theatre roughly in the mid-nineteenth century (Dharwadker, *Communication* 35). Nandi Bhatia has shown the different phases of modernity in theatre during the colonial and postcolonial periods (xv-xxxvi). The early use of traditional performances through Western models of drama to produce a theatre which is Indian as well as modern gradually becomes more 'westernised' in terms of the commercialisation of theatre. "The new technologies of production and institutional management" that involve "actor-managers, the proscenium stage, the enclosed auditoriums, lighting, set design, painted scenery, costumes and ticket sales, to name only some" (Dharwadker, *India's Theatrical* 433) are the clear signs of modernity. This modern theatre, however, changes towards the end of the colonial era and after Independence. Nationalism, anti-fascism/Nazism, "the rise of the Left movements" (Bhatia xx) and the subsequent development of a 'people's theatre' (IPTA) lead to a reorientation of theatre, which becomes most evident after Independence. A newly-formulated modernity can be found in theatre. There is, on the one hand, the neo-nationalist project of nation-building with the mass euphoria over it and the state's parental encouragement; on the other, a growing scepticism over the state-driven system as an aftermath of Independence can also be noticed. They both create a postcolonial condition for 'new-thinking'. Theatre becomes a platform either for rediscovering the national identity or for critiquing the prevailing discourses. A new enthusiasm is seen to deal with the situation at hand in a new way. The trend displays an amalgam of styles and techniques. On the one side, a backward move to retrieve the

indigenous Sanskrit and other performance traditions is there, and, on the other, an innovative awareness of the Western mode of production can also be discerned. In the rearranged political and aesthetic situation, this combination of forward and backward mobility (Dharwadker, *Communication* 35) in terms of form and content renders the act of playwriting a unique exercise, never witnessed before. Dharwadker points out two symptomatic aspects that signal the arrival of the new. One is the “generational upsurge” (Dharwadker, *Communication* 35) in theatre, and the other is the plays’ “integrated textual and performative presence in multiple languages” (Dharwadker, *Communication* 35). The critical and experimental context the creative minds find themselves in, perhaps, urges Karnad to claim the novelty of post-Independence theatre activity.

To understand the implication of Karnad’s claim, a look into the debate over the formation of an Indian theatrical canon could be very useful. Although IPTA (Indian People’s Theatre Association, founded in 1943) deserves the credit for formulating the vision of a mass-based Indian theatre, the new historical-political situation after Independence demands newer initiatives (Dalmia 167-69). Writers, intellectuals, critics feel the urge to create a new dramatic tradition in tune with the newly emerged socio-political demands of the time. The state is also eager to endorse such attempt at identity-formation at the cultural level. Consequentially, the Sangeet Natak Akademi’s drama seminar (1956) is held as the most visible, institutionalised expression of this “reoriented cultural politics” (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 37). The clear call is for disavowal of the Western model of drama, which brings in its alien associations such as proscenium stage, realism-naturalism, and a revival of the indigenous resources of theatre. The colonial period of drama is repudiated because of its over-dependence on Western materials, or excessive commercial orientation, or closet nature, or even over-politicisation of content. As a result, the current generation of aspiring dramatists does not have anything to refer to as an immediate, inherited tradition. This concern is voiced, on several occasions, by a long array of theatre personalities, which includes theatre-directors Habib Tanvir, playwright Karnad, and playwright-cum-director Badal Sircar. An authentic Indian theatre tradition is very much the need of the hour that the current writers and directors can call their own and cling on to for moulding their dramaturgy. So begins the trend, known as the ‘theatre of root’ that tries to revive the Sanskrit theatre with its content and stage conventions. Other ancient and pre-colonial performances also draw renewed attention. Different folk performance traditions developed by several religio-cultural

groups are restored to create and sustain an authenticity of representation in the modern era. Performances like Kutiyattam (Kerala), Yaksagāna (Karnataka), Chau (West Bengal, Orissa), Nautanki (North India), Tamasha (Maharashtra) are greatly exploited to formulate a new narrative of the nation by an innovative use of theatrical traditions. Numerous mythologies provide a storehouse of content that can be utilised for both original reproduction and contemporary adaptation. Even the rural life and its existing cultures bring scope for indigenous theatrical production, free from the Western constraints.

By the end of the first decade after Independence, a range of playwrights and theatre directors started experimenting with this new idiom and helped shape a standard to be developed further in the following decades. Habib Tanvir's *Agra Bazar*, produced in 1954, shows the successful use of "nonproscenium vehicle concerned with the resources of oral poetry and the life of ordinary people in the streets" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 87). Dharamvir Bharati's *Andhya Yug* (1954) stands out as a pioneering work that deals with the epic war of the *Mahabharata* with a sharp allegorical insight into the contemporary political discourse. Both in terms of content and form, the play exemplifies the first mature execution of the theatrical aspiration of the time. And it perhaps achieves its highest recognition of stage visibility in Ebrahim Alkazi's memorable production at the open-air, tiered settings of the Purana Qila (Old Fort) of Delhi in 1974. *Ashadh ka ek din* (1958) of Mohan Rakesh is also a brilliant work on ancient content as it reconstructs the iconic Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, in order to understand the criticalities involved in relationship and the process of self-realisation.

But the three remarkable works, written as part of the so-called revivalistic/pro-tradition theatre, are Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* (1964) and *Hayavadana* (1970), and Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972). Based on the complex nature of the reign of a fourteenth-century Sultan of Delhi, *Tughlaq* displays an innovative use of history, in an equally novel theatrical manner, to negotiate contemporary political realities. Through the psychological exploration of character, the play deals with the complex mechanisms of discourses and power. And all is under the intriguing garb of precolonial history that opens up fissures within the contemporary narrative of state politics and nation-building and problematises 'given' meanings. It signals the true arrival of the post-Independence play capable of a critical engagement with the state of things at hand. The second play to

take this new trend to a level of revolutionary excellence is, of course, *Hayavadana*. Karnad himself considers it the play which, along with *Tughlaq*, gives the indigenous theatre its major boost by its insight into the question of identity through an unmatched folklorist framework (*Building* 178). The story presents the irreconcilable duality of mind and body and the resultant imperfection of the human condition, while simultaneously creating several referential points of political and cultural nature. More importantly, the play exhibits an artistic employment of several folk conventions, adapted from the Yaksagāna performance tradition, in its dual frame of play-within-a-play. In terms of its coherent organisation of the indigenous form and content with a marked contemporary relevance, *Hayavadana* has indeed an impeccable credential. It is the first work to translate the theory of an 'Indian theatre' into practice (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 332). The third play in this line is *Ghashiram Kotwal*, which according to Karnad, is "a milestone in the history of modern Indian Theatre" (*Theatre in India* 348). Although Tendulkar is not the regular practitioner of the indigenous theatre style, this play stands out as a marvellous use of history through selective appropriation of folk devices from Tamasha. However, in terms of profundity of thought through a well-coordinated folk style, it cannot match *Hayavadana*'s feat. But the tactful use of the folk medium allows it, in Tendulkar's words, "a lot of space, to think of a new idea" (*Interview* 22), in fact, to interrogate iconic history as well as the contemporary narrative of power politics. These plays mark the true arrival of post-Independence 'Indian theatre'.

From the above study it becomes clear that playwriting attains unprecedented scope in terms of theme and style after Independence. It also makes clear that Girish Karnad stands out as the most powerful playwright of the post-Independence Indian theatre movement that tries to construct an 'Indianness' in theatre by relating itself to the past tradition of drama and performance. Many other experiments are also done by other exponents, but Karnad seems to be the man of the moment, who has been most consistent in setting up a standard artistic polemic and carrying it forward successfully down the decades. Tendulkar's successful venture in this thematic and generic experiment does not repeat itself as he treads on in his own inimitable style in the years to follow after *Ghashiram Kotwal*. But Karnad continues to explore the possibilities of this genre in plays like *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *Talé-Danda* (1989), *The Fire and the Rain* (1994), and *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997) and tries to create a tradition of playwriting with a distinctive cultural identity.

One important aspect to note about the indigenous theatre movement is that its attempt to re-link with the past theatrical conventions is not a mere revivalist approach to restore the past to the present. It is, in fact, the state-priority to revive the 'pristine past' of Indian theatre for building a nation with a distinctive culture. But such revival is not possible because the past is, then, always mediated by historical events through time as also by different forces of modernity such as the state and its cultural apparatuses, urban/semi-urban lifestyle, composition, publication, circulation, production of plays, stage spaces, ticket pricing, the range of scholarly attention. There are state-endorsed attempts at "authentically presenting" (Jain qtd. in Bhatia xxii) the Sanskrit plays of Kalidasa or Bhasha. But such attempts at reliving the Sanskrit theatre could not deny the modernity in their production and reception. So, this revivalist movement betrays political overtones of varied nature. The state, through its institutions like Sangeet Natak Akademi, endorses revivalism of the Sanskrit drama and projects the numerous folk forms as its "offshoots" (Dalmia 172) to consolidate the cultural narrative of nation-building. Undeniably, the state's effort brings attention to this long array of virtually extinct art and aesthetics. Among the practitioners of this art, theatre-directors such as K. N. Panikkar, B. V. Karanth, Habib Tanvir have shown novelty and worked towards formulating a new poetics of performance for the present by exploiting the past. On the other hand, a number of playwrights use this revivalist narrative to initiate a critical dialogue with contemporary socio-political developments. Myth, folk, history are retrieved not to move back in time or relive the past dramatic tradition in its pristine form but to use them as the thematic and generic platform to negotiate the present. Among many of his contemporaries, Karnad excels in this respect. His position, like many other urban playwrights who use indigenous tradition, is "the most interesting" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 69) because he employs this form without having interest in any cultural revival (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 69). Sometimes, his use of 'folk' even parodies the forms and subverts their significance. But more importantly, his handling of the retrospective narratives of myth and history seems to be more exciting and consistent than the other writers'. The immense possibility of critiquing contemporary history in his adaptations of premodern and folk resources stands unparalleled. And there, perhaps, lies the justification of Karnad's recognition as one of the exponents of post-Independence theatre, beside Tendulkar.

Apart from Girish Karnad, the present study includes Vijay Tendulkar as the other playwright who typifies the post-Independence dramatic tradition of a distinguished style. In spite of the excitement over the pro-tradition drama, there is a strong presence of other dramatic styles, having no visible link with the emergent style of myth and folk. A notable number of playwrights with varied nomenclature explore the medium of drama differently. What makes their style distinctive is their distance from the prevailing trend of pro-indigenism. They try to reorient theatre by making it realistically concerned about social problems. IPTA's naturalistic plays are surely a major inspiration for them. There is, however, a great variety within this alternative dramatic discourse. A wing of writers appropriates IPTA's leftist/left-oriented political theatre to the new condition. Utpal Dutt and G. P. Deshpande are in this stream (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 70). Their original source of inspiration ranges from Shaw, Ibsen, Brecht to other anti-fascist/imperialist playwrights. There is also the "existentialist-absurdist theatre" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 70) of Badal Sircar and Mohit Chattopadhyay who draw inspiration from Antonin Artaud, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett. But among all these writers of different traditions, Vijay Tendulkar, who does not belong specifically to any of the two groups mentioned, occupies a distinguished position, perhaps with one of his contemporaries, Mahesh Elkunchwar. Although Tendulkar's most famous and commercially successful play to date remains *Ghashiram Kotwal*, a marvel in the tradition of modern folk drama, his forte lies in the realist mode of the medium. He expunges "melodrama, spectacle, and sentimentality from the forms of realism inherited from the pre-independence period" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 270) and reshapes it to form a powerful dramatic idiom in the decades after Independence. Free from any rigid dogma, Tendulkar adopts social realism and delineates the urban/semi-urban spaces with an unprecedented frankness to expose hidden meanings. Like Karnad, he is also a critical (or sceptical) reader of contemporary society and politics, its hidden mechanisms and the process of meaning-making/unmaking at several levels of life. The profound scope of Tendulkar's social-realist engagement, which is mostly disguised by a deceptive simplicity and frankness of style, makes him the central figure of this alternative tradition of playwriting. The long career, which has seen works from *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) to *His Fifth Woman* (2004), shows an unmatched consistency and sharpness in reading the society. He might rely on the realist mode of representation which is dismissively regarded by the traditionalists as alien to the local context, but it never undermines his proximity to the core of his immediate (so to say, Indian) realities.

The “freshness of structure” and “improvisatory character” of the *Silence! The Court is in Session* has impressed even a revivalist like Suresh Awasthi (85). Tendulkar stands supreme among his realist contemporaries because he is able to address the core socio-political issues of our time, consistently and effectively. And here, he is in tune with Karnad. Both of them are avid readers of society through dissimilar dramatic styles.

What could be the factors that account for such difference in style? Karnad strongly believes in the inadequacy of blind adaptations of European models (*Three plays* 9; *Building* 175-76). What he advocates is a mode that would relate comfortably to his immediate reality or context. Hence his admiration for Tendulkar – not only for *Ghashiram Kotwal*, but also for the critical perspectives Tendulkar provides on immediate issues (caste, gender, family) for an immediate audience. He dreams to have an independent Indian tradition of theatre but, perhaps, realises that such a locally-appropriated realistic mode is not his cup of tea (*Building* 176). However, some of Karnad’s later plays (*Broken Images, Wedding Album*) show his brilliant effort in this mode. He contributes to the contemporary indigenous movement but in his own way relates to his immediate audience, i.e. the “city-dwellers” (Karnad, *Three Plays* 12), the urban/semi-urban audience. The influence of Brecht, which was a major factor for many all through the ’60s and ’70s, lays bare the “potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques” (Karnad, *Three Plays* 15) available in the native tradition. Examples of Anouilh and O’Neill are there to show the use of mythological materials. An interest in the rich storehouse of mythology and folklores, attended by the closeness to scholarly figures such as B. V. Karanth (Karnad, *Three Plays* 12) and A. K. Ramanujan (Dharwadker, *Introduction* xiv), makes his dramatic experiment considerably inevitable and comfortable. Regarding Tendulkar’s choice of crude realistic style, several factors could be looked at. Shanta Gokhale observes that the first phase of experimental Marathi playwriting after Independence preferred realism as the mode of writing and presentation because “it was through this mode that the modern sensibility could best express itself.” (qtd. in Dharwadker, *Theatres* 270). The creative milieu of this phase has perhaps influenced Tendulkar, to some extent, in his choice. His personal realisation about the inadequacy of the non-realistic mode might also be a factor (Hansen 79). Another aspect that might have encouraged realistic presentation is his journalistic stint. He has seen “complex, puzzling and sometimes even shocking” (Tendulkar, *The Mind* 18) situations as a journalist, and his ever-inquisitive nature might have incited him to explore them in

their 'original' colour. The Nehru Fellowship (1974-75) to study violence also provides a scope to witness some of the gruesome realities of life (Tendulkar, *The Mind* 18). It becomes such an obsession that the plays never hesitate to meet reality face to face. On a deeper subjective level, his youth, disturbed by some "unvarnished reality" (Ramnarayan 88) of his surroundings, might have left an imprint on his plays and rendered him unhesitant to face hard reality. Finally, whatever may be the determinant factors behind their choices, their authority over their respective modes is unquestionable.

From the above point of recognition, the present study endeavours to examine Tendulkar's and Karnad's critical dialogue with contemporary history. The engagement with the period since 1947, which is best designated as post-Independence (Dharwadker, *Communication* 35), comes under the critical focus here. The effort is to understand the quality of performative intervention in the varied socio-cultural landscape. Their plays take up several contemporary issues, through a variety of techniques, at macro as well as micro levels. Power politics at the state or larger level co-exists with other issues, such as gender, caste, religion functioning at the local, domestic level. The plays try to interrogate the social ideals or the given/received notions of reality regarding these issues so as to challenge the 'legitimate' and the hidden process of legitimisation in all these fields. They seem to look upon reality as discursive and, therefore, subject to negotiation. From this point of distrust in the 'naturalness'/'ideality' of reality or history (remote/contemporary), they deal with socio-political practices embodied in different institutions and visible in several domains. Such a critical engagement with reality tends to re-interpret all that it deals with and produce newer or unorthodox versions so as to recognise the issues left unaddressed in the dominant narrative of reality.

Both the playwrights are products of the post-Independence reality, and their creative endeavour remains always to understand its historical contexts at multiple levels. Karnad observes that their generation was in a state of tension,

Tension between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of the western modes of thought and our traditions, and finally between the various visions of the future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. This is the historical context that gave rise to my plays and those of my contemporaries. (*Three Plays* 1)

The roller-coaster ride of the nation, in the decades after Independence, is always breathtaking to those concerned about its future. Hopes around a newly independent nation after a long history of colonial oppression conflicting with a simultaneous loss of hope caused by enormous decadence in every sphere of life stirs the conscience of Tendulkar and Karnad. These tensions inform their plays that attempt a close engagement with society in general. From nation-building, state-politics to local issues of caste and gender, everything seems to come within their purview, reflecting their awareness of the formative volatility of the nation and the different phases of transition. Karnad adapts the indigenous style and formulates a powerful mode to understand this contemporary reality. The folklorist framework has an immense possibility for assertion and subversion of meaning (Karnad, *Building* 177) and “simultaneous presentation of widely divergent points of view” (Karnad, *Theatre in India* 347). No wonder myths, legends and other folk performance conventions become the most important vehicle for Karnad to express his concern for the contemporary. A similar concern for existing issues excites Tendulkar. He proclaims, “Everything that affects this society affects me” (*A Testament* 56). Deeply embedded in his socio-political context, he wants to be, he is in fact, a “merciless”, “inquisitive”, “non-conformist”, and “objective observer of life” (Tendulkar, *A Testament* 57-58). His uninhibited sharp probing (Tendulkar, *An Interview* 7) makes him “suspicious of everything that is too neat and streamlined” (Tendulkar, *A Testament* 55). His scepticism about being a disciplined and law-abiding good citizen shut away from all ‘real’ realities (Tendulkar, *The Confession* 111) might initiate his queries about structural discourses and his perception of reality as a discursive construct, which is always tentative, not final. In his realist and naturalist style, he plain-speaks about the non-viability of what is visible and reveals the darker sides of our condition, i.e. the realities unacknowledged. *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) is one such example that attempts to unmask the civilised society by critiquing the prevailing ‘gender-truth’ and bringing to the fore its pretentious morality, sexist prejudice and mythic progressiveness. Tendulkar unveils the pervasive double standards on which our society is founded.

The present study seeks to understand, as its prime concern, these two playwrights’ relations with their historical context, their problematising of the ‘natural’ that ‘goes without saying’ in our society and culture. The socio-political context of their plays is obviously post-Independence and postcolonial. Independence from colonial rule and the condition of decolonisation call for an ideological and aesthetic reorganisation.

This changed condition results in a new range of creative activities that want to participate in the various emergent discourses of the time, and drama has played a crucial role here as a creative medium. As regards nation, state, and other related issues, “drama has priority over other fictional genres...as one of the strongest expressions of what Loren Kruger calls ‘theatrical nationhood’ ” (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 221). It can best engage the matters of nation’s history on the stage with effective audience-reception. The plays of Tendulkar and Karnad also undertake a critical dialogue with history. History of different temporalities, remote past (precolonial), immediate past (colonial) and contemporary past (postcolonial), is in view. The aim is to interrogate the ‘process of naturalisation’ or the validity of the ‘naturalised’ past. Remote history is contested (chiefly in Karnad) along with a direct contestation of immediate social/political history (chiefly in Tendulkar). But the common point is that the dealings with remote history/past take place in conjunction with critiquing the ‘naturalised’ present, while the dealings with immediate present directly intervene in its ‘natural’ status. This is true of their history plays as well as social plays. Karnad’s folk-mythological plays, too, prove the point because they contest reality (history) in folk-mythological temporality with a view to examining the present as well. This creative enterprise of re-reading ‘history’ (i.e. socio-political realities) at the backdrop of post-Independence condition becomes the chief critical concern of the present study.

Linda Hutcheon has pointed out that the postmodern critique of naturalised reality (e. g. textualised history) has “strong connections” (226) with several other ideological positions in the world. The connections are with those positions which were earlier suppressed by the dominant power and now have gained freedom to talk due to political emancipation. One such position is, in her words, the “previously silenced ex-centrics”... (post-colonial)” (179). In undertaking a “dialogue” with history, she argues, postmodernism “overlaps significantly with the post-colonial” (qtd. in Dharwadker, *Theatres* 218) and is largely “reconfigured” (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 219) in the emergent condition of postcoloniality. The postmodern act of questioning often helps a newly independent nation’s self-examination after the colonial rule. The freed-nation begins to question not only its pre-/colonial past but also its post-independence/postcolonial present. This spirit of critiquing seems to play a significant role in the Indian condition as well. Here the post-Independence is largely modified by postcoloniality, and this is evident in several ways. The neo-nationalist aspirations for the nation-state, or what

Nandi Bhatia has called “nationalistic post-colonial imagination” (xxi), is also accompanied by a counter-narrative of scepticism about it, an opposition against any type of (neo-)colonial oppressive system, and the recovery of the ex-centric voices. The immediate jubilation of Independence encounters this critical query in a condition where stereotypes are questioned. And Indian drama (specifically of Tendulkar and Karnad) has lent a strong voice to this condition. It has questioned the nation’s past and contemporary reality with the objective of rereading the present condition. Consequently, legitimate meanings are contested, and the possibility of new meanings arises. This happens at various levels of the post-Independence society – state/administrative power politics, sexuality and gender, caste and class. The present study seeks to look into this act of critiquing.

Both Tendulkar and Karnad critique issues relating to the remote past or the immediate present, and this dispassionate reading of socio-political history raises serious questions about the authenticity of meaning and its process of construction. They critically look at the established meanings in several social domains. What surfaces, as a result, is a series of realities that is eventually contested and largely dismissed off. History, in its variable temporal forms, is always ‘narrativised’ and projected as ‘unproblematically natural’. Both Tendulkar and Karnad seem to be the two most important dramatic voices that pose a challenge to this conception of history. They undermine the ‘notionality’ of history, constructed by superior power, so as to contest the ‘given’/‘natural’ version. They never claim themselves to be outside the condition they scrutinise. They are very much within it. But, by living inside they try to challenge it from within. In fact, Karnad is in the forefront of the indigenous theatre movement, but he has less (or nothing) to do with any cultural revivalism. Tendulkar is also driven by the urge to create an Indian theatre tradition to which he contributes in his own style, but his engagement with the existing condition is always to diagnose problems and undermine any effort to hide them. This shows that there is no location outside the existing condition, from which they can challenge. Everything must be questioned from within.

Another important point is that both the writers are well poised in their works to interrogate various narratives/narrativised formations, but without letting much scope for any answer or solution. They seem to believe that “challenging and questioning are positive values (even if solutions to problems are not offered), for the knowledge derived

from such inquiry may be the only possible condition of change” (Hutcheon 8). This avoidance of a definite solution is a visible feature of both the writers. Tendulkar loves to raise “inconvenient questions” (Tendulkar, *A Testament* 58) but, evidently, avoids solution. He is as candid as ever to say, “I see problems clearly, but I don’t see solutions clearly enough” (*The Confession* 109). Karnad is, also, equally sceptical of providing a final solution to the problems he identifies. None of them, in fact, believe in using their plays as a medium of social change by prescribing solutions. To bring a radical social change, the frog (writer) needs to become an elephant, stated Tendulkar in his, perhaps, most cynical take on the subject (*Interview* 245). The process of challenging and critiquing remains the most important part in any engagement. In Karnad’s words, “At best, an artist can question values” (*Building* 178), and the consequent awareness of knowledge from such questioning is often tantamount to highly empowering and liberating. Questioning makes the ‘centre’ or a ‘totalising’ force weaker to reveal its hidden fissures and highlights the “ex-centric” (Hutcheon 12) of all denominations. As the unifying homogeneity in different spheres of socio-political life becomes unfeasible, the suppressed issues, problems and voices start coming out, not for any ready-solution but for recognition. This acknowledgement of the ‘invisible’/‘hidden’/‘unnatural’ realities creates a space of self-movement, which is very important for any sort of empowerment or liberation. In place of a final and absolute answer to questions, the tentative awareness of a plural version of reality produces new “intellectual energy” (Hutcheon 21), provoking new articulations of the post-Independence condition. The plays are, therefore, the critique of socio-political realities that penetrates into the hidden politics of meaning-making and its naturalisation at various levels. The logic is, if you want to question a particular version of meaning, you have to understand the process of its making. Only then, you can unmake it, and this will be equivalent to questioning. Under this critical observation, a literary text appears as a cultural text and a play appears as a cultural product. It is embedded in its cultural context. It seems to be inseparable from its social and political context and also a vehicle of politics mediating the fabric of social, political, and cultural formations (Brannigan 417).

In this respect, Karnad’s contextualising of his plays (*Three Plays* 1) only helps to affirm the ‘rootedness’ of the text (performance included) in its context. The state of tension and uncertainty, following Independence, over the prospect of the new nation can be felt everywhere. The state-narrative of nation-building is very powerful, but the

simultaneous doubt and scepticism over the new developments gets currency. This results in a situation where meanings are created by the state-narrative only to be doubted and discredited by a large section of conscious people. The situation gives birth to plurality of thoughts that wants everything, accepted as “natural” and “for the people”, to be reviewed. This is the historical (post-Independence) context of uncertainty that raises questions. Drama has played its role as an agency of this new trend of questioning. It takes part in the discursive process of meaning-making and questions the very process in order to unmake it. This is the mood of the time, and drama (text and performance) proves itself inseparable from its context. This contextually-embedded drama works as a vehicle of politics by critiquing dominant ideas. Both Tendulkar and Karnad interrogate prevailing ideas in several cultural formations and, thus, let their plays participate in power relations. They see through the dominant discourses in order to challenge their claim to singularity. And this act of contesting reiterates their participation in the politics of discourses and the discourses on politics.

One important thing to note is that the present study does not intend to fix their plays solely as cultural texts embedded in some specific contexts. Tendulkar’s and Karnad’s plays are invariably rich in understanding “the hidden depths of human nature”, “the eternal human predicament” (Tendulkar, *A Testament* 60) or, broadly speaking, “the contradictions that lie at the heart of the human situation in general” (Karnad, *Building* 179). However, these critical probes in human life tend to be inescapably evocative of certain contexts. In their supposed exploration of the universal human condition, they often come to address a society or a historical context in particular (Karnad, *Building* 179). The present study attempts to analyse such contextual expressions. In doing this, it finds some discernible contexts to their plays. These contexts are broadly categorised in the present study to closely understand the scope of dramatic interventions. First, there is power politics in the general sense of political culture or governance in the independent state. Secondly, the tropes of gender and sexuality under the changed/changing socio-political condition also figure in. Thirdly, the growing importance of caste and casteism in the contemporary political discourse is examined. Finally, there is the volatile character of the middle class individual and family in a time of change and transition.

The first level of context refers to the creation of the new nation-state and its consequent functioning through different stages of self-development. Its formation in 1947 highlights some points. The new state is structured on the modern/Western model of nation-state, though its guiding spirit remains nationalistic in character. This creation of a modern state under the nationalist impetus seems to have its inherent ambivalences because its modernity is, then, bound to clash with the premodern callings of nationalism. Indian nationalism gains its currency by invoking the 'authentic' past of the land in order to contest the alien 'present'. In this respect, it has its natural antagonism against the colonial modernity. However, Indian nationalism betrays some important aspects that make its relation with the Western modernity special. It normally seeks indigeneness by a cultural revivalism of its lost glory of the "Sanskrit Indic civilisation" (Sethi 12). And this dream of revival is, ironically, attempted by a "selective appropriation of the notions of the Orientalists" (Sethi 12). The Orientalist re-construction of the Indian past finds wide acceptance in the nationalist narrative, which tries to build native identity on that 'supplied' source of material. Again, on the other hand, some ideals of Western nationalism are also incorporated in the narrative from the compulsive desire to be 'modern'. This modernity is defined and supplied by the Western/colonial system of thought. So, it comes to this that Indian nationalism rejects alien contamination and aspires towards its cultural identity largely by appropriating the Orientalist discourses on its cultural heritage. Further, it seeks to be modern by accepting "the very intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based" (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 30).

The contradiction of acceptance and rejection determines the course of the pre-Independence Indian nationalist discourse. It rejects colonial influence and revives its ancestral glory to build its autonomous character, and, at the same time, looks towards the Western principles of reason and progress. There is no doubt that this nationalist thought occupies the central position in the spectrum of anti-colonial struggle, largely owing to its elitist/English-educated controlling core, but this ambivalence cannot be overlooked. Partha Chatterjee has articulated how this ambivalent nationalism, after undergoing a process of manoeuvrings, comes to play a vital role to form the nation-state after Independence (*Nationalist Thought*).

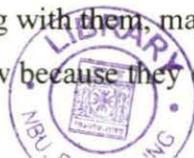
The nationalist discourse, which relies upon an essential difference between East and West, e. g. spiritualism and materialism, undergoes a change-over in the hand of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, in order to facilitate the formation of a modern nation-state. The “new nationalist reinterpretation” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 137) rejects the essentialist inferiority-superiority or spiritual-material concept of East and West. It attributes the existing backwardness of East to a historical process that works through the period of growth and the period of decay. After a glorious stretch of continuous growth till the eleventh century, the ancient Indian civilisation begins to witness decay. It is at this historical moment that the civilisation declines for many reasons, external as well as internal. And it is just at this moment of history that the European civilisation finds a new spirit, energy and creativity. At this juncture, when the two civilisations meet each other, the West conquers, the East submits (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 137). So India’s backwardness is historical and periodical, not essential, and this backwardness is compounded by the colonial subjugation. The wisest way to improve is, therefore, by doing away with the colonial power and forming a nation-state. For the latter, we have to look to the West which happens to be ‘modern’ in the due course of history. This will not disturb India’s indigenous identity, which is always there. Under this “mature nationalism” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 144), India’s turn will come to regain its lost glory in the world.

The euphoria of nation-building and state-building (state being projected as the concrete representation of the nation), encouraged by this “mature nationalism”, literally takes off after 1947. The Nehruvian discourse of nationalism has presented “a realist’s utopia” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 160). Here ‘modernity’ will be achieved through a pervasive development of society. Large-scale industrialisation, land-reform, social justice have to be undertaken to realise the utopia. Planned economy is to be the key to development. And all this is to take place under the supreme guidance of the state. It will assume, as it were, a ‘divine’ authority, above power squabble, politics, and corruption. It will steer the nation, as its legitimate representative, to the desired goal. The nation must play its due role, as and when dictated by the state, to support development. Absolute trust in the state is required because it works, disinterestedly, for the nation. The nationalist discourse successfully grants the state its position of centrality in the nation-building and creates the general euphoria over this national project of reconstruction. It becomes successful to contain several other disturbing issues like communalism,

casteism, linguistic discontent by the irresistible appeal of common progress, though it is only for some time as these issues eventually pop up to contest several aspects of national development. The statist system, undeniably, achieves some commendable success in several fields of development (Rudolph 180), but its failure in many other fields ultimately becomes glaring. The Five-Year Plans fail to deliver on many grounds. This results in ideological crisis and confusion over policy. Consequently, the nationalist project begins to lose its shine and strength. Fissures and disjoints, hitherto hidden behind the euphoric gloss of nation-building, begin to surface. The way the situation has been perceived so far changes, and the entire system, along with its chief articulator Pandit Nehru, stands deglamorised to the newly-formed critical eyes of the people. The nationalist jubilation fast erodes to ultimately become a disillusionment over the entire system. Hope is gradually replaced with despair.

The nationalist project is overwhelmingly state-centric, and its failure on multiple grounds (Chatterjee, *A Possible India* 48) raises serious questions about its seemingly unquestionable authority over public life. Its indisputable discourse of development and welfare also comes under doubt. Under this growing scepticism, the state administration, its apparatuses, and governance begin to lose their egalitarian image. Its image of the omnipotent and enlightened supervisor gives way to the perception of an authority entangled in the messy politics of power. Under the garb of welfare and progress, several agencies of the statist system are found as playing politics to safeguard their power. Several empirical evidences are there to prove this character of the system, where it has totally lost its image of an un-corrupt and benevolent facilitator of development. Apart from the economic failures, the debacle in the Chinese war (1962), the crisis in democracy during the state of Emergency (1975-77), the growing communal and casteist politics, and corruption are the main factors for the dissolution of the benevolent image. This gradual degeneration from jubilation to despair signals the loss of the nationalist narrative. It becomes fragile and unable to hold itself intact.

The state and the political culture of the country never look the same as before because uncomfortable realities start coming out. Some disquieting issues have already been there since Independence but kept hidden from general attention by the nationalist discourse. They now become visible. Along with them, many other new disturbing factors also start emerging. They can be called new because they emerge by exploiting the newly



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found weaknesses of the system. The issues, early to surface, are – the presence of political iconography and an almost feudal-style authority despite democratic structure, sheer confusion over policies and indecisiveness despite inflated view of the future. And the immediate object of this disillusionment is, inevitably, Nehru. Nehru assumes an unquestionable centrality in his party, government, and public mind after Independence. This owes to three factors – one, a frontal role in the freedom struggle; two, he is the prime minister of the new state; three, the “mature nationalism” of which he is the chief architect. From this ‘incontestable’ authority, he announces his plans for the nation, its “tryst with destiny”, and invites the people “to become partners in this great enterprise of building a new India” (qtd. in Hasan 161). He has absolute conviction about himself and his plan and seems unhesitant to take his personal authority of policy-making to such a level where it stands unchallenged (Chatterjee, *A Possible India* 17). But despite his effort, many of his plans fail, owing to their demerits or the demerits of his party or the administrative set-up. He, himself, betrays despair, “I have an increasing feeling that such utility as I have had is lessening . . .” (qtd. in Chatterjee, *A Possible India* 23). Multiple debacles turn him into a lost figure. Although the task he had undertaken was huge, the loss of shine owing to failures foregrounds a political icon, who has enjoyed feudal-style authority and tried to play the destined national-messiah but ended up, arguably, as “the rejected man” (Spear 15) along with many of his ideas.

The post-Nehru years mark the death of the nationalist zeal and, consequently, witness the continuous rise of some unprecedented features in the state-politics or the general political culture. These are dynasty politics, sycophancy, total politicisation of state machinery, criminalisation of politics, and stifled democracy. The latest additions to the list are communalisation/casteisation of politics and, most importantly, unabated corruption at all levels of the system. In reaction to this rotten state, secession/sectarianism is also on the rise. Indira Gandhi’s prime ministerial era seems to be the post-nationalist hot-bed for the growth of these factors. The nationalist hang-over is totally over; no more the state is/can be, in the popular perception, benevolent. Decadence mounts all around. This context of post-Independence nationalist consolidation and its subsequent crises in state mechanism, governance and general political tradition provide the socio-political space that some of the plays are embedded in. This is the political context or contemporary history that they negotiate.

'The woman question' is the second level of contextuality that involves formation of sexuality and gender in the post-Independence society. The new condition is increasingly marked by an incompatibility between patriarchal dominance and female self-assertion. The patriarchal presence is almost pervasive in India, and the political emancipation fails to be synonymous with sexual emancipation. Notwithstanding some considerable achievements of the nation-state (Rudolph 180), the condition of women remains miserable, and it is well exposed by the publication of *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* (1974). Women's lack of access to development, education, health-care and her absence in terms of political and economic participation (Tharu and Lalita 2: 101) are the crude facts of the post-Independence Indian society. Women's legitimate status is still an illusive dream in India where the sex ratio stands at 933 females per 1000 males, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) is worse at 927, and the literacy rate is 54.16% compared to the male literacy rate of 75.85% in the year 2001 (Planning 12-14). The misery is further proved by the steadily increasing crime rate against women and the pathetic rate of conviction against the cases registered in the recent years (Planning 16-17).

It surprises many that this strong presence of patriarchal hegemony is not disturbed by the development project of the new nation-state; rather, it gets stronger and becomes more evident when the shine of the 'build-up' begins to go off. The reason is that the existing gender design owes its origin largely to the pre-Independence nationalist discourse on woman. The "mature nationalism" of the new state conveniently adopts this discourse because it offers a male-centric approach to life. Indian nationalism configures itself through its struggle with the colonial power and its modernity. The colonial system of thought, authoritatively, constructs 'the Indian character' that legitimates their rule over it. It is projected as "irrational, deceitful, and sexually perverse" (Tharu and Lalita 1: 9). Notably, Indian women capture maximum colonial attention. The native woman, the symbol of the conquered land (Loomba, *Colonialism* 152), is shown as sensual, exotic, and the legitimate target of sexual exploitation (Sen 3). The Orientalist thought, however, reconstructs the Indian woman as a symbol of devotion and chastity. They eulogise the self-sacrificing woman and, simultaneously, prescribes her modernisation. In spite of this apparent contradiction, both the strategies (colonialism and Orientalism) seem to coalesce in strengthening the colonial hold over the immensely important strategic-subject, the Indian woman. This urgency to modernise 'the woman' gains currency as the nineteenth-

century renaissance in Bengal takes it up as its chief agenda. However, the nationalist discourse comes to challenge this 'modernising the woman' project as a threat to the Indian authenticity and formulates its concept of woman strictly on the material/spiritual or modern/traditional or external world/internal home or, finally, male/female dichotomy (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 119-21). While the native male negotiates Western/colonial modernity in the public domain in order to design the nationalist struggle, the female is to remain in the inner sanctum, immune from colonial contamination so as to retain the authentic Indianness. Interestingly, both the renaissance and the nationalism, despite their dissimilar agendas and anti-colonial stance, are premised on the same ideological terrain of colonialism/Orientalism that offers definitions of modernity as well as Indianness to them. More importantly, the woman question presents here the Indian woman as a gendered category, which is authoritatively manipulated by both colonial and anti-colonial forces to further their political interest. This nationalist discourse on woman, which is evidently male-centric, remains enormously influential in the Nehruvian narrative of nation-building and more so perhaps in the general social consciousness, in Partha Chatterjee's words, in "the ethical domain of the community" (*The Nation* 157). Some attribution of legitimacy to woman at the official or public level does not compensate for her relegation to 'otherness' at local/domestic level. For example, a woman prime minister might invoke legitimacy in the public domain, but hardly does so, say, a single-working-woman at local/micro level of the society. In spite of the growing trends of challenge/dissent, this gender-narrative remains an inescapable reality of the post-Independence condition.

However, the counter-discourse of self-assertion rapidly becomes prominent. The social and political discontent over the state and its system of governance becomes increasingly felt among different spheres, dampening the euphoria of nation-building. It is chiefly from the seventies that this disillusion becomes overwhelming and a new wave of political engagement begins. The declaration of Emergency comes as the most visible state reaction against it, though it fails to contain the anti-establishment anger which becomes wide-spread even among "quietist and conservative" groups like doctors, engineers, teachers (Tharu and Lalita 2: 98). Consequently, this mass anger against the existing system proves conducive to a more aggressive formation of feminist assertion. This context of counter-assertion is immensely important as it opens up a scope to formulate strategies of contestation, sensitive to local specificities, such as caste, religion,

ethnicity, and their demands. The sexual discontent reveals that woman/her body still remains the vulnerable site of gender-manipulation. In the following globalisation-liberalisation era, they seem to stand in a critical position. There is, on the one hand, modernity of the new era. On the other, the indigenous, neo-nationalist, cultural forces are there. Women remain at the centre of the debate, where all try to prescribe for them the 'rightful' way to live. But women's self-awareness, which they have historically acquired by this time, can make a difference now. They might be able to design strategy that could conveniently negotiate all the opposing forces – be it the new market-oriented modernity or the pro-tradition elements. It could be a strategy, or strategies, to challenge, contest or even appropriate these forces with a view to liberating the female subject and attaining some space of relative freedom. The chances of success are very minimal because if they chose one against the other, they may get caught within the patriarchy they oppose. In this respect, two different examples of self-assertion can be taken up where the women seem to gain some space through strategic negotiation of the prevailing order. The first one is their protest against an imposed dress-code, mainly, in the government workplaces (as in West Bengal) that amounts to be liberatory with the simultaneous risk of falling to 'modernity' (Mukhopadhyaya 1). The second example is their acceptance of the imposed dress-code of burqa (e.g. in Kashmir) that also, occasionally, becomes "liberatory" (Loomba, *Postcolonial Studies* 209) and may provide some "refuge from the alienation and commodification set in motion by modernity" (Loomba, *Postcolonial Studies* 211), though the risk of being hijacked by traditionalism is very high. So what they need is a careful and self-conscious action to contest the patriarchal forces of modernity (globalising/liberalising) and tradition (cultural assertion). This difficult job for general Indian women to attain a substantive amount of freedom and self-respect, equal to men, in a highly patriarchal-hegemonic condition is the context to some of the plays in the present study.

Like gender inequality, caste or the politics around it always remains a "potent reality of Indian life" (Bayly 381). So much that if a person with a 'lower' caste background ascends to the highest office of the Indian Union or that in the Parliament on individual merit, the mass media is inclined to view it from caste(ist) angle and label it as a "decisive breaking of 'caste barriers' " (Bayly 380). This seemingly inescapable context of caste reality is the third contextual level of the present critique. The origin of caste is obviously premodern and scriptural. But it is not a fixed system without historical

development. Its system of organisation continuously undergoes a process of making and remaking down the ages. It assumes varying significance in different historical moments, depending on the prevailing social and political conditions of the time. Its present expression, therefore, owes itself to the existing socio-political context and also its continuous development in history. Susan Bayly has shown how the precolonial formulation of caste-based society is as important as the colonial re-formulation in complicity with many local factors, chiefly, nationalism, to develop caste-expression in the post-Independence and postcolonial state. However, the colonial/Orientalist handling of caste and the nationalist articulation of it remain the most important point of reference for its status in the new nation-state, since the new state is largely modelled on the appropriated premises of Western (colonial) concept of progress and the Orientalist construction of 'authentic India'. It is discussed earlier how nationalism (or new nationalism of state-building) has done this appropriation. During the colonial period, caste, like many other local specificities, undergoes making and remaking under the influences of colonial and anti-colonial forces. Partha Chatterjee observes, "If there was one social institution that, to the colonial mind, centrally and essentially characterised Indian society as radically different from Western society, it was the institution of caste" (*The Nation* 173). This 'essential difference' legitimises all sorts of colonial and Orientalist intervention in the subject called, India. Misrepresentation of Indians as slaves to a rigid, Brahmin-centric caste system and identifying them chiefly in terms of specific caste prove a very useful technique for an effective control over them (Bayly 99). Not only the colonial power accords high importance to caste, but the nationalists also focus on caste as a key to its anti-colonial struggle. They have adopted two opposing strategies to deal with caste (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 173), owing to their acceptance and rejection of Western modernity (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 2). The first one calls to deny that caste is essential at all to Indian society. By this denial, nationalism can qualify to aspire for 'modernity' and the 'modern' state. The second strategy is to retain caste as an essential part of the Indian identity. The so-called anti-modernity of caste is overcome by emphasising its 'ideality'. Notwithstanding its empirically-historically oppressive character, caste is said to create a harmonious whole/society, acknowledging the distinctness of its parts. Through Gandhi's articulation, this nationalist argument becomes immensely powerful. According to Partha Chatterjee, these two arguments of nationalism are actually complementary because they both "accept the premise of modernity" (*The Nation* 174). The first condemns caste and directly advocates the modernist principles.

The second highlights the ideal/philosophical value of caste without its anti-modern feature, like untouchability, and presents it as consistent with the modernist aspirations.

The nationalist discourse seems to have greatly influenced the Constitutional argument about caste in Independent India. There is an inescapable paradox in the Constitutional vision of a casteless nation-state and simultaneous recognition of caste through the pronouncement of abolition of untouchability (Article 17) and “special care” for the “Schedule Castes and the Schedule Tribes” (Article 46). The state seems to have failed to resolve this paradox to date. The paradox reflects the two opposing nationalist streams of thought. One is the urgency for modernity by denying caste altogether, and the second, which proves more powerful through Gandhi’s articulation, is to benefit from the benevolent aspect of caste system by removing untouchability from its body. This second motive facilitates the “special care” for the backward castes that has ultimately snowballed to dominate Indian political culture in a way as never seen before. Several implications can be drawn from the constitutional paradox. It might be a compromise done by the Nehruvian “mature nationalism” to retain, at the internal level, the authentic Indianness, i.e. upper caste-centric structure, that talks benevolently about all castes and takes “special care” of the untouchables to remove their untouchability; or, it might be, provocatively, a political compromise driven by the urge to gain/retain the support of the backward castes. Even if one looks on the Constitutional provisions of Articles 17 and 46 as B. R. Ambedkar’s contribution (Bayly 270) that negates any scope for upper caste politics over them, their presence can still imply that the powerful nationalist discourse might have tried to co-opt him. This key critic of Congress’s/Gandhian view on caste was incorporated in the Nehru cabinet as the Law Minister. He was also appointed as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution. All was, perhaps, to contain his dissenting voice. Ambedkar’s role behind the Constitutional provisions would never annoy the Congress because the provisions, in spirit, conformed to the Gandhian holistic view on caste. Such provisions may, apparently, serve the interest of the oppressed castes, but actually they seem to satisfy the upper caste-centric structure. Eventually and significantly, Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet in 1951.

The unresolved agenda of caste perpetuates itself in the political tradition of the country. On the one hand, casteisation of politics, caste vote-bank, quota politics are at their peak; on the other, caste stereotypes are being made/remade owing to political

necessities. An unbiased estimation of the situation seems to have become impossible as it will disturb the political equations over caste. Caste status quo continues unabated in macro and micro sectors of the society. The issue of proper empowerment of the underprivileged takes a back seat, as all parties concerned, be it the upper castes, the lower castes or the so-called neutrals, idiomatically address the situation to self-benefit from it. In this situation, the Constitutional vision of a casteless society seems to be a far cry. The section of the thesis on caste and casteism seeks to capture this mood of hopelessness, which is a direct consequence of the present politics over caste, and presents it as an unavoidable socio-political condition.

In this study, the final level of engagement with social reality is the problematic character of the Indian middle class after Independence. This enormously important category has its origin in the colonial system of thought that wants to create an educated, local group of colonial collaborators. Consequently, the middle class is produced – an amorphous class of people, in the words of Lord Macaulay, “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste” (qtd. in Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 476). They also become the active agents of nationalism. As a product of colonialism, the middle class, often referred to as ‘Bhadralok’ or ‘Baboo’, subscribes to the Western concept of modernity. They come to represent the modernist ideals of reason, progress, humanist values and, thus, occupy a central position in the nationalist struggle. They seem to be Bhabha’s “mimic man” (*Of Mimicry* 476) who resembles the colonial authority and proves disruptive to it as well by its ‘distorted’ mimicry. Independence witnesses the replication of middle class prominence for almost the same reason that granted them significance in the colonial era. They are still the emblem of modernity. They are consensually incorporated in the nation-building project. But the jubilation of participation comes to be short-lived, and there emerges discontent in this group over the general political course of events in the country. The discontent is expressed over the wholesale plebianisation of politics (Visweswaran 25). Corruption, criminalisation, and vote-bank, number-based politics render the middle class sidelined, even irrelevant, in the political field and, eventually, necessitate their exit from it. This gradual displacement from power, due to political ‘contamination’, makes them discontent over politics in general. It erodes their enthusiasm about the nation-state as they assume an indifference to its proceedings. This forced exit seems to create a double-standard in the middle class character – the difference between ‘ideality’ and ‘practicality’. They, ideally, espouse the modern principles of corruption-free, casteless,

secular society and state-mechanism, while, actually, they seem to do it to satisfy their popular image or compensate for their dislodgment. They protest against corruption and immorality vocally but, contrary to their self-made image, often indulge in corrupt practices.

The newly arrived condition of market-oriented liberalisation, chiefly from the 1990s, accelerates the crisis in middle class character and exposes their alleged double-standard more than before. In this new socio-economic condition, the middle class suddenly comes under a growing economic and political focus. They assume enormous significance in contrast to their earlier displacement. And this happens solely for their numerical size and ability to consume. They are identified as consumers and valued for this only. Most importantly, the middle class category witnesses a rapid change in its configuration during this period. There come the new entrants largely from rural India and the non-upper castes, thanks to the immediate benefits of the new economy (G. Das 286-87; Varma xviii). But it is the old guards of this category who seem to suffer an identity-crisis owing to the new situation. Their inherited image of superiority, relying on a sophisticated upper caste culture, education, professional skill and government-jobs, receives a shock. They amazingly watch how the millions of people whom they “thought to be far below their ‘status’ consider themselves to be their equals” (Varma xviii) chiefly on the basis of monetary strength. The sudden sense of empowerment, made possible by the consumerist economy, endears the new socio-economic order to the traditional members of the category. They take the new order for their ‘modernist calling’ and consumption for the new success-mantra and, thus, again enter into a crisis between their long-held ‘ideality’ on the one hand and compulsive ‘practicality’ on the other. The gap between their popular image and dark underbelly widens as they still espouse modernist ideals in public but practically contradict those ideals in their role as consumers. This level of crisis raises questions about the viability of the ‘mythic’/‘ideal’ middle class in contemporary India and offers a valid context to some of the plays.

To be clear about the above divisions, dealt with in Chapters I-IV, they do not intend to compartmentalise historical reality. In fact, the multiple levels, referred to here, do not exist in mutual isolation. Issues such as politics, gender, caste and class continuously interact and overlap with each other in the ongoing social process. The chapters are divided along these levels so as to emphatically examine the discourses and

power in some specific social sites foregrounded by the plays. Discussed under these critical rubrics, the chapters provide specific contexts to the plays and help better appreciate the society that they address.

The plays under discussion intervene in and critique 'official', prevalent discourses to contest 'reality', as upheld by different discursive domains. "Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them" (Weedon 108). A discursive domain is a political/social/cultural space configured by historically prevalent discourse(s). History is seen as discursive. It is not an objective account of the past – rather, it is a "human construct" (Hutcheon 16). It is made available to us through its text, which is determined by historically dominant factors. The production of text is mediated by discourse which becomes dominant/powerful at a historical moment. So the same text may offer different meanings and become contestable at a different historical juncture, when the previous discourse becomes ineffective, replaced by a new one. Like textualised history, a political regime is also a discursive field that always provides possibility of new meanings. A regime is a system of thought driven by an ideology. Ideology, which is constructed by dominant discourses, works through self-validation and ensures consensual public-support. It is a strategy to dominate people, who consensually accept its domination eventually. "This is the trick of hegemony", in the Gramscian sense, "to persuade the whole of society that a prevailing ideology . . . is really the only natural and normal way of thinking" (Sim and Loon 37). So, powerful discourses work in the shape of ideology and create hegemony so as to avoid/minimise resistance and ensure spontaneous consent. Under scrutiny, a so-called highly benevolent regime can also betray several unpleasant 'truths', made to look good by clever hegemony. Discursive practices characterise not only the state or its institutions like education, judiciary, military but also human relationships within the family. Religion, caste, sexuality are also discursively configured, and so is human subjectivity which is not fixed, coherent but constantly reconstituted in discourse (Weedon 33). They are always replete with the possibility of newer interpretation and meaning.

The plays discussed here at once image, interrogate and reinscribe the power relations and operation of discourses in such discursive domains as state, sexuality, caste and class (middle class). They see through several systems and question their validity. In

the domain of power politics, negotiation with history becomes an important cognitive premise. Precolonial, colonial and even fictitious histories are reread. And this investigation results in 'reknowing' our past, in conjunction with reviewing our present as well i.e. our contemporary historical knowledge. Popular notion about the present is destabilised. As a result, the political culture of the country appears with its dark underbelly and renders the idea of a progressive nation-state debatable.

In the same vein, the contemporary history of gender practices, caste realities, and middle class condition is examined. The dominant narrative of gender is rethought, and its hidden mechanism is exposed. Simultaneously, there is also a concern about the possibility of counter-action. Alternative female subjectivities are constructed to explore new spaces for self-determination. Even the most powerful regime has inherent potentials for counter-action, or even resistance, which can, at least, contest or, at best, reverse the systems which "quietly order us" (Foucault qtd. in Fillingham 151). In varying sexist domains, women can be found to adopt varying means of countering patriarchal ideology. And, importantly, their dissenting actions reveal further about the oppressive orders, irrespective of their visible success or failure. Tendulkar's and Karnad's approach to dissension is of course not similar, though they both look towards a condition of gender justice. A look into the differences of their approach would help understand their specific insight into the issue of gender.

Caste and class (middle class) are the two other discursive domains that the plays probe. Manufactured 'naturalities' in these two domains are contested. The familiar relations of oppressor-oppressed between the so-called caste-privileged and caste-underprivileged become destabilised. The definitive categories, such as the pious Brahmin, the generous upper caste or the helpless untouchable/Dalit, undergo a remake. The middle class also betrays a different reality. They stand far away from their popular image of the social conscience-keeper and look vulnerable. Such an interrogation of reality begets its alternative versions that eventually unsettle our "common-sensical" (Hutcheon xi) knowledge of it.

Broadly speaking, 'truth' becomes tentative, and history (past or present) comes to display the legitimisation of certain versions of truth at the cost of some other vulnerable versions. Tendulkar and Karnad deal with this simultaneous process of legitimisation and

marginalisation of realities that informs the post-Independence Indian society. It is important to note that their reading is evidently supported by their hold over their respective dramatic forms. Karnad's technical oeuvre is exquisitely rich to meet his thematic profundity. His adaptation of folk conventions and mythologies, undoubtedly, widens his scope of experimentation. Again, his recent plays – *Flowers* (2004), *Wedding Album* (2009) – continue to show his urge for novelty in terms of dramatic technique. In this respect, Tendulkar may appear to be less experimental. Except *Ghashiram Kotwal*, he looks most comfortable in his realistic and naturalistic idiom. In fact, his inimitable matter-of-fact and plain-speaking style perfectly suits his merciless treatment of reality. This simplicity, which is of course deceptive, effortlessly sees through the social hypocrisies and critiques the irrationalities, on which our society is founded. In this respect, he is a perfect match for Karnad. They both offer their versions of reality and reveal what is safely hidden, raising alongside alternative patterns of truth.

Chapter I

The Politics of Power

A critical dialogue with the post-Independence grand narrative of nation-building, state and governance remains to be one of the chief considerations for both Tendulkar and Karnad. They delineate contemporary political realities with a view to negotiating their 'normal' and 'legitimated' status. The 'natural' history of the new nation-state often comes under their 'problematizing' gaze that seeks to contest its discourse of pervasive development and expose problems kept conveniently hidden. This enterprise of reviewing contemporary historical reality is informed by an understanding of history as a 'textualised', 'human construct'. History is no more seen as objective annals of data and events whose reality is absolute and final. On the contrary, it has become a fluid space whose authenticity depends on the prevailing discourses of ideology. History as text has been continuously made and remade to meet the ideological demands of a particular historical time and, thus, becomes a site of possible resignifications. From this understanding of history as 'alterable', Tendulkar and Karnad seem to look at the past. They try to find 'untenability' within the historical rationalisations of the past in conjunction with analogous 'untenability' located in the present. Thus, a critique of our contemporary historical knowledge becomes possible through a retrospective engagement with the past historical knowledge. Some of their plays, to be discussed here, display such contestation of reality that negotiates the post-1947 statist and political discourses through a rereading of the familiar events of some hundred years ago. 'Notional reality' of the past is critically read to probe into a similar 'notionalisation' of contemporary political history of the country.

Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq* (1964) investigates the build-up of a nation-state under the leadership of the fourteenth-century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughlaq. A similar investigation into the state-functions and political culture is undertaken in Tendulkar's *Encounter in Umbugland* (1968) and *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972). History

becomes the object of critical reading in these plays. Precolonial historical knowledge is examined in *Tughlaq* and *Ghashiram Kotwal*, whereas fictitious history with a strong allegorical suggestion becomes the subject of *Encounter in Umbugland*. The main objective remains to scrutinise the discursive operations and hegemonic functions that take place at different levels of political authority and are kept hidden by history's rationalisations. These examinations reveal different roles of power that work to sustain a political regime or a hegemonic system. As a result, absolute knowledge on authority becomes alterable, and history's stereotypes are contested. It leads to a reknowing of the 'textualised' past, where history's straight-jacketed mad Sultan Tughlaq or hero Nana Phadnavis comes to constitute a different kind of knowledge. The recognition of such alternative knowledge, which renders history discursive, effectively questions its claim to 'singular' meaning – particularly, in connection with the project of state-building and gradual development in governance and realpolitik. The intricacies of political power relations and discourses in the nation-state are disclosed, resulting in a review of its political culture. The fourth play in the present section is Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997). Importantly, the play negotiates the Euro-centric history that validates colonial expansion and its enterprise of " 'worlding' the world as Europe" (Gandhi 171). History again looks debatable as the coloniser's discourse of domination over the colonised-dissenter is taken on. More striking than all is the potential ability of this rereading of the past to provide critical perspectives on contemporary political discourses. In fact, all the four plays can be credited with sharp insights into the political condition of the present.

Tughlaq is a milestone in contemporary Indian theatre for the immense scope of its theme and technique. Its dramatic potentials on stage are adequately exploited by various successful productions, like that of B. V. Karanth (1966), Alyque Padamsee (1970), Ebrahim Alkazi (1974), leading up to its stage visibility. Thematically, the play continues to draw critical attention even after forty six years of its composition and first production. The chief reason is that it penetrates into the psychological world of a much maligned sultan and builds up through dialogue a complex discourse of power on post-Independence politics of the country. In writing the play, Karnad's immediate concern is the history of the newly independent country. He comments, ". . . independence had made history suddenly important to us" (*Three Plays* 7). The present history of transition from the colonial past to a postcolonial future is breathtaking enough to draw critical attention.

The Nehruvian project of nation-building is the grand-narrative of the time. But the conjunctive socio-political developments create doubts about the grand-narrative. Karnad has summed up the new mood as, “. . . the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India: the gradual erosion of ethical norms that had guided the movement for independence and the coming to terms with cynicism and realpolitik” (*Three Plays* 7). This crisis makes critical awareness of the contemporary history necessary. And no wonder Karnad finds Tughlaq to be his suitable historical subject for the purpose. The sultan, who was “the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures” (Karnad, *Three Plays* 7), provides him ample scope to reassess the grand project of empire-building and concurrently postcolonial India’s project of nation-building. The man who stood behind the policies, many of which are now considered “far-sighted to the point of genius, but which in their day earned him the title ‘Muhammad the Mad’ ” (Karnad, *Three Plays* 7), invites a rereading of the man himself and his project. Thus the play refers to the contemporary history of building the Indian nation and creates a critical awareness of it by closely observing the power politics involved in Muhammad Tughlaq’s analogous enterprise.

The transfer of power in 1947 seems to be India’s moment of arrival with the new task of forming a nation-state and enhancing development. The oppressive colonial system, which impeded socio-economic development, and its legacies in many a sector are to be encountered by the regenerated might of the new-born nation. And for this purpose the new leadership under the auspices of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru sets before it the task of establishing a sovereign state to mark a departure from the colonial condition. The idea is once the political power is achieved, economy can be restructured by the sovereign state to maximise production and distribution so as to meet the demand of the independent nation and ensure social justice (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 133). Pandit Nehru is the unquestionable leader for this immensely difficult task. His neo-nationalism rejects the essentialist inferiority of India (East) to the British (West) superiority. It considers the rise and fall of civilisation a historical process (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 137). At the juncture of Independence, Nehru appears as the ‘chosen’ leader-cum-ideologue to guide the nation-state in such historical moments. His “mature nationalism” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 144) is sure enough to bring the “realist’s utopia” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 160) through a “tryst with destiny” (Nehru qtd. in Hasan 1). Considering the complexity of the mission, Nehru’s work draws awe and

admiration. The enterprise of nation-building produces visible dividends. It lays the foundation of the country's parliamentary democracy, keeping it in a dignified distance from the communal/authoritarian mess of its new-born neighbour, Pakistan. But even then, it remains a case of mixed virtues, as with Nehru's death in 1964 the so-called 'golden age' comes to an end, leaving behind a trail of problems unaddressed and unsolved. The last few years of the heroic leader's life seems to have been clouded in multifarious crises – linguistic, regional and communal strife in domestic politics; growing corruption, ineptitude, factionalism in the party; disenchantment over the Five-Year Planning Programmes and finally the debacle in the Chinese war (1962) (Chatterjee, *A Possible India* 24). To quote Partha Chatterjee again, "the hero had lost his magic touch" (*A Possible India* 25).

The hope and disillusionment of the Nehruvian period surely provides a context to the play, but it would be absolutely wrong to read *Tughlaq* only as a political allegory of any particular post-Independence leader or his/her 'regime'. The play is, on the contrary, a critique of the post-Independence political experiences getting murky and devalued down the decades. Its continuous success on the stage among linguistically diverse audiences proves its unending contemporaneity. After Nehru, sheer politicisation of the system fast becomes a visible feature. With the mounting crises in democracy, the nation continues to be in an economic mess. Corruption and scams come to race with communalism and, more importantly, "pseudo-secularism" (Alam, *India* 84). The common people are at perils. *Tughlaq* continues to capture this crisis of the nation, where the authority/state, despite its supposedly best efforts, fails to deliver what it promises to the common people.

The play is at once about the leader's or authority's self-conscious process of image-building and the ironic dismantling of the image. Karnad projects through Muhammad a king-with-difference, who has a "mission" (204) for his people and a dream that he must realise. But the validity of his image comes to be challenged by the methodology of his self-assertion. The sultan self-consciously formulates his benevolent authority over the people he wants to guide, and this formulation betrays politics. His claim to be a reformist force challenging the existing system becomes problematic because the method of challenging seems to equate him with what he opposes. Karnad explores the inner self of this man to show his dream on the one hand and, on the other,

the murky game of politics he indulges in to realise the dream. As a result, Sultan Tughlaq comes out from his frozen image of a mad man and reveals the intricacies involved in state-politics.

Muhammad comes as the saviour with all his towering idealism for his people. He always justifies his position as the ruler of the land by his idealism and capability to execute it. "The country's in perfectly safe hands – safer than any you have seen before" (147). His ideal kingdom will practice equality among all irrespective of religious faith. Development will be the key to improve, politically and economically, common people's standard of living. Equal treatment of the Hindus and the Muslims, shift of the capital for better governance, economic and agricultural policies are some of his agendas intended to materialise his dream and establish himself as the only capable agency to facilitate public welfare.

The construction of leadership includes the poetic self of the sultan. He is not merely a leader absorbed in the monotony of administration but a man with a taste for Persian poetry as well as with the knowledge of ancient philosophies. He incurs inspiration from them for the sustenance of his vision and his relentless mobility. He does not sleep much – ". . . how dare I waste my time by sleeping?" (155) – as if to remind us of Nehru's love for Robert Frost's immortal lines, "But I have promises to keep,/And miles to go before I sleep" (Tharoor 215). He is a powerful Muslim king expected by the ulemaas to spread the cause of Islam all over the land. He indeed works to satisfy them. But the discourse of a benevolent king sidelines all these minor aspects of his character. He can equal Sukrat (Socrates) and Aflatoon (Plato) in his thirst for truth and justice and move beyond the clichéd world of the Arabs and the Koran (165).

Muhammad's departure from traditions propels contemplation over his reformist status. Can he be called a 'challenging-Other' in the prevailing political order? He indeed poses challenge to the social status quo. A republic economically strong and free from religious dogmatism and communal hatred seems to be his desire. The great mission is in his mind. But implementation appears to be prolonged by sustained oppositions that make him resort to power politics, overt or covert. Sheikh Imam-ud-din, a religious leader, represents the mood of the orthodoxy, ". . . slaves have often tried to replace their masters" (164). Under this light, Muhammad surely appears as a challenge to the existing

order. However, his methodology of execution renders his image of the dissentious outsider problematic. The mere fact of having a great vision in mind seems not enough to undermine his limitless indulgence in unscrupulous politics. The image of a ruthless and crafty politician comes to the fore as he tries desperately to realise his dream. The chaos and anarchy his kingdom falls into at the end renders Muhammad's 'challenge' suspect. Surely, he is not history's straight-jacketed lunatic. But he cannot be a challenger either. His political indulgences dismantle his benevolent image and reveal complexities of the ruler and his rule in a transitional and volatile moment of history.

The dismantling of the sultan's image is done through a process of contesting the concepts constructed all through the play. Muhammad the benevolent despot gradually reveals the impersonal ruler, who imposes his "mission" on his people more to strengthen his image than to improve their life. In the consequence, he appears as a crooked tactician who can unscrupulously manipulate situations to turn them in his favour. To contest his strategically articulated image, Karnad has introduced the character of Aziz, a Muslim dhobi (washerman), as a theatrical ploy to contest Muhammad's welfare-project. Aziz is Muhammad's alter ego, who intervenes in each of his welfare plans and utilises them for his personal benefit. His successful manipulation of the projects questions their validity and problematises the sultan's benevolence.

The first instance, where Muhammad's 'benevolence' comes to be contested, is the returning of the confiscated land to a Hindu Brahmin. The goodwill gesture is surely intended to encourage communal harmony in the kingdom. But it totally ignores the ground reality as to whether such a gesture will be appreciated by both the communities. The atmosphere of Delhi is too vicious to welcome the policy. The Muslims are tough on it because they find it pro-Hindu, while the Hindus disbelieve the sultan as this unprecedented softness comes from a Muslim king! As a result, the gesture is perceived as a statist imposition to be doubted. It comes more to widen the communal gap than to bridge it up. The lack of foresight in its imposition suggests that the sultan is desperate to build his own secular image and in the process disregards the public preparedness for it. This rashness becomes evident again when Aziz busts up the policy by disguising himself as a Brahmin to receive the land. His camouflage subverts the secular plan of the sultan and points out the administrative ineptitude resulted from the royal haste for a secular image. This failure of policy discloses the huge gulf between the ruler and the ruled.

Muhammad fails to address the cause of this gulf and tries to overcome it more by coercion and ruthlessness. This growing violence in him is inevitable because power can be “coercive or repressive when the idea of government (a structure of actions upon other actions for possible outcomes) is frustrated” (A. Sengupta, *Being* 164).

Muhammad’s secular brand is questioned by many other instances that show him deep in murky politics. He wants to uphold secularism but never hesitates to use religion for political benefit. His elimination of the amir, Shihab-ud-Din, at the prayer is a classic example of religious manipulation. He pre-plants the Hindu guards, who are free from the royal decree that bars the Muslims to carry their weapons during prayer, and uses them to kill the unarmed amir. His final, blatant use of religion is his invitation of Abbasid Ghiyas-ud-din Muhammad, the descendant of the holy Khalif, to counter his religious foes. Political power can achieve authenticity if it is given the holy patch of religion. But this gimmick is also exposed by Aziz. His arrest at the end unmasks not only him but also the sultan, highlighting the nexus between politics and religion.

To create his ideal state, Muhammad undertakes several other projects. Much to the uproar of the orthodoxy, he shifts the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. The city of the Hindus as the capital for a Muslim kingdom serves to boost his secular credentials. He invites his people to participate in the project, as if they could turn down his offer if they had liked. The exodus brings insurmountable loss and agony to the people, let alone the huge cost it incurs. The sultan, however, remains obsessed with his dream and cannot wait to see whether the people as well as his administration are ready for it. His two other noble projects meet similar fate – first, the introduction of copper coins with the same token value as gold and silver; secondly, government subsidy to famine-hit farmers in the Doad region. Karnad has used Aziz to expose their deficiencies. The clever dhobi counterfeits copper coin in order to exchange them for silver dinar and plans to rob the royal treasury of its gold and silver. He also becomes a fake farmer and receives subsidy for famine. Thus, the welfare projects fail because of the lack of administrative foresight and competence. They reflect, rather, the ruler’s obsession with self-image.

Karnad destabilises Muhammad’s brilliance to free him from history’s ideological simplifications. Muslim historians, like Zia-ud-din Barani, criticise him for his un-Islamic stance, while the Orientalist historians, like Henry Elliot, Mountstuart Elphinstone,

Vincent Smith, disapprove of him to prove Western supremacy over the East (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 249). In this context, Karnad thoroughly investigates the psychological state of the man vis-à-vis his political surroundings to provide an alternative version of reality. The so-called mad and tyrant sultan displays a “Greek” (165) mind that can think beyond his stagnated time. But he also displays his ruthless skill to play the political game of power (160). This is the complexity of Tughlaq’s character. He is a visionary, but his visions are excessively concerned with his self-image. The great plans he has undertaken show his brilliance, but all of them are clouded by his self-obsession that undermines public interest.

In challenging the historical preconceptions about Sultan Tughlaq, the play negotiates the post-Independence euphoria of nation-building under the aegis of Nehru. The massive projects of national vision undertaken at two different historical moments seem to reflect, under Karnad’s rereading, some analogous points and help to scrutinise the present through the past. Nehru, highly regarded as “a man who cared for the people . . . a man of consuming energy and endless activity” (Spear 17), reminds one of the medieval sultan. Tughlaq’s dream of Plato and Aristotle and his desire to rise above the Koranic-world evoke Nehru’s Western dreams – democracy, secularism and development. But Karnad rereads the past to foreground the crude power politics in Tughlaq’s “Greek” dream. Tughlaq ardently believes in his self-proclaimed role of the nation-builder and, therefore, unabatedly plays the game of power. He has noble ideas, but he makes it a reason to be the only ‘chosen’ leader who has the sole right to guide the people at any cost. As a result, he stands alone, cut off from his people at the end. Through this obsessive self-rationalisation of Tughlaq, Karnad tries to capture Nehru. Through Tughlaq’s failure, Nehru’s dream, which also often fell prey to realpolitik, is looked upon. The centralisation of power, divisive state policies, politicisation of state machinery, and forced imposition of policies seem to blemish the so-called golden period of Nehru.

However, Karnad rereads Muhammad Tughlaq more to critique the general political erosion after Independence than to contest any individual political figure. The play continues to question some major trends in Indian political culture, such as the issues of political despotism, secularism and development. The State of Emergency (1975-77), declared by Indira Gandhi, displays the height of despotism and centralisation of power in

Indian democracy. People's voice is suppressed by the state, and, interestingly, the Emergency is said to have been implemented in the interest of the people (Park 996). Tughlaq's regime explains why and how the despotic authorities centralise power and claim to do so for public benefit.

The politics of secularism is the other trend that the play interrogates. Indian nationalism's desire for a 'modern' nation-state, which would simultaneously retain India's indigenous (Hindu) identity, seems to render the nation's relation with religion and secularism problematic. On the one hand, it aspires to be secular in tune with Western modernity, and, on the other, religion or religiosity takes a deep root in its consciousness. Apart from the long colonial rule, the wound of the partition and communal riots seems to perpetuate in the public consciousness a desire for indigeness, which finds expression in the nationalist call to revive the lost glory of the "Sanskrit Indic civilisation" (Sethi 12). As a result, constitutional secularism comes into force after Independence, though the deep-rooted desire for cultural revivalism also co-exists. Most unfortunately, it is the Indian political class that comes to see profit in this tense relation between secularism and religion. They come to play with both and end up increasing the majority-minority (Hindu-Muslim) tension. They pretend to espouse secularism and give the minority a false sense of security. In the name of secularism they even encourage minority-communalism for political gain. This 'pseudo-secularism', on the other end, enrages the majority which feel betrayed for this 'appeasement politics'. The political class never fails to capitalise on this anger, which gradually turns into majority-communalism. On the whole, the problem lies in the pseudo nature of Indian secularism. As Javeed Alam observes, secularism's "very intellectual elaboration by mainstream Indian political thought and the manner in which it has been put to use by those who control the political institutions of the Indian State have been 'pseudo'" (*India* 84). Because of it, to quote Alam again, "There is an explicit importance given to the Muslim presence in India today and the secular is now defined in terms of one's position towards them" (*India* 84).

The political version of secularism fast becomes minority-centric, or, more specifically, Muslim-centric clearly for vote-bank gains. This secularism has become an instrument to ghettoise the Muslims as a profitable political identity. It tries to segregate the minority by asserting its communal difference so that it can be politically exploited as

a group. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's passing the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act in 1986 attempts to appease the fundamentalists for political mileage. The banning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* is a replication in similar direction. Likewise, Tughlaq's regime displays the sultan's political brand of secularism where the Hindu identity becomes very important. In the Islamic kingdom, the Hindus are politically powerless and minority, but they have the numerical majority. To gain their vital support, the state undertakes 'special care' of them much to the anguish of the political majority, i.e. the Muslims. Tughlaq's returning of the confiscated land to the Brahmin is such exemplary secularism that pampers the Hindu sentiment. Karnad's theatrical agent of exposure Aziz sees through it and has to disguise as a Hindu Brahmin to maximise his chances of procuring the state-largesse. As a balancing act, the sultan invites Abbasid to appease the Muslims. On the whole, religiosity and secularism have become political instruments that render his kingdom communally split. Analogous condition prevails in contemporary India where pseudo-secular/communal politics has reached an all-time high in the post-Ram Mandir and Babri Masjid episode (1992). The alarming importance of the communal card under the garb of secularism in vote-bank politics poses the severest threat to the country, a concern which was foretold long years back by Karnad's theatrical marvel and is being addressed by its continuous reproduction on the stage.

The issue of development is another important area that *Tughlaq* intervenes in. His capital-shift, copper currency and subsidy to the farmers are some of the developmental policies that provide critical perspectives on contemporary debates over development. In India at present, the traditional narrative of development, which is unsustainable, is vigorously contested by a position that insists on a human face of it. It questions the legitimacy of such development that survives on unequal distribution of wealth, "exploitative power relations, centralization of decision-making, disempowerment of communities caused by the development process" (Sangvai 111). Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has extolled, "To sustain and accelerate our growth process, we have to make some *tough policy choices*. . . . Development must become a national obsession" (my emphasis) (11). What remains to see is at what price this development by "tough policy choices" comes. This sometimes leads to the fissure between the leader and the led. The examples of the Narmoda Bachao Andolan against the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmoda river (1985 onwards) and the Singur-Nandigram movement against land-

acquisition for industry (2006-08) seem to put forth the question, “who should sacrifice for whose benefit?” (Sangvai 113). *Tughlaq* pertinently questions this ‘unsustainability’ of development that satisfies the privileged interest, putting people’s interest at peril.

As a play *Tughlaq*’s most important aspect is its ability to remain relevant to the changing condition. Its main objective seems to capture the hope that comes with a new system after Independence and the subsequent destruction of that hope down the following decades. The unabated corruption of politics and state machinery ruins the nationalist euphoria of a ‘utopia’. The colonial authority is replaced to be sure, but the promises of a better life fast become a far cry for the common people. Prospect of change is almost lost as it happens in *Tughlaq*’s kingdom. The sultan, who claims to clear the ‘filth’, has come up with another structural impasse. This continuous corrosion of the post-Independence hope is endlessly addressed by *Tughlaq*. This is why the play continues to be relevant to newer situations. Its varied reproductions at the hand of different directors (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 258-62) keep exploring its endless potentials for providing newer perspectives on the existing as well as the impending conditions of hopelessness. Its ability to negotiate the ‘present’ reality seems unending.

Contemporary power politics becomes a major issue again in Vijay Tendulkar’s *Encounter in Umbugland*. Like *Tughlaq*, the play surveys contemporary political history of the country that displays sheer centralisation of power and politicisation of the state machinery. It challenges the nationalist claim to post-Independence progress, disclosing the dark underbelly of the nation-state. The primacy of politics, which relegates the common people to insignificance, is captured so as to show how the leaders serve their political ambitions holding the country to ransom. In this world of power-crazy politicians, the discourse of development and progress seems to be hollow. Through the narrative of a fictitious history, Tendulkar reads the situation and shows how suppressive ideology is created and maintained to give politics a free run.

The story unfolds in the imaginary land of Dambadwip (Umbugland) which has seen the sixty-year rule of its autocratic king, Vichitravirya, and the change of guard at the royal palace after the aged king expires. His daughter-cum-sole-descendant, Vijaya, is placed on the throne by the cabinet of ministers who wanted to have a puppet king to fortify their interest. But things take a different turn as the new queen gradually becomes

a master politician. She thwarts their expectations and, thereby, makes Umbugland a hotbed of politics where multiple power-mongers are backstabbing each other and letting the country bleed. The play can be divided into two parts. First, it shows the autocratic regime of king Vichitravirya. Under the rhetoric of democracy and freedom, the king has established an oppressive system. He himself remains at the centre and disseminates his hegemonic authority through different agents at the different tiers of the power structure. The entire system is under his constant surveillance, directly or indirectly. From the sense of being constantly watched over by the king the people conform to the norm and help to perpetuate the surveillance all across. This regime seems to remind one of the Foucauldian Panopticon where the inhabitants are made subject to constant surveillance by the central invisible power even without their knowledge (Smart 88). The second part of the story tells about the introduction of a 'fresh' subject in the game of power. But interestingly, the new subject (Vijaya), though she initially wanted to serve the common people, steadily acclimatises herself to the existing condition and even improves on the techniques of oppression. The storyline produces a powerful narrative that probes into some important issues hidden behind the developmental rhetoric. These are the culture of intrigue, manipulation, criminalisation in politics, the position of the common people especially the minorities (religious/ethnic), politics over development, and another vital factor in the political game i.e. commercialised media. By looking into these factors, the play busts many notional realities about the progressive state and its political culture.

King Vichitravirya's rule epitomises some rhetoric of state politics. The myth of the leader's larger-than-life image is a deliberate construction to legitimise authority. The sixty-year rule has upheld an image of the king over the people, sustained by techniques which are regularised in the name of order and decorum. The tediously ceremonious proclamation of the arrival of the king before the courtiers and the king's order for a life-size portrait display the techniques of amplification and authentication. It seeks to manufacture the image of the father of a nation and circulate it throughout the body politic. By these technical manoeuvres, the king enjoys the central position, keeping all other ambitious forces at bay.

In the present political structure, the ministers, despite their personal ambitions, work as complicit force to sustain the model. Stake holders in power, they are the beneficiaries, though suppressed by the king. They want to sabotage the king. But since

the king is too powerful to be ousted, they resort to flattery or sycophancy. Sycophancy becomes the mandatory art to bargain for a better space. This sometimes knows no bound as one minister declares, "His Majesty is Umbugland and Umbugland is his Majesty!" (277). Such competitive flattery as the one that declares "Indira is India; India is Indira" (Barooah qtd. in Gupte 428) becomes the hallmark of Indian politics and is seen as a ritualistic passport to the corridors of power. The sycophants become totally bereft of self-dignity and can stoop to any low to achieve personal goal as a former President of India (Zail Singh) once did. Out of his 'gratitude' he announced that "he would gladly sweep the ground that Indiraji walked upon" (qtd. in Bobb 90).

The politics in Umbugland suffers from the 'bizarritisation' of sycophancy. The ministers' flattery aims to sustain the dynastic rule because its continuation promises mutual benefit for the leaders and their hordes. The leaders get to enjoy uninterrupted privilege of their central position, which, in the other way, safeguards the strategic interests of their coterie. Even after sixty years of (mis)rule, the king likes to have it more. To his wish to rule for another fifty years, the ministers start mounting up, seventy, seventy five, even going up to, astronomically, five hundred! This underscores the mutual desire for a dynastic rule for political exploits. The sycophants can be desperate to have it ensured. For example, a former Union Human Resource Development minister floated the name of Rahul Gandhi as the future Prime Minister of India in a desperate attempt of appeasement during the very tenure of Dr. Manmohan Singh (Nayar).

The rhetoric of sycophancy works through another technique of state politics i.e. spectacle. The ruler is always conscious of his image as the father of the nation. Vichitravirya's stress on minute detailing of his life-size portrait showcases the importance of the spectacle in ruling the people. The ministers are also in a fanatical hurry to flatter the king by performances of loyalty, which are no less bizarre than the real-life exercises of today's politicians. This involves the attempt to self-immolate outside the Parliament after the Congress president Mrs. Sonia Gandhi listened to her 'inner voice' and declined the Prime Ministership (Bobb 90) and the craze for naming government institutions after the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty (*Fullstop*). Indian politics is fast defined by this type of sycophancy-spectacle syndrome, a condition that robs the political culture of Umbugland of any productive strength.

After the king's sudden death, Princess Vijaya is transplanted by the warring ministers as a scapegoat – “She'll be the rule, we'll be the rulers” (293). Nomination of a puppet candidate is a much common ploy in politics that relies on the power of deputation. Authority works through an agency to increase its effectiveness and sustainability. But Vijaya is going to thwart their plan by her refusal to be a puppet and her active participation in the game of power. Can she be compared with Muhammad Tughlaq in terms of challenging the status quo? The answer can be both, yes and no. They both indeed bring fresh air to a rotten state. But Tughlaq, in spite of his ‘Greek dream’, seems to be a master player of politics from the beginning, whereas Vijaya is initially juvenile and ignorant of the outside world, let alone the political tricks. However, she fast adapts to the new condition and evolves as a crafty and ruthless politician to match the cunning ministers. Her education in politics and her consequent power-clash with the ministers bring the entire political culture under scrutiny, revealing its overall decadence and the dangers it brings to the society.

First of all, Vijaya's transplantation speaks of the technique of deputed power. It seems to remind one of the alleged selection of young Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister by the Syndicate, “an informal party caucus, consisting of some powerful state and central leaders” (M. P. Singh 42) in 1966. Indira's honeymoon with the Syndicate did not last long and both fell out finally to split the party in 1969 (Park 999). Through its intervention in this type of political manoeuvring, the play seems to examine the present and reread the situations afresh. The technique of deputed power, exercised by the Umbugland ministers, thus reveals an aspect of the oppressive regime.

Deputation of power does not always guarantee success for the authority that employs it. The person deputed with notional power often self-discovers and frustrates his/her employer. Vijaya exactly does this. Her transplantation is a part of the game, and she learns to turn the game in her favour. She poses challenge to the existing ‘masters’, but her challenge is never to subvert the present order and replace it with an altogether new system of thought. On the contrary, it seeks to continue the same oppressive structure by better techniques and more effective strategies than before. She might have some desire, at the outset, for welfare but it fast gives way to politics. She reckons politics the only way to survive and wants to play it better than her adversaries.

Vijaya's counter-game reveals new idioms of power politics. To defeat the ministers, she imports criminals to her party. She even buys off some of her enemies and disintegrates them. In order to counter the people's uprising, which is engineered by the ministers to topple her, she employs her resources to re-mobilise the people against the ministers. Her engineering proves better because her propaganda-machine convinces the people of her worth and reshapes their opinion. The conflict highlights some glaring aspects of today's politics – the nexus between politicians and criminals, the use of money for political horse-trading, and the role of the state propaganda in forming public opinion.

The core issue of conflict between Vijaya and the ministers is a developmental project undertaken by the queen for the untouchable Kadamba tribe. But unfortunately, the project is politicised by Vijaya and her adversaries, both of whom perceive it as a means for strategic consolidation. For their political advantage, both the parties use the communal card over the execution of the project and pit the majority community against the minority Kadambas. Finally, Vijaya's craft wins over her enemies, who also save their life by surrendering to the queen. However, it does not end well with the Kadambas who are left out by all to face the majority-rage. They remain as the passive object to the political adventurism of a wily queen and her crafty ministers.

The political game played over the Kadambas surfaces a major concern of contemporary India, i.e. the politics played over the minorities. In the existing set up, the minorities of different denominations, such as caste, religion, tribe, hold tremendous importance to the political parties for their usual tendency of en bloc voting. It is reported that in the last three Lok Sabha elections before 2004 "at an average, over 67 percent of members of parliament have won on a minority vote" (Jha 1582). The minorities seem to draw political attention for their decisive role in vote-politics, but this attention ironically proves calamitous to them. They become vulnerable to the sophisticated welfare agendas. They are scientifically objectified and segregated further from the others. Once the vote is secured, the minorities find them left out where they were to rot in their ghettos. The condition of the Dalits, tribals, and Muslims, despite numerous affirmative policies of the state, is a pointer to the issue. In India, the Muslim community seems to be politically most lucrative among the other minorities because of their numerical size and allegedly monolithic structure. Therefore, explicit importance is given to the Muslim presence by

all political parties in present India (Alam, *India* 84). Everybody is eager to seize the minority vote through welfare politics, and the chief mode of expression of this welfare politics is affirmative action i.e. reservation. Race for reservation is mounting as all the parties find it the easiest way to woo the minorities. This unavoidable situation seems to be largely due to the state's dilemma over the political and cultural character of the nation-state. Down the decades it seems to have failed to properly explain the Constitutional co-existence of the abolition of untouchability (Article 17) on the one hand and the "special care" for caste backwards (Article 46) on the other. This hesitation of the state to properly address the issue, perhaps, comes from its allegedly majority (upper caste/Hindu centric) discourse. Several implications can be made from this retained confusion. The state might be "weary of assertive minorities, especially when the history had proven that such assertion might obstruct the process of nation building." (Jain 2436). And, therefore, perhaps even the wordings of some articles are kept in vague "in order to facilitate regular interpretation of the rights by the courts of India" (Jain 2436) according to the historical and spatial requirements of the state. Secondly, it might have something to do with the nationalist perception of Indianness that speaks of a holistic view of society, taking care of its 'marginal'. The "special care", as it were, reflects this liberal discourse of the nation. Thirdly, it might be, at its worst, a political compromise done by the majority discourse to gain/retain minority-backward support. But, whatever might be the implications of this state-confusion, it appears to encourage unabated minority politics at the cost of proper minority welfare. Even Nehru was concerned about it because this minority-obsession can forfeit "that inner sympathy and fellow feeling with the majority, which is dangerous" (qtd. in Jha 1581). This is exactly what happens in Umbugland where the Kadambas remain only as a pawn in the hand of power. They are played with as long as they have political potentials and readily discarded before the majority-rage the moment they have outlived their utility.

The third issue the play points out is the politics over development. As in *Tughlaq*, this trend again shows how politics puts people at peril under the pretence of development. The Kadamba project is a classic example of it. It explains how politics backstabs development to serve the ambition of power. The underprivileged Kadamba tribe becomes a mere site of political game where all the ugly strategies are employed to safeguard the vested interests. They badly need the basic facilities of life – food, healthcare, shelter, employment. This backwardness is largely the creation of power.

They are left to rot in their backwardness for political reasons. Again, for political reasons only they are enticed to the illusion of development, but this is only to reduce them to a more comprehensive state of backwardness. After the game is over, the Kadambas are slammed in more miseries. Now they have no parties around to woo them except the majority mob running after their blood. For them development seems to have become “displacement-rehabilitation-displacement continuum” (Alam, *The Contemporary* 51) that more alienates a particular community from the society than rehabilitates them to normal life.

Media’s role in politics remains a crucial issue that the play examines while critiquing the overall machination of power. In a society, either totalitarian or republican, the presence of a vibrant mass media is very important to facilitate the democratisation of politics. A media free from any particular political dogma and sheer commercialism can go a long way in constructing the public sphere or a social platform for general public discussion. Media can give birth, because of its advantageous position of access to a vast span of political reality, to a group of concerned and informed citizens by “ensuring secondary contact” (Sinha 2803) of these people with the reality accessed. The people seem to be eager to believe in the authority of the media discourse largely because they “believe that most others believe the same” (Sinha 2803). Media can mount on this public faith to assume the role of a watchdog. As a regulatory body over political establishments, it can do wonder, producing the terms of accountability. But problem arises when media begins to consider itself solely as a commercial venture set to cater to the popular taste as a part of its consumerist agenda. And, secondly, when it decides or has to ally itself with power for its commercial sustenance. As in the first case, commercialisation of media is a serious concern in any civic society. The fast vanishing line between news and trivia surely endangers its authentic role and degrades it to a status of “newstainment” (Purie 1) or “Tamasha news” (Purie 1). News is packaged in such a way that it becomes easily consumable and sellable, leaving no scope for serious thought (Sinha 2803). On the second level, media falls in the hand of Establishment and lets itself be a part of the state propaganda. As a seasoned player in the game of power, it masters political twist and turn to remain in the good-book of whoever coming to power, and thus the possibility of a democratic society is permanently damaged.

In *Encounter in Umbugland* the appearance of media on the stage is very naturalistic. "Two men enter, one from each wing, wielding huge pens like sceptres. They stand facing the audience, and bang their pens on the ground thrice" (269). These two men are dressed in black. The symbolic gesture with the huge pen, which is reportedly mightier than sword, goes to denote the authority of the media-discourse over people. The blackness contributes to the vague and volatile nature media assumes for itself. The unmistakable comedy in their performance indicates the superficial media functioning in a state of voyeurism to sell everything, from state matters, political rivalries to gossips. They were all praise for the king as long as he was alive. Then, they comically measure the snakes and ladders game as to the heir to the throne. When Vijaya is selected, they are all set to eulogise the queen. The launch of government programmes, like mosquito eradication, the queen's foreign tours, her authority over the trade unions, intelligentsia, scientists and industrialists are given maximum coverage. Even the queen's catching cold, her smile, the gossip of her intimacy with somebody, and the watermelon grown in her park are not missed out. No wonders when, in real life, one sees the media fanfare over the displeasure of Mrs. Rabri Devi, the ex-chief minister of Bihar, for not receiving a basket of lichi as a gift from the existing chief minister Mr. Nitish Kumar (Shankhyadip Das 12). The power game in Umbugland provides ample chance to the media to sell the thrilling news about the probable winners, keeping all options open for itself. Despite its bet on the ministers, it does volte-face to the queen's side the moment she wins the game.

Encounter in Umbugland ruthlessly exposes the absence of healthy political practices and the predominance of political opportunism which thrives on intrigues, hypocrisy, and communalism. Development of the common people has gone backstage, giving way to unscrupulous politics and power-sharing. And most ominous among all is perhaps the absence of an independent public opinion. People seem to have lost their power to think, except feeding on the 'special diet' prescribed to them. They have become, in the words of Prannarayan who is a eunuch and biologically-culturally unlike the rest, "a formless, characterless, lifeless, existenceless gathering" (356). On their ignorance, autocratic regimes and "State of Emergency" (1975-77) are built. As a whole, excessive centralisation of power, criminalisation-communalisation of politics, and a fast losing democratic set-up supplemented by a public apathy are posing serious question to the concept of national progress. The play aptly probes into these portentous developments in Indian politics down the decades.

The discourse on state-mechanism and power politics reaches a new level in Tendulkar's most famous, yet most controversial, play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Through its spectacular stage-visibility over thirty-five years, the play continues to negotiate contemporary Indian politics with unmatched sharpness. The narrative of fictitious history (*Encounter in Umbugland*) here gives way to a narrative formulated from the historical resources of the early colonial period. Historical past, like Karnad's *Tughlaq*, becomes a vehicle for negotiating the socio-political present. Engagement with historical past always has the risk of dismantling the iconic figures of textualised history, for it seeks to find plurality in meaning. *Ghashiram Kotwal* does exactly the same. Its rereading of the eighteenth century Maratha history and some of its icons recasts fresh insight into the accepted realities of the pristine past. This invites hostile reaction from a section of the society, but the play's merit undoubtedly lies in this impassionate handling of the sacred past. The act of re-knowing the past leads to 'reunderstand' the present, rejecting its recognised and notional realities. The post-Independence discourse of welfare state and governance thus comes to be scrutinised. The scientific techniques of domination, which maintain a regime, are looked upon and the operation of power, which works through a relationship of confrontation, is analysed. Consequently, this reveals the darker side of political governance and practices.

Ghashiram Kotwal critically addresses some alarming aspects of the contemporary Indian state and society. First, the criminalisation of power with its subsequent spread to other domains of discourse. Secondly, the excessive centralisation of power that polices its people and undermines the democratic system. Thirdly, the danger of the post-Independence, postcolonial Indian state replicating the colonial style of thought and operation. The nexus between politicians and criminals is not solely a post-Independence feature. This was visible in the pre-Independence era as well. During the Raj, as Leonard A. Gordon observes, ". . . political leaders had their own squads of *goondas* or hoodlums to use as the need arose" (qtd. in Bhattacharya 4280). However, the phenomenon has recently crept into Indian politics in a way like never before. The existing political system, seemingly, 'destigmatises' corruption and establishes it as one of the standard corridors to power. The outcome is clear in one report, "There are 543 MPs in the Lok Sabha. Of them 117 have been charged and are being investigated for murder, rape, assault, extortion, and robbery. Nineteen MPs have more than three

criminal cases pending against them. Twenty-nine have been accused of spouse abuse. Seven have been arrested for fraud. Seventy-one cannot get credit or loans due to bad credit histories. Twenty-one are current defendant in various lawsuits. Eighty-four were involved in offences and made to pay fines” (R. Puri 6). Such an important issue as criminalisation of politics becomes one of the chief concerns in this play. It is true that Tendulkar here, through historical narrative, wants to “depict a recurring human and social condition” (Juneja 39), but he has also, undeniably, “turned a historical event into an allegory of the prevailing political situations, depicting ordinary men growing into monsters under the patronage of self-serving politicians” (Kennedy 2: 1338). Criminal-politician nexus, where anti-socials are nurtured to serve the political authority, seems to be the core issue in the play. It shows the rot in politics that impacts other spheres of a democratic society.

Centralisation of power and its demonic expression are the other aspects that the play takes up. Corrupt power often develops into despotism and establishes a police-state that sustains through draconian apparatuses. The democratic process is stalled as power comes to be concentrated in the hands of the few. The Indian nation witnessed it during its days of Emergency (1975-77). Its encounter with demonic power is yet to be over. Several draconian acts like The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), or The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) have disturbed its democratic set-up and challenged some basic constitutional promises about individual freedom. Importantly, in the current context of terrorism the necessity of these acts may not be fully dismissed. They may be crucial for tackling some anti-state disruptive forces, which however does not justify their misuse. The play effectively intervenes in this negative development of political governance and the dangers it poses to the fundamental fabrics of the nation.

The plot of the play revolves around the Maratha icon, Balaji Janardan Bhanu (12 Feb 1742 – 13 March 1800), better known as Nana Phadnavis (or Farnavis), and his subordinate superintendent, Ghashiram, in the later half of the eighteenth century Poona. It enacts the corrupt world of Poona where Nana has established his power-regime with the help of many other interest-groups, especially the Brahmins. In this corrupt structure Ghashiram, a Kanauj Brahmin, comes from outside and is brutally rejected by the local Brahmins. To avenge his insult he formulates his strategy to come close to Nana, gain

power and teach the local custodians of religion a lesson. His ascendance to power unleashes a reign of terror in Poona and sees him as its supreme authority. But, little he knows that his power works at the behest of Nana who remains behind and works out his plan, using him as a political stooge. Nana does and Ghashiram pays. But when he realises it, it is too late for him. Through this story of power politics, the play shows how a corrupt regime functions. It employs different techniques either to contain or to co-opt oppositions and establishes a “partnership” (16) and “arrangement” (23) among interest-groups to give the system a safe run.

Ghashiram Kotwal's socio-political thematic attains new dimension due to its strong performance-appeals. Adapting folk conventions onto the modern stage, the play remains a milestone in Indian theatre history. Its subject continues to appeal to the contemporary audience largely because of its excellent execution of folk traditions. A living visual of action is created on the stage by the limitlessly interpretative possibilities of the folk style. Tamasha, the Maharastrian “earthy dance-drama form” (Vatsyayan 171), is used to portray Poona. The play also uses the techniques from other older forms, such as Gondhal (a type of religious discourse) and Lavani (a metrical composition for popular entertainment), which are incorporated by the Tamasha tradition. The strong physicality of these styles built through loud song, music and dance proves useful to create a corrupt regime. The intricate mechanism of power is successfully penetrated chiefly because of the proper use of the techniques, such as the dialogic question-answer pattern of Gondhal and Lavani, the ironical use of religious and secular rituals and many other stage devices of Tamasha.

In the play, Nana establishes a powerful regime, relying on the mutual give-and-take with other competing powers. His political power mingles with religious and sexual powers to create an interface where multiple power-brokers happily coexist. The state (Nana) certainly remains the highest beneficiary in this system of mutual profit, where competing powers have to accommodate each other for strategic reasons. Nana does not have to physically reach out to all the local domains to control them. He exists, in the Foucauldian sense, like a superstructure to the entire power network, investing body, sexuality, religion, family etc (Rabinow 64).

Nana's hegemonic authority receives a symbolic illustration almost in the beginning of the play. It opens with the invocation to Lord Ganesha, a Tamasha convention. The Brahmins are swaying in devotion to the Lord, and the world around seems to follow them. They are the religious custodian, and this is suggested by the multi-purpose human curtain on the stage. This portable human curtain, made of the Brahmins, indicates the power of religion. It adjusts to the requirements of the Brahmin authority, revealing what power thinks fit to be revealed and covering up what not fit to be shown. After the sunset, the human curtain dissolves and reshapes again in Bavannakhani, the place of Gulabi the courtesan and the nocturnal destination of the Ganesha-worshippers. Interestingly, Bavannakhani has another visitor – Nana himself. The place becomes the melting pot where all the powers converge. Nana, Gulabi and the Brahmins dance together to suggest the arrangement between different interest-groups joining hands to set up a structure of "metapower" (Rabinow 64). All are having authority in their respective domains, but Nana remains as the superstructure. With his invisible omnipresence, an "airtight" (Bertens 88) order is formed. Chances of insubordination seem to be minimal here as they are mostly internalised through the techniques of co-option.

In this "arrangement" of power, Ghashiram is initially an outsider. His arrival surely creates turbulence in Poona-politics, but it fails to become a productive resistance in the long run. Partly like Sultan Tughlaq or more like Queen Vijaya, his reported challenge becomes embroiled in the intrigues and autocracy it claims to oppose. It seems to be devoid of any constructive alternative other than his personal vendetta against the local Brahmins. Their brutal rejection certainly deserves a punishment, but Ghashiram hardly understands that his strategy of revenge is going to compromise his position for ever and make him an easy case for co-option. His story is, ultimately, the tale of an ordinary man whose sole motive in life is to have a better livelihood and who can manoeuvre to any extent to meet his goal. Presumably, this is why he comes to be easily co-opted in the system under the illusive deputation of power and used, unknowingly, as a stooge to serve the interest of greater power.

Gashiram's reign of terror in Poona highlights several aspects of corruption. His kotwalship comes at an unthinkable price. He exchanges his daughter, Gauri, for the post of kotwal. Now life in Poona comes to a standstill as the new kotwal promulgates his decrees. Every inch of public life comes under regulation. This is Ghashiram Raj, where

whoring, pimping, gambling, stealing, adultery, even night strolling are banned. But one can get away with any of these, if he has the permit of the kotwal. A good woman can be a whore with a permit. The decree is "Do no wrong, without a permit" (26).

Quite inevitably, Ghashiram's autocracy is seen as an analogical anticipation of the State of Emergency (26 June 1975 – 21 March 1977), when Indian democracy came under unprecedented assault. Like any autocratic regime, Ghashiram's reign self-justifies by creating notions of positive growth. His prohibition on whoring, pimping is said to have its positive side. This seemingly refers to a governmental initiative that tries to convert the mass into a group of loyal citizens always ready to serve 'national interests'. The Emergency, which was called the death of democracy by Jayaprakash Narayan and, contrarily, the necessary derailment of democracy for larger causes by Indira Gandhi (qtd. in B. Puri 1740), adopted many programmes and slogans of similar nature. Anti-smuggling drive, income tax raids, anti-inflationary and price control measures, family planning, and slum clearance drive were reportedly aimed at a "comprehensive transformation of society" (B. Puri 1740). These helped to create a positive image of the regime to a certain section of the society. A section of the people seemed to feed on the idea that "the tasks of the new revolution ranged from making India a world power to eradication of social evils like dowry, from economic reform to ecology (tree plantation), from cultural renaissance to family planning and so on" (B. Puri 1740). But these supposedly welfare activities smacked of political interest as most of them reportedly turned into strategies of domination whose main purpose was to objectify the citizens to create a regiment of morons loyal to the authority or the iconic image of a leader. The sterilization programme, better known as 'Nasbandi', seemed to be one such effort to "control the population" (Henderson 65). It was an example of "direct physical state abuse" (Tarlo 2921) where the common people, the rickshaw-walas, sweepers, peons, labourers, craftsmen, street vendors, and poor housewives were targeted and ordered to "cease to reproduce altogether once they already had two children" (Tarlo 2921). This aggressive strategy to regulate the individuals was very much a part of the machination that relied on the element of fear as it was considered beneficial and "motivating factor when all other means fail" (Henderson 53). The regime of Ghashiram evokes a similar element of fear supported by many constitutional and extra-constitutional measures targeting the individuals. His personal vendetta against the Brahmins is empowered by the constitutional power he has bargained for himself, and this encourages his

unconstitutional excesses that clearly encroach on the right to privacy and life of the citizen.

Ghashiram's terror should not be limited to the Emergency alone. It questions the crisis over individual rights and the police excesses on civil life, burgeoning alarmingly in contemporary India. On one occasion, Ghashiram spots a Brahmin out on the street at night, without a permit, going to call the midwife for his delivering wife. He readily charges him for roaming at night without permission and then raids his house to check out whether he has a legal wife or a hired whore. The kotwal's threat compels the neighbours to testify against the poor man, and he is arrested on the ground of immorality. On another occasion, he forces a Brahmin to hold red hot fire ball to prove his innocence and extracts confession. The bizarre nature of his action points to the danger of a police-state. Although the Article 21 of the Constitution is pretty categorical on this matter of personal liberty of an individual, violation of it is in plenty (Bandyopadhyay 7). The police, which are considered the most "common and awesome representative" (Bayley 2287) of the government, "intrude on human lives at moments of enormous emotional importance" (Bayley 2287). Their deputed power allows them to indulge in "bizarre acts of lawlessness" (Bandyopadhyay 7) – so much so that, a former home secretary of a state openly declared, "Cops can come to search without papers" (Bandyopadhyay 7). Ghashiram's house-raids without warrant and inhuman method to extract confession refer to this type of threat to the democratic society. His reign has parallel in contemporary Indian politics and legislation, where power gets centralised and individual rights are compromised by the draconian laws, such as TADA, POTA, or AFSPA.

Girish Karnad once wondered how the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* "predicted, with terrifying accuracy, the Indira Gandhi-Sant Bhindranwale dance of death, 11 years in advance of the events" (*Tumultuous Prophet* 65). The alleged nurture of the Sikh terrorist elements by Mrs. Gandhi to keep the rising Akali Party at bay (Thapar qtd. in Gupte 376) is held largely responsible for the ignominious Operation Bluestar (1984) and the consequent assassination of Mrs. Gandhi herself. *Ghashiram Kotwal* refers to the criminal-politician nexus and autocratic regime in the Indian body politic. It has explained how criminals are raised and deputed with power by politicians for their vested designs. The lawlessness and despotism, which follows this nexus, is also taken up by the play. On the whole, the play critiques the undemocratic developments after Independence.

The Nehruvian dream of an enlightened, modern republic comes to be destabilised by a horde of self-serving politicians, aided by an elitist bureaucracy of ICS, IAS and IPS. Notwithstanding the nation's spectacular run with the general elections based on universal adult franchise, it undeniably coexists with the growing threat of anti-democracy forces, such as the Emergency, Operation Bluestar, Ayodhya dispute, or the numerous scams. And here *Ghashiram Kotwal* ceaselessly steps in to examine the notion of political progress, exposing its volatilities.

The play also stands at an important juncture when a newly freed nation wants to see the colonial style of governance discontinued in every sphere and feels disturbed when this does not happen in many a case. Democracy is still intact but constantly shaken by the disjunctive fissures, many of which bear the memories of the past. Criminalisation at the highest political level, autocracy and consequent loss of democratic rights often leave the people wondering about the reported difference between pre- and post-Independence conditions. This confusion brings in the question of discontinuity of the colonial discourse in a postcolonial condition. *Ghashiram Kotwal* should not be read purely as a postcolonial text, critiquing this alleged failure of a newly independent nation to shake off its colonial baggage. But the play, like many other post-Independence plays namely *Tughlaq* and *Encounter in Umbugland*, surely voices this concern of a large section of the society. On the one hand, we have Nana Phadnavis' hegemonic rule and his 'arrangement-politics' to stay safe at power and, on the other, the administrative excesses of Ghashiram. Both of these take place at the expense of the common people. For a post-Independence audience living in an almost analogical situation, the play might refer to a continuation of the colonial attitude to people. Pervasive "indifference" to the common people gives birth to corruption and violence (Nair xxx) and comes out as the most prominent feature in the world of Nana and Ghashiram. This administrative apathy towards the common people, as observed by Rukmini Bhaya Nair, is a key feature of the colonial discourse as well. The post-Independence audience, who are at a loss over the neo-apathy of the independent nation-state, could reasonably find their concern voiced in the play. In all probability, it relates their post-Independence experience with an awareness of the colonial past. Nana-Ghashiram duo reminds them of the "replaying" (Nair 245) of the vintage techniques of a politically gone era in the present.

Critiquing the contemporary trajectory of the nation-state finds a different expression in Girish Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997). Like the other plays discussed in this section, it rereads the past and forms a retrospective narrative that actually investigates the present. But what makes it special is that the play deals with colonial history and its system of manufacturing and authenticating 'meaning'. Its 'past' involves the 'history of Tipu', which comes down to us as a product of the colonial historiography. Instead of the medieval or the Maratha history, the play revisits an important phase of the anti-colonial struggle, i.e. Tipu Sultan's challenge to the British in the late eighteenth century, and contests the colonial version of the challenge. What renders Karnad's act of remembering Tipu all the more important is the historical context of its composition. The play is written, ironically at the behest of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), to commemorate the fiftieth year of India's Independence. At this crucial juncture of post-Independence and postcolonial condition, the project comes with multiple significances. It critically remembers the past experience under the colonial regime in order to, first, uncover the traumatic past of colonial violence in a way to make it familiar and approachable for the present understanding. Secondly, it is to launch the project of, to use Dharwadker, "a complex poetic rehabilitation of Tipu" (*Introduction* xxiii). And, thirdly, it is to expose how vulnerable the postcolonial dream of discontinuity of the colonial discourses is. The new-born nation claims to have severed ties with the "infectious residue of its own unconsidered and unresolved past" (Gandhi 7). But if unresolved, the infectious past (i.e. colonial system of knowledge) lingers in the present and runs as an attitudinal condition through the newly-set system. By rereading Tipu, the play seeks to resolve the past, i.e. the 'colonial history of the sultan' and refer to the continuity of some colonial set of thoughts even after fifty years of Independence. The hidden persistence of the colonial attitude is uncovered, and that is where the play comes to negotiate the present.

Tipu, the elder son of Haider Ali, was born in November, 1750, and succeeded to the throne on 29 December, 1782 at the age of 32. Historically, the father and son formed, as Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*, "formidable adversaries who inflicted a severe defeat on the British and came near to breaking the power of the East India Company . . ." (qtd in Habib xvii). It is considered one of the foremost and serious resistances to the colonial power. Tipu's challenge came as a rude and unacceptable shock to it, which was used to see unconditional surrender of the native powers obtained through coercion, or

sophisticated techniques of co-option. Its response was therefore in proportion to its surprise and anger at this gesture of disobedience and abnormality. The silencing of Tipu on the fourth of May 1799 in the Battle of Srirangapatnam displayed a varied range of suppressive techniques which were used to contain this disruptive force trying to unsettle the Empire.

The play begins with a conversation between two scholarly persons; one is Mir Hussein Ali Khan Kirmani, the official historian of the court of Tipu Sultan, and the other, Colonel Colin Mackenzie, the Oriental scholar. It appears to be a dialogue between the East and the West. The entire play is (re)enacted through the memories of these two historians. Orientalism, represented by Mackenzie, claims to have the final knowledge about the colonised-history by its imaginative construction of facts. For Mackenzie, Tipu was nothing more than a deceitful native king who fought against the British for his personal interest, kneeled before the French for help, and faced a humiliating defeat. This Oriental (mis)construction of Tipu demands objectivity from the native historian Kirmani, an objectivity which has to fall in line with the colonial lexicon. If Tipu is to be documented, memory has to be erased out from the mind of the native historian. Kirmani vehemently protests against this colonial strategy of displacing the colonised and manufacturing the truth. His refusal comes as a rejection of the welfare politics.

The right to represent the colonised 'Other' is always crucial to colonialism. The colonial/Orientalist discourses "claim the right to *speak for* the mute and uncomprehending Orient and, in so doing, relentlessly represent it as the negative, underground image or impoverished 'Other' of Western rationality" (Gandhi 77). Its objective is to construct some stereotyped categorisation of the Orient, such as "the heat and dust, the teeming marketplace, the terrorist, the courtesan, the Asian despot, the child-like native, the mystical East" (Gandhi 77). These stereotypes are inevitable because they "confirm the necessity and desirability of colonial government by endlessly confirming the positional superiority of the West over the positional inferiority of the East" (Gandhi 77). It bestows a racial privilege on the ruling narrative and empowers it with indisputable authority for the well-being of the subject race. It is this sense of positional superiority and command over the oriental knowledge that permits Colin Mackenzie to advise (or order) Kirmani to disown his unauthentic historiography. 'Remembering', which is a vital weapon of the anti-colonial garrison, is disapproved by the Western historian because it

has the potential to reveal the ambivalences created by the colonial mechanism. Kirmani's looking back to the heroic resistance of Tipu and his undue end is seen by the West as a threat. It smacks of a revisionist attitude towards the antagonistic and ambivalent moments of the colonial history, which are safely kept 'uninterrogated'.

A pluralistic reading of history, however, contests the colonial history of Tipu that presents him as a ruthless, communal and inferior king. It is true that Tipu tried to forge an alliance with Islam to give his "sovereignty a colour of religious militancy" (Habib xxiv). He sent his emissary to the Ottoman court. His coins bore the sign of Allah, and the names of Muhammad and Ali. "There is little doubt that the motif of tiger, so much emphasized in Tipu's ceremonial symbolism, was designed to link him with the same hero of Islam whose title 'Haider' also meant a lion or tiger" (Habib xxiv). Some reports of serious religious crimes are also there. The action against the rebels in Coorg and Malabar reveals incidents of forced conversion of the Hindus. Western historians, like Francis Buchanan and Mark Wilks are vocal on these atrocities, which are undoubtedly condemnable under any circumstances. But Tipu's engagement with religion is more political than dogmatic. He sent his ambassador to the Sultan of Turkey; so did he to the King of France as well in 1788. Regarding his attitude to Hinduism, B.A. Saletore has discussed extensively in his article, *Tipu Sultan as Defender of Hindu Dharma* in Irfan Habib's compilation (115-30). Religion can, therefore, be termed as "one great ideological prop for his power" (Habib xxv) to resist the British aggression. It was never a tool for him to confront with his Hindu subjects. Tipu is also projected as a war-monger sultan by the colonial historian Buchanan (Habib 167). This type of arbitrary judgement over the colonised subject reveals the self-set right of the coloniser to conveniently rationalise its rule.

Looking back to the colonial past is an endeavour to make sense of the trauma of the present. In the play, Kirmani does exactly the same by revisiting the slain sultan for the sake of his proper assessment. By the appearance of objective analysis of facts, Mackenzie claims to present the truth and disapproves of Kirmani's narrative for its so-called nexus between historical facts and emotion. This garb of objectivity seems to serve as a prerequisite of the colonial historiography. Mackenzie asks, "Our loyalty is to history, Kirmaniji. Keep emotion out. Stick to the facts" (182). To this, Kirmani tries to problematise the very 'facts' that the Orientalist narrative imposes by the virtue of

'objectivity'. "You mean, memories. But that's where the real betrayal lies" (182). When facts are fabricated, objectivity or no-objectivity hardly matters. Regarding Tipu's alleged embassy to Mauritius to seek military assistance from the governor-general of the island, Malarctic, Kirmani vehemently differs from Mackenzie. According to him the deal with Malarctic never happened. In this context, Irfan Habib observes,

Of any substantial help from France, however, there was little sign. A mission to the French island of Mauritius in 1797-98 obtained the services of 99 Frenchmen, who volunteered in response to a proclamation by Malarctic, governor-general of the islands, issued on 30 January 1798. This document was practically worn through in providing the justification for the final British invasion of Mysore in 1799. (xl)

Kirmani's claim looks justified because he actually tries to draw attention to the insignificant French help which was purposefully blown out of proportion by the British.

The attitudinal difference between the two historiographers comes to the surface again with relation to Tipu's diary containing the record of his dreams. From its epistemological indifference towards the mysterious Eastern subject, the colonial power dumps the diary as "an odd little book. A pleasantly inconsequential conversation piece" (191). Kirmani's colonised location, however, could see the suppressed fire of a tiger unduly put in restraint through the hard copy of the diary. The pages, which Tipu left blank, seemed to him the limited scope of self-expression under the colonial duress. But to Mackenzie, it is "Blank pages in a secret record of dreams – that's Tipu for you" (192). It becomes clear from the encounters between these two historians that the ambivalence between the coloniser and the colonised runs deep into the formation of history. Kirmani's revisiting the past from his localised and 'off-centric' position challenges the Orientalist version of it. He disturbs the strategy to patch-up the historical ambivalences by manufacturing a demonic image of the enemy force. The notorious war criminal, Tipu, seems to have got a much-deserving rehabilitation from him, and it is through him that Karnad performs his own act of 're-membering' the troubled past to cast fresh light on the present.

In the play, Tipu appears a visionary. He had several dreams which he noted down in a diary made public only after his death. These dreams of Tipu Sultan posed a challenge to the colonial discourse. His dream of a benevolent monarchy and modern

governance, acquired from his direct or indirect encounter with the West, undermines the original Western equivalent. He seems to have challenged the Western sense of superiority by miming some of their styles of operation. The identity of the coloniser is disturbed by what Homi Bhabha calls mimicry, “the always slightly alien and distorted way in which the colonized, either out of choice or under duress, will repeat the colonizer’s ways and discourse” (qtd. in Bertens 208). The coloniser racially stereotypes the colonised “as a fixed reality” (Bhabha, *Other Question* 41). The colonised is always made to appear before them as a hypothetical, exotic, unrefined, and dependant image which looks up to their authority of knowledge for its own identity. Importantly, this racial stereotyping does not only construe the colonised but also the coloniser. The coloniser also develops a ‘fixed reality’ of their own identity vis-à-vis the colonised. They perceive themselves as an undisputed authority unfamiliar to any sorts of interrogation. Now, if the ‘dependant’ colonised tries to be independent, it comes as a challenge on two counts. One is that it directly defies colonial authority. Secondly, it disturbs their status of authority by ambitiously miming some of their strategies (Bhabha, *Of Mimicry* 475-77). Such aberration amounts to undermine the authoritative ego of the ‘stereotyper’ and provokes a disciplinary response from it. Tipu’s alliance with the French, his collaboration with them for arms production and military training, his benevolent dictatorship to set up a sovereign kingdom with international presence, however unrealistic they sound in the contemporary context, seems to hold up a mirror before the coloniser. His military entrepreneurship and strategy to pose the French against the British give him a position of ‘hybridity’, which enables him to re-articulate the colonial idiom. From this position, he seems to mime the ambition of a European sovereign kingdom. To the British, this miming comes as a (mis)appropriation of their ideology that is able to “circumvent, challenge and refuse colonial authority” (Parry 42). This comes as a pay back for the British quite adept at this game of divide and rule, befriend one princely state to isolate the other. Their identity is threatened by this ‘alien and distorted’ mimicry, and they felt the need to reassert their authoritative identity vis-à-vis the native-inferiority. The result is the attack on Srirangapatnam. Tipu himself realises this, “. . . I’ve two teachers in my life. My father, who taught me war, and the English, who taught me trade. They taught me that the era of camel is over, and that it is the age of sailing ship. And they dislike me for being so adept a pupil” (209).

Tipu's mimicry of the British comes as his resistance against the colonial discourse. Apart from military skill and trade, the British seems to have oriented him to many other aspects of building an empire and preserving it as well. One such technique as adapted by Tipu is religious diplomacy. He is quick to learn from the British manipulative politics on religious and communal lines. His engagement with Islam betrays his diplomacy aimed at building up a general consensus among the Muslims against the 'infidel' British. His embassy to Turkey is also a part of this religious diplomacy. Religion here becomes exclusively a political tool of resistance. Tipu is something more than the communal, anti-Hindu fanatic, stereotyped by the Orientalist discourse. Record shows that the sultan who courted the Turkish Emperor, could also flirt with the French and even entertain the ideas of revolutionary France with the hoisting of the Republican flag and the Tree of Liberty planted at Srirangapatnam on 15 May 1797 (Habib xl). The consistent attachment with the Sringeri 'math' to help it out at several junctures of political calamities is another evidence of his religious diplomacy that tries to include the Hindus in the resistance against the British.

Tipu's simultaneous engagement with religion and modern technique of governance and warfare seems to provide critical insights into the nationalist struggle for independence. The coexistence of tradition and modernity seems to be an unavoidable feature in almost all the nationalist discourses, and importantly, Tipu's anti-British campaign displays a similar type of coexistence. Nationalism likes to dwell in the paradoxical premises of "forward looking vision" (Gandhi 106) and "pre-modern and atavistic sentiments" (Gandhi 106). In the Indian context as well, the nationalist discourse has to look to the West for the modern practices of rationality and liberal thinking (Alam, *India* 94). Simultaneously, the English educated elite leadership seem to have felt the need to fashion their discourses with some unique perspectives so as to be different from the colonial culture. As a result, nationalism witnesses a cultural revival with a view to creating a 'nation', relying on "culture-specific ideals engineered through myths about language, religion, race, and gender" (Sethi 2-3). This is what Partha Chatterjee has called the acceptance and rejection of modern (Western) knowledge in the Indian nationalism (*Nationalist Thought* 2). According to some critics, the failure to strike a balance between the modern and traditional elements and the gradual predominance of an authentic 'Indian' identity, arguably, give rise to the concepts like Hindutva in the post-Independence situation (Alam, *India* 83).

Tipu's anti-colonial agenda tries to combine the opposing elements of European modernism on the one hand and religions like Islam and Hinduism on the other. It betrays an almost analogous condition, where quest for modernity seems to coexist with traditional drives. Religion, particularly Islam, is the chief weapon for him to form a distinct, cultural identity. The formation of a militant Islamic identity seems purely political for Tipu to strengthen his challenge by means of collective resistance. It is not exclusive in nature because he evidently takes care to include his Hindu subjects into his campaign to give it a national look in the true sense of the term. Neither Islam nor Hinduism proves to be his goal. As envisioned in one of his famous dreams, he wants to be a secular emperor, like Alexander and others famous for their mighty conquests, and works to build up a secular resistance by capitalising on the merits of religions. His banking on the French and admiration of the European progress, even that of the British, denotes the liberal orientation of his mind. In spite of the apparent synonymy of his nationalistic spirit with the later versions of the phenomenon mainly during the Congress-led anti-British agitations and the post-1947 condition, he seems to stand apart for the inclusive nature of his narrative. The ambivalence of nationalism in its paradoxical attachment with 'modern' and 'pre-modern', progressive and critique of progress, seems to have been resolved by him. He appears more anti-British and anti-colonial than a mere religion-specific force. Here is his difference from the brand of cultural nationalism that tends to bank on a pure, indigenous identity by reviving the notional past, i.e., the mythic Hindu past, most of which is made available by the Orientalist discourse. For him religion seems to be more a representational than an essential precondition of existence. All he wants is a collective resistance against the British imperialism on the basis of a consensual homogeneity among his people. Cultural narcissism and apathy towards social plurality are largely absent in the discourse of his struggle.

Colonial power always likes to play the role of a self-appointed arbitrator over the colonised. From its 'superior authority of knowledge' it intervenes in the colonised condition and normalises the challenges of mimicry. If a colonised, or even fit to be colonised, raises voice by adapting the coloniser's techniques, he is readily cut to size by normalisation. This has happened with Tipu. Interestingly, a similar trend can be noticed in contemporary global politics of the postcolonial world. Saddam Hussein, the former Iraqi president, is contained for not toeing the colonial line. In the name of world peace

and order, the colonial/neo-colonial power rationalises his disobedience. He is normalised by the modern apparatus of peace, i.e. the U.N. Peace Keeping Mission, only on the ground of his alleged production of weapons of mass destruction. It appears that an imagined threat factor is formulated by the colonial lexicon to justify its normalising the 'mimic man'. So long the colonised agrees to play the second fiddle and become a tool to the imperial design, he is assured to survive. But any self-stylisation on his part provokes aggression as it distorts his stereotyped image of dependence and subordination. There seems to be a striking parallel between the appropriations of these two subjects, Tipu and Saddam, in spite of their different historical contexts. In almost all the cases the anti-colonial challenges have been normalised under the pretext of some imagined constructions about the identity of the colonised. The colonial misconception of the so-called threat-factor of mass-destructive weapons has legitimised the American aggression on Iraq. So did it happen with Tipu. The controversial deal with the governor-general of Mauritius, Malarctic, which is hotly debated on by the two opposing historiographies of Mackenzie and Kirmani (190), is (mis)used by the British to justify the final assault on him. There is another example, when Charles Malet, the representative of Cornwallis, comes to the Maratha camp and says, "The Governor General hopes that the Maratha Chief will use this opportunity to obtain reparation and recover the territories seized unjustly by Tipu Sultan's father, Haider Ali, and will join us in punishing a man who *we believe* is the enemy of all mankind" (my emphasis) (207). The colonialist succeeded in convincing the Marathas and the Nizam about the imagined threat factor of Tipu; nor does it miss the opportunity to propagate the same in the case of Saddam.

On the fourth of May, 1799, the coloniser started another process to ensure total victory over the dissenter. Tipu was defeated after being betrayed by some of his generals. The British soldiers started the post-battle duty of searching for the corpse of Tipu in the heaps of the dead. It reminds one of the smoking out of Saddam from his cave. The search for the already vanquished Iraqi President might sound unnecessary, but it is an essential rhetoric of the colonial discourse that looks for a concrete evidence of the success of its rationalisation. The sight of Saddam pulled out from the rat's hole and thoroughly scanned by the doctors seems to construct the image of a lunatic dictator (the colonised) who is now under the careful treatment of the 'rationaliser' (the coloniser). The self-styled villain is caught in the photography of defeat that shows "how far the tyrant had fallen – triumphalism disguised as medical solicitude" (Macintyre 12). In

Srirangapatnam, the heaps of the corpses are rummaged to find out the body of Tipu. The British soldiers are considering this job heinous because his “big twirly moustaches, round face” (183) make it difficult to identify his body among the other look-alike native “bastards” (184). What becomes evident, here, is the cultural ambivalence between the coloniser and the colonised. Visual and racial prejudices are getting assimilated into each other to manufacture a stereotyped image of the colonised, where men, like Tipu and Saddam, appear as the forces of evil to be normalised by colonial rationality. No wonder a British soldier chops off one of Tipu’s moustaches and gets away with this inhuman act. The little reproof that he gets from the Oriental historian Mackenzie is concerned more with the threat of an anti-British uproar over this act than with any insult to the erstwhile Tiger of Mysore.

After Tipu, Srirangapatnam is humiliated as ‘collateral damage’, which is also a part of the colonial rhetoric. His beloved tigers of the palace are shot dead to eliminate the legacy of the Tiger of Mysore. Tipu’s sons are expelled from Srirangapatnam and moved to Calcutta, where they end up on the British pensions. How well Tipu understood the colonial strategy of divide and rule becomes clear when within twenty years of Tipu’s fall the British annexed the Maratha empire. He was ahead of his time in his appreciation of the contemporary political situation and, thus, invited the aggression.

Karnad has ended his play with a postscript. It is a brief narrative on the paradox in Independent India. After 1947, the families of the maharajas who bowed before and served the British are allowed a sumptuous pension (‘rajanyabhata’) by the sovereign Government of India, but the descendants of Tipu Sultan are left to rot in the slums of Calcutta. Further, as Irfan Habib has observed, “when 4 May 1999 came, marking the second centenary of Tipu’s last stand against the British at Srirangapatnam, it was stonily ignored by the government of India and all its agencies” (xviii). This, perhaps, refers to the new nation-state’s alleged proximity to its erstwhile colonial master. The dual forces within Indian nationalism can be held responsible for the sidelining of Tipu. One is the desire for Western modernity and the other the longing for an authentic past. In its nationalist bid to be modern (Western), the state seems keen to shun a figure like Tipu who once dared to oppose ‘colonial modernity’. State largesse showers only on those people who allied themselves with the British and their design to make colonised India ‘modern’. Those who opposed the British have become anathema to the state, and this

attitude continues even long after Independence. Another aspect of the nationalist zeal is the desire for indigenouslyness. The modern Indian nation-state seems to be over-reliant on the nationalist narrative that eulogises the 'pristine' Indian identity thriving on a geo-religious denomination of culture. The revival of the glorified past, or the Hindu past as suggested by critics like Javeed Alam (*India* 83), still remains a panacea in the nationalist discourse for the antagonistic and disjunctive aspects of the present. This revivalism is often viewed as a precondition for the much-needed homogeneity. As a result, the growing zeal over homogeneity after Independence makes the nation more exclusive and less accommodative than before. It is this unwillingness to give space to the 'different' and recognise plurality that seems to suppress Tipu still in the present. This insistence on 'singular' history is unexpected in the constitutionally approved democratic space. Such monopoly over historical meaning as in Tipu's case, ironically, persists as a colonial derivative in the postcolonial nation. It raises question as to whether the postcolonial nation has failed to debug some of the legacies of colonialism. To use Patricia Waugh, the class hierarchies, the structure of the colonial state, everything is retained, "the main difference being . . . that an aggressively chauvinistic, culturally impoverished, and kleptocratic black bourgeoisie had now taken over from the white colonial elite" (348). No wonder under these circumstances Tipu's sons had to rot in the slums of Calcutta even after August 15, 1947.

From the present analysis some important issues come to the fore. All the four plays discussed here revisit history or (as in the case of *Encounter in Umbugland*) a history-like story. Through this revisit, they achieve two goals. One, they problematise our knowledge of 'textualised' history. Two, by reknowing the past they try to 'reunderstand' the hidden irrationalities of the present. Once the hidden irrationalities are exposed, the given version of the country's contemporary political history looks largely 'untenable'. Further, this critique of the contemporary political history comes to contest the nationalist claim about the progress at various levels. Political corruption scales new heights and questions the possibility of a progressive nation. Scepticism is multiplied by the crises in democracy and individual right, which are corollary to the centralisation or even 'demonisation' of power. The national dream of "a new India" (Nehru qtd. in Hasan 161) comes to be ruthlessly scrutinised. On another level, the plays in this chapter show a concern, though unambiguously by Karnad's *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* alone, about the general confusion over the claimed discontinuity of the colonial past. The apprehension

about the continuity of a colonial bug in the various official set-ups of the independent state is voiced time and again by many a critic. They point out how the “institutions of democratic governance, like the parliamentary system, federal structure, bureaucracy, judiciary, the legal system and the civil and criminal procedure code, the penal code of 1860 including the preventive detention provisions, originating from the ‘Defence of India Act’ of 1858, and the police code of 1861, along with other liberal institutions owe their origin to British colonial rule” (Ray 3412). This “recycling” (Bayly 275) of colonial tradition seems to have created a confusion over the difference between the pre- and the post-Independence conditions. “We have rid ourselves of the burden of the past” (qtd. in Hasan 149), claimed Nehru on the eve of Independence, but the consequent developments in the contemporary political history of the nation seems to undermine, to an extent, the above claim. Finally, another aspect that comes out is the enormous difficulty to think about a change of the existing structural stalemate. Possibility of a comprehensive alteration of the situation is a far cry. This is evident in the outcome of all the subject positions such as Muhammad Tughlaq, Vijaya, Ghashiram, and Tipu. Except Tipu, all the other subject-positions seem to be untenable as far as their ‘resistance’ is concerned. Tughlaq wanted to become a saint-cum-dhobi, but ended up only as another dhobi, who had to bear the stain of the filth while cleaning it up. On the other hand, if Ghashiram wanted to bring anything new, it turned out to be his desire to become the biggest thief among all the other thieves in Poona. So was it with Vijaya, who ended up more as a crafty and ambitious power-player than her opponents despite her initial ‘difference’ from them. Amidst all, Tipu alone seemed to offer some qualitative alternative to the British dominance. But that did not work because of historical reasons. What evolves, on the whole, is a post-Independence scepticism about the narrative of comprehensive national development. The mythic progress at various levels is doubted, and the hidden ambivalences and fissures are uncovered. Thus what these plays offer is a critique of the general political health of the nation.

Chapter II

Rethinking Gender

The woman question in Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad seeks to understand the inescapable patriarchy and the growing assertion of female sexuality in Indian society after Independence. Patriarchy's grip over the social traditions is overwhelming, though much of it always remains unacknowledged. And patriarchy itself must be credited for this convenient 'invisibility'. Through its omnipresence, it ensures legitimacy to the point where it is considered 'natural'. The nation-state, too, seems to have taken extra care to maintain this naturalness in the name of nation-building and development. The present male-dominated society owes its origin largely to the ancient religious scripts and cultural traditions of the country. Some of these traditions come to persist after being selectively appropriated by the colonial as well as the anti-colonial discourses during the pre-Independence period. If the colonialists are motivated by their imperialistic necessity to conquer the strategically important 'native woman', the nationalists are also guided by their anti-imperialistic need to re-conquer it. In the process they both formulate the 'authentic' Indian-woman convenient to their respective objectives. This gendered femininity continues to survive, except for some inevitable reorganisations, even in the newly independent country. Importantly, the socio-cultural site of sexuality and gender is now increasingly marked by a counteractive sexual assertion. This counter discourse comes to challenge the 'rightful' oppression of women, intervening in the sexist rationalisation as many ways as possible. Against this critical backdrop, Tendulkar and Karnad negotiate the contemporary history of sexuality and gender practices. In the present chapter, it is to be seen how these two playwrights critique this oppressive aspect of the society and expose the irrationalities, hitherto unrecognised due to male hegemony.

Dramaturgically, Tendulkar and Karnad stand apart from each other in their handling of social reality. They delineate the society through different dramatic conventions and styles. Tendulkar's realistic and close-to-life manner is far away from Karnad's folklorist-mythological framework. Besides, their critical perspectives on the

present issue of gender are considerably distinguishable. Regarding the question of women's emancipation, they seem to hold their individual standpoint. However, for analytical convenience the present section focuses on the two aspects that seem to be the key to their take on the subject. The first one is the male-dominated structure of the society that can also be termed as the 'code of silence'. The second one involves the contesting of this normative code by counteractive sexual assertion. While the first aspect helps understand the social history of sexual discrimination as negotiated by the plays, the other one evaluates the responses to this discriminatory system from the sexually underprivileged. Both these aspects seem to be crucial to understanding the plays' intervention in the social space, marked by the two forces – a still dominant discipline and the growing opposition to it. The nature and outcome of the oppositions or responses are evidently variable between the two writers, but on one point they seem to be together – that is the possibility of a substantial intervention in the 'code of silence' and questioning the gender irrationalities.

Tendulkar and Karnad have exposed the male regulatory system particularly in the domestic sphere. Gender injustice is visible in the society at large but seems to be more so in the domain of home. Human relationships within the socio-material purview of home are examined. Conjugal life along with the other overtones of domesticity is explored. And the backdrop is mostly the normative Indian family built upon a strong discourse of sexual hierarchy. Although gender is present in many of their plays, it surfaces as a major issue in some particular ones to be analysed here. This includes Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), *Sakharam Binder* (1972), *Kamala* (1981), *The Vultures* (1971), *The Threshold* (1981), and *Naga-Mandala* (1988), *The Fire and the Rain* (1994), *Hayavadana* (1970) of Karnad. First, the largely unacknowledged male dominance is investigated and its different techniques of subjugation are exposed. Afterwards, the possibilities of contestation by the females are probed into. The female characters in all these plays are individually studied in order to trace the scopes of some possible improvement of their status in the suppressive condition.

A critical reading of Tendulkar's and Karnad's negotiation of gender does not necessarily call for any stringent theoretical parameter. One reason is that they themselves are free from the strict allegiance to any dogmatic or ideological discipline. This freedom proves productive as it ensures their broad perspective on and fruitful penetration of the

discourses of domination. From maiden motherhood, troubled pregnancy within marriage, single working mother to the gendered categories of wifehood and motherhood in general and the institution of marriage – a long range of experiences is examined by them to disclose the male-defined regime along with the possible avenues to woman's emancipation. Instead of any strict theoretical parameter, what needs, here, is a critically informed approach complying with case-specific requirements. And this approach has to take cognizance of the fact that both playwrights are writing about the non-Western and the so-called Third-world situations. Their local context inevitably prevents the straightforward application of any Eurocentric, or White Feminist parameter. The Indian situations with their socio-cultural specificities should be duly addressed while assessing the question of oppression and opposition.

A universal feminism to redress the shared agonies of all the women of the world, irrespective of their geo-political and geo-cultural differences, seems to be a highly contested issue at present. The so-called Eurocentricism of the allegedly White Feminism has tried to universalise the personal experience of a limited section of women and create "an 'essential' model of woman – a model based on a dominant white, middle-class experience and aspirations" (Freedman 76). It fails to adequately acknowledge the historical circumstances and values that render the women's issues different in a non-White, non-Western society, for example India, from the issues in the West (Chitnis 9). The emergence of the new branches of Feminism, such as Black Feminism and Third World Feminism, poses a challenge to it. Issues with local significances receive appropriate address from these new trends. In a so-called Third World country like India, feminism reportedly displays a similar turn and tries to confront multiple issues in the context of the post-Independence and postcolonial present of the country (Mohanty qtd. in Ashcroft 259-63). It can be argued here that both Tendulkar and Karnad display a similar concern for the issues of women and critically read gender in a culture-specific way, without being totally oblivious of the major questions of woman emancipation and empowerment. Therefore, our critical approach is to be informed by a concern for the local specificities along with a simultaneous awareness of the feminist critique of woman's subjectivity and gender. For example, Beauvoir's questioning of the concept of 'woman' might explain the formation of female sexuality even in a non-Western context. Again, Foucault's ideas of discourse and power could also be drawn on for understanding the formation and reformation of subjectivity in a network of gendered relations. As

mentioned before, both the playwrights' freedom from any strict ideological parameter could make this type of reading fruitful.

The patriarchal code of sexual discrimination, as it exists at present, has its inception largely in the colonial period. The gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity come to be formulated during this period, which acts as a vital precedent to the present condition. Male dominance surely precedes the colonial time, but the second half of the nineteenth century colonial India witnesses "a definite cultural focus on the Indian woman" (Sen 2). The social hierarchies, such as gender and caste which seem to be primordial in the Indian society, are recast by colonialism (Chaudhuri xviii). The native woman, who traditionally stands as an epitome of the native culture, has strategic appeal to the colonial politics and is subjected to a process of identity-construction (Loomba, *Colonialism* 151-9). Historically, she becomes the passive site of ideological manipulations by both colonial and anti-colonial forces. The Orientalist prescription for the Indian woman, who is devoted, chaste, self-sacrificial on the one hand and 'modern' on the other, is appreciated by the Renaissance reformers in their quest for an autonomous feminine identity. She is expected to remain 'Indian' but, at the same time, become educated and enlightened. However, the nationalists later come to reject this 'modernisation' of Indian woman on Western line. They oppose the Renaissance modernist reform as unnecessary concession to the Western/colonial influence on Indian traditions and conceptualise the image of Indian woman strictly on the line of material/spiritual or modern/traditional or external world/internal home or, finally, male/female dichotomy (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 119-21). Importantly, both the reformists and the nationalists, despite their dissimilar methodologies, owe their theoretical premises to the Orientalist discourse that offers them the definitions of both, 'modernity' and 'Indianness'.

The Orientalist construction of Indian woman appeals strongly to the nationalists. They find it necessary to build up the anti-British nationalist struggle by invoking the power of the goddess, 'Shakti' or 'Durga', and identifying this feminine image of power and self-less service with the nation. Their interest in such construction can be explained by the fact that the "native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere" (Loomba, *Colonialism* 168) recognise the domestic sphere as their last stronghold and seize "upon home and the woman as emblems of their culture and

nationality” (Loomba, *Colonialism* 168). They appropriate the Orientalist notion of Indian ‘sati’ (chaste woman) as the standard of Indian womanhood and uphold the so-called “voluntary abstinence and purity” (Bagchi, *Indian Woman* 3) of her as a national myth. The nation is identified with the “myth of the Shakti” (Bagchi, *Indian Woman* 3) to construct the image of a powerful motherland, and the contemporary woman becomes the helpless part of this nationalist mobilisation of identity. It should be mentioned here that the identification of the nation with woman (mother) is precolonial. The reference to the ‘Bharatmata’ (Mother India) as the presiding deity of ‘Bharat’ can be found in early Sanskrit texts of the fifth/ sixth century AD (Bagchi, *Representing Nationalism* 69). The colonial condition seems to have inspired the nationalists to look back at the religious configurations of the past and appropriate the Orientalist representation of them in their enterprise of a cultural demarcation. They uphold such a role of woman as the passive repository of national culture and look upon it “as extensions of their domestic selves – caring, subservient, non-militant” (Loomba, *Colonialism* 224). Even Gandhi insists that “service to the husband, his family, and the country (in that order) should be accepted as the ‘primary duties’ of women” (qtd. in Sethi 133). Thus the image of Indian woman is ‘narrativised’ by nationalism and widely circulated for continuation in the days to come.

Post-Independence does not bring radical change in the role of woman, except the whole range of constitutional and legal provisions guaranteed by the ‘modern’ nation-state. Progressive policies are implemented. Universal adult franchise, right to property, equal pay for equal work, maternity leave etc. surely empower women. But her ‘modern’ status in the general social consciousness or “the ethical domain of the community” (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 157) remains problematic. The huge task of nation-building keeps the nationalist fervour alive, though only after some modifications necessary for the new historical situation. The Nehruvian “mature nationalism” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 144) still invokes the image of ‘Bharatmata’ for governmental-political convenience (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 147) and helps to sustain indirectly the gendered stereotype of Indian femininity. So, ‘modern’ in the restrictive official domain and ‘traditional’ in the greater social consciousness remain the defining factors of Indian womanhood. Right to self-formation continues to elude her.

The new socio-economic order of liberalisation brings new challenges to the Indian woman. She is still split between the state-sponsored ‘modernity’ on the one hand

and 'tradition' on the other. Importantly, 'modernity' is now prescribed to her in the liberalised idiom of market-economy. Opposing this model, the neo-nationalist-cultural forces also become active. As a result, the woman is again cast in the debate over her identities and becomes the passive object of the modernist and the anti-modernist discourses. The new social order upholds the notion of the "new-age woman" (Raza 9), hailing it as the ultimate example of sexual liberation. But it seems to bring in a "neo-patriarchy" (M. Sengupta 4) that actually objectifies the female body in a covert fashion. Through the network of a consumerist culture, women are invited to fall prey to a sexist space that produces stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. This consumerist modernity recommends that sexual desirability is the ultimate source of power for women, and so a beauty myth (Coward qtd. in Kemp & Squires 361) is given to them. Thus the 'new-age, liberated woman' becomes a prisoner of her "gendered subjectivity" (Moi, *Sex, Gender* x), "commodified as a selling strategy for conspicuous consumption" (Chanda qtd. in Chaudhuri xl). On the other hand, the traditionalist reaction against this "new-age woman" is also fraught with oppressive agendas, betraying intent to design female subjectivity strictly on an 'authentic Indianness'. Almost in a replication of the pre-Independence debate between the reformists and the nationalists over the female body, the post-Independence situation seemingly repeats the trend. Women are still being subjected to choose identities, modern or traditional, all of which are evidently offered to her by the male society.

Notwithstanding the growing self-consciousness among women after Independence, a sexual bias is undeniably powerful in the society, discriminating against them in favour of the male perspective. And the play, which takes the veil off this society and critiques its gender hypocrisy in an unprecedented style, is Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967). The play hits out at the social mechanism that rationalises different gender disproportions and upholds a coherent image of the society. The realistic mode, adopted for scrutiny, proves effective in exposing the sexist forces working under the guise of customs and traditions. Institutions function as male-agencies to perpetuate norms and contain aberration. Society's so-called progressive bloc betrays the most orthodox and anti-modern attitude possible. Here, the torment is of a single working woman who aspires to live on her own, going against this attitudinal bias. Her ordeal in the hands of the society's custodians shows how powerful this 'code of silence' is.

Tendulkar employs the naturalistic technique of play-within-a-play to bring out the dark inside of a moralist society. If the outer play shows the civilised face of the society, the inner play suggests the face which always remains unrecognised and comes out only in casual and informal exchanges. One is the conscious expression of subjectivity, and the other expresses the hidden feelings which become visible only in an unofficial space removed from social recognition. Such a style as play-within-a-play proves useful to expose the double standard as far as 'civilised' men's attitude to women is concerned. The outer story involves a group of theatre activists coming to a village on invitation to stage a social play on the issue of President Johnson's production of atomic weapons. Their evening show will stage a mock-trial of the U.S. President. The group comprises people from different walks of life, mainly the middle class of the society, established and reputed. Among the majority of the male members of the group, Miss Leela Benare is a prominent female member, who is a school teacher and leading a single life on her own. She is over thirty, outspoken, smart, and loves to be independent, causing inevitable trouble to many. Given the need for rehearsal and the availability of spare time, the other members of the group decide to hold a mock-trial, very much in the pattern of the original play of President Johnson but with a different accused and a different charge. This mock-trial as a time-filler composes the inner play. They have chosen Miss Leela Benare for the role of the accused and the charge levelled against her is infanticide. Then follows a series of spectacles where the accused, Miss Benare, can be found as being hounded down by the other characters. They settle on the 'game' of dissecting her personal life, sheltering themselves under the hypocritical garb of the mock-trial. The boundaries of reality and fiction regarding her life are deliberately blurred to see her stripped amidst a horde of males and satisfy their bestial ego. However, their sexual vendetta against her only serves to expose the oppressive skeleton of the society. How inhuman it can be to subdue a woman who dreams to rewrite 'her story'! It calls her abnormal to protect order and normalcy.

The play presents situations that point to the politics of gender. The unanimous choice of a woman-accused in the witness box is one such example. In their reported mock-trial, the members want to see a woman, and it is Miss Benare for the obvious reason of her 'sexual appeal' to the male gaze. First of all, her 'biologically determined' inferiority makes her an object to be observed and regulated. Secondly and more importantly in the present context, her staying alone and the rumour of her sexual

promiscuity are reasons enough for the male audience to project her as an object of 'sertainment' (sex and entertainment), far more enjoyable than a male-accused who could hardly provide the similar sense of power and titillation to them. As one male member rejoices, "... a woman in the dock, the case does have a different complexion, . . ." (73).

During the mock-trial, Benare's past life begins to surface. Some of it is real, and some fictive. The real part of her suffering shows the perilous condition a woman often has to go through. Her relation with Prof. Damle has left her exploited and with a child in her womb. The onus then came upon her to prove her purity. Her career of a primary school teacher came under fire as the given image of a female teacher does not permit such promiscuity as unmarried motherhood. The preset norms for a female teacher claim the right to define her body as either pure or impure and decorate it either with 'salwar' or 'saree' (Mukhopadhyaya 1). However, she did not think of abortion because that would amount to refuse her own sexuality. She wanted to, and still wants to, be the mother of the unborn child and become a complete woman in her own definition. But her desire is unacceptable to the social moralists. A single working woman, as if not enough, comes to be tagged with the stigma of unmarried motherhood! Patriarchy wants total control over these 'abnormal' thoughts, and Benare's torments, in or outside the mock-trial, explains the process of normalising the abnormal.

Another aspect of the social mindset, the play exposes, is the consensual female-supporter. "Patriarchy operates significantly through the construction of desires and thoughts, influencing what choices people want to make so that some options are ruled out before hand" (Chambers 330). It tries to engineer a mechanism which is less resistance-prone and does rely on the consensual compliance of the subjects. This mechanism involves the Gramscian consensual-indoctrination of the oppressed mind because it is "much more efficient and much less wasteful" (Rabinow 61) in the Foucauldian sense. In this play, Mrs. Kashikar, a member of the theatre group and wife of the man playing judge in the mock-trial, is an example of this supportive subject. She represents a pathetic figure whose voice is lost in the obligations of marriage. Clare Chambers has discussed Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (330) which means the structured life of an individual formed in relation to his/her response to the objective condition of existence. People are made to respond to particular circumstances they live in and become accustomed to the responses which they repeat consensually "with little or

no conscious awareness or choice” (Chambers 331). The entire process of repetition makes the given situation look ‘natural’ and creates a “habitus” for an individual. It becomes “a set of durable disposition formed in response to objective social condition” (Chambers 330). The individuals are seen as docile subjects and bound to respond in the expected manner that will sustain the system. This becomes a habit that ultimately decides their subjectivity. Mrs. Kashikar explains this sort of docile subject in a “habitus” or sexist hegemony.

Normative motherhood or womanhood, as it once became a nationalist obsession, is negotiated in this play. In the court room, woman is reaffirmed as the divine mother. Motherhood is said to be the most hallowed dimension of her sexual identity that circumscribes her position from the ordinary, placing her in an exemplary category of value and morality. The abstract motherhood becomes a benchmark to judge her moral status. Admonishing Benare’s adultery, one male member puts it thus, “We have acknowledged woman as the mother of mankind. Our culture enjoins us to perpetual worship of her” (79). Such inscription of motherhood as supreme and pure only contributes to the overall notion of womanhood as dependent and inferior.

Beside marriage and motherhood, the mock-trial provides critical perspective on another institution – that is the legal system or the judiciary. In a recent verdict, the Supreme Court of India has proclaimed that the witness of a rape-victim must be regarded as ‘gospel truth’ in order to have a fair trial (Dhar and Biswas 4). The verdict is important to understand the continuous presence of gender bias in the legal discourse. It makes some presumptions about the identity of woman. She is perceived as an epitome of chastity and honour and somebody whose witness deserves highest recognition. It sounds good to be sure, but it seems to spring from the same sexual prejudice of law that earlier denied her witness or version of truth of any authenticity. This new approach comes from the perceived notion that if she can risk her individual and family prestige and dare to suffer ‘social death’ by coming to the witness box, she can be trusted in her words (Dhar and Biswas 4). So the inner mindset of law does not change a lot. Through its dispensation of justice, the law and the judiciary like to cling to the essentialist notion of Indian womanhood. Whether denial or sanction of legitimacy to women’s witness, it strengthens the stereotypes of family or social honour and, above all, her chastity and prestige. From this presumption, it once dismissed Mathura’s witness to her rape at the

police custody (in the infamous Mathura rape case) because she could not provide visual sign of injury on her body as evidence of her protest (Ghosh 4). Or, in some other cases it rejected the woman's witness on the ground that it would spoil the victim's marital prospect (Ghosh 4). So, the present verdict continues the tradition, though with a seeming difference.

Benare, in the witness box, resembles a rape victim in the traditional court of law. Her persecution centres on the basic model of the Indian womanhood. While trying her for adultery, the mock-court takes a sharp note of her life-style – the way she mixes with men, talks, laughs along with her independent disposition. She is 'unIndian' in every sense of the term, and her being a woman compounds the risk a lot. She cannot forsake her given responsibility as the carrier of morality for her personal interest. Benare resembles a rape victim from another angle. To the eyes of law her case of alleged infanticide and unmarried motherhood does have no difference from a case of rape because of their synonymous relation with female body. To prove a rape, the law first constructs the female body and then decides about its status, strictly conforming to its normative code. The victim does have no role in the construction of her body except being a helpless object to this process. Benare undergoes a similar experience. The mock-court persecutes her 'crime' only after affirming the ideal of a female body. This ideal is always-already given without Benare's consent. All she needs to do is to conform to it and have the social recognition. Her experience exposes the gender bias of the law and the judiciary that like to speak about woman, for woman, but "never do they 'speak woman' " (Dhar and Biswas 4).

The male-dominated society renders Benare's sexuality questionable and thus sustains its code of silencing women. She is projected as a woman whose appetite for sex is propelled by her unmarried status and financial independence. She is said to embody the myth of the seductive enchantress, once created by the colonial power for the native women (Sen 3), and be "a sinful canker on the body of society" (112), pulling all the norms upside down. Quite legitimately, she provokes the normalising action from the moral-custodians. It is for the sake of the institution of marriage, morality and overall the social order that the ancient rule, " *'Na stri swatantryamarhati.'* 'Woman is not fit for independence' " (115), must be upheld. Even a crime like infanticide, as goes the verdict

of the mock-court at the end, becomes permissible to the eyes of law for the wider interest of humanity. The sheer irony of the situation tells it all.

Another play by Vijay Tendulkar, *Sakharam Binder* also explains the sexual stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. As a play, *Sakharam Binder* is a 'shocker on stage' that hits at the root of traditionalism of all colours and hues. Sakharam is an iconoclast. He is anti-caste, anti-religion and a vocal basher of middle class morality. Tendulkar visúally presents the man's naked assault over institutions. He is ruthlessly nonconformist and appears often as a terror to the placid and refined sentimentality of the urban audience. However, Sakharam's iconoclasm seems to betray a different tendency as well. His unorthodox life involves his special relations with women. He brings stranded women to keep his home as well as his body, and when one quits his home or outlives her purpose he brings a new one. Sakharam continues this 'experiment' with women inside the laboratory of his self-defined 'home'. For a born-Brahmin living on a decent profession of book-binding, it is indeed rebellious, but it also exposes the formation of another suppressive institution, sustaining a master-slave relation between man and woman.

Sakharam always declares before a newly arrived woman, "It's Sakharam Binder's house" (125,155). The house is truly unconventional for it treats women differently, but its unconventionality is decided by Sakharam alone. His house is a cage where the women are kept like birds (154). He brings in destitute women rejected by their husbands and unleashes his sexual reign over them till the replacement arrives. The arrival of a new woman in his house is always accompanied by his ritualistic long monologues on the domestic rules and womanhood. He despises marriage. But this free style of living together is hardly free from his male chauvinism. He upholds living together of man and woman so long it satisfies his personal notion of domesticity, where the woman, though free from any normative category, must qualify for the essential femininity. Any lapse of conformity on her part provokes Sakharam's immediate punitive actions. In his 'unconventional' home, he demands unconditional loyalty of the woman so that the servitude remains incontestable. He enjoys this hire-and-fire concept because in this system "She works well, she behaves herself. She knows that one wrong move and out she goes" (154). He wants to call this pressure-tactics liberation from oppression!

Sakharam has adopted two methods to construct his home; one is the straightforward physical violence, and the other the symbolic violence. While the first one draws loyalty through physical assault (or the threat of it) on the terrorised female body, symbolic violence, which “is expressed not physically on the bodies of those it violates, but mentally on thoughts” (Chambers 330), ensures complicity of the female subject with the “ideal gendered behaviour” (Chambers 330) without coercion. Chambers also mentions that “compliance is secured more easily by ruling out options before they are considered, so that people never come to choose” (330). At the outset, when Sakharam enters with the first woman Laxmi (sequentially the seventh one), he dishes out a long list of norms to her. First, he constructs the image of the ‘home’ and its one and only boss. His hot-headed, foul-mouthed and *bidi*-smoking feature reasserts his masculine image in his “home” (125). As a precautionary measure to silence probable dissent, he declares beforehand, “In this house, what I say goes...The others must obey, that’s all. No questions to be asked” (126). The metaphor of the kitchen is crucial in this codification of gender roles. In his home, the first move Laxmi is expected to make is towards the kitchen, and she proves ‘normal’ to her master’s gaze as she complies. In the beginning of Act Two, the same ritual is repeated but this time to a new guest, Champa, who is brought in to fill the gap. What Sakharam wants from them is to play the role of a wife (126). But this is not the traditional wifehood. It does not depend on the religious approval and the normative categories of ‘brahma’ and ‘prajapatya’ marriage, formulated in the sacred texts of the *Arthashastra* and the *Manusmriti* (P. Mukherjee 52). This is his self-styled manner of keeping women as subordinated slaves.

Though less explicitly, Sakharam’s sexual autocracy reappears in *His Fifth Woman*. This play can be referred to here because of its brief glimpse of the same Sakharam. *His Fifth Woman* (2004) is the prequel to *Sakharam Binder* (1972), though Tendulkar has written it long after, taking the clue from Sakharam’s brief reference to the woman who came at number five before Laxmi and Champa (*Sakharam* 134-35). At the request of The Lark Play Development Center (New York) he has written the play after a long lull, and that is too in English which he never did before. The result is marvellous. A new Tendulkar seems to have emerged through a newly evolved dramaturgy. It is witty, full of humour and sharply tongue in cheek. Trimming off all excess, the form becomes slim enough to appeal to a contemporary urban audience. The new play also establishes Sakharam’s tyrannical home in almost a similar fashion. The despotic attitude to the

women is still visible, though its explicit expression is restrained. The crude violence of the past is missing here, and its place is taken by a sardonic humour, perhaps owing to the playwright's changing theatrical outlook. The character of Sakharam, however, displays his iconoclasm along with the flickers of his male ego. He takes pride that he does not keep women; rather, he gives them home (*His Fifth* 50). And when the woman dies, he starts hunting for the next prey.

The play's brilliance comes at its best in the final scene where Tendulkar creates a magic world to critique real life. The scene presents, in a flash, a fantastic way for the woman to escape the male world. After her death, she enters the after-life. She is now bodiless, without the burdens of womanhood (72) and can enjoy life free from the male gaze. There is also her bodiless husband, frantically looking for his lost dick. He looks powerless without his dick, much to the relief of the woman. However, the absurdity of this freedom peeps up as the woman later regrets not to have her body any more to entice the man. "All bothersome things have their plus points too" (74). "A dickless world" (73) does never ensure her total freedom from suffering. Sakharam's on-going hunt is the only unavoidable reality. The women have to chalk their strategies of survival not in a world of fantasy but in this bodily world, inside the "old red-tiled house" (*Sakharam* 125) of Sakharam.

The unavoidable sexist bias in the urban and domestic sphere is again ruthlessly brought out by Tendulkar in *Kamala* (1981). The play negotiates the domain of family that exhorts an image of domesticity on the basis of hierarchical sexuality. This is the family of Jaisingh Jadav, a journalist in an English national newspaper. He lives here with his wife Sarita, and they are occasionally visited by Sarita's uncle Kakasaheb, a veteran journalist who works in a regional daily. Again, as in *Sakharam Binder*, the 'home' here becomes the site of gender discrimination. It bears the presence of its owner, who reigns over it as its husband-cum-master. The wife is fated to play an auxiliary role, as though a passive telephone call receiver attending the incoming calls and keeping records for her husband. Besides, she has also to meet the physical needs of her husband as and when required. Thankfully, this master-slave relationship is covered by the sanctified norms of marriage. In this gendered space, the husband can rightfully go to the extent of bringing another woman (*Kamala*) from a rural flesh-market on the ground of professional reasons. His manhood permits him to exercise this right and expect his wife to be a loyal and mute

spectator of this exploitation. Tendulkar uses the character of the tribal woman, Kamala, as an intervening force that unconsciously questions, or helps others to question, this institution of family and the social attitude to women.

Manhood or masculinity is a very definitive term in the play, *Kamala*. It exerts male authority, centralism and a disregard for the sexual 'Other'. It is not restricted within the domestic world because it affects other domains of social discourse as well. Jaisingh Jadav as a journalist betrays it in his professional exercises. He buys Kamala from Luhardaga bazaar in Bihar to expose that auction of women is still prevalent in modern India. The site of auction amuses Jaisingh's masculine self, though he has gone there as a fact-finding reporter. The titillating spectacle of the auction with the women being treated like cattle and their body made subject to physical verification by the male buyers satisfies the male on-lookers. It draws more curiosity about the fantasised female body than sympathy for it from the predominantly male audience.

Media, the institution Jaisingh officially represents, is also conditioned by the patriarchal attitude to women. In a consumerist society media is dictated by the factors of market-driven economy. Commercial equation decides what/how media will see and present. Sensationalism becomes a chief precondition for any news item. However trivial it may be, a news item is stretched to the point of "tamasha" (27) to produce sensation as a market strategy. And who doesn't know that sex creates sensation and sells better than anything else? Media, therefore, exploits the feminine sexuality and defines women "in terms of how they benefit men's lives" (Freedman 61). Following this perception, Jaisingh arranges the press conference in New Delhi to present Kamala to the civilised world. To media, Kamala as an exploited woman does not hold so much importance as the way she is presented in the press conference. She is made to appear as a helpless allurements to the male world. The result is spectacular. The competing cameras flash to capture the best curves of her body. The audience falls over to have a glimpse of her. Undoubtedly, Jaisingh has had his professional mileage from this show. But Kamala remains where she was, a victim despite this 'liberating' enterprise of the civilised society. Her spatial shift from the jungle of Luhardaga to the glitter of Delhi fails to improve her qualitative status. The so-called borders between the civilised and the backward come to be blurred by the synonymous nature of exploitation existing in both of

the domains. The press club in New Delhi becomes the urbanised version of the Luhardaga auction market.

Kamala's torment is unique because of her context. Her womanhood surely denies her autonomy. But conjunctively, her tribal status and spatial location in a remote village compound her suffering. The oppressive hierarchies of caste and class supplement her gendered backwardness. This is why she remains as much vulnerable in New Delhi as she was in Luhardaga. As it can be said, she suffers "multiple patriarchies" (Chitnis qtd. in Chaudhuri xxiii) that function through the hierarchies of gender, caste, class, tribe etc.

In the play, the 'code of silence' thus relegates feminine sexuality to insignificance. And this is true both in and outside the home. Jaisingh can dictate, like Sakharam, "It's I who take decisions in this house, and no one else." (42), and be sure to be obeyed. As a male he can do anything within his power to achieve his professional success – that includes using women as pawns. Both Sarita and Kamala must remain, consciously or unconsciously, the mute spectators of the 'code' and play second fiddle to Jaisingh's male ego.

Gender bias exists even in a most affluent and seemingly sophisticated family, and *The Vultures* proves it. The play provides one of the crudest shocks to the middle class morality. Tendulkar here explores the degeneration of a family and comes up with stunning truths about sexual oppression within the socially approved structure of an urban, middle class family. The ailing patriarch, Hari Pitale, once cheated his brother to take control over the family business but the evil that he sowed seems to recur in his next generation. He comes to be ill-treated by his own sons, Ramakant, Umakant, and the daughter, Manik. They all four resemble vultures in their crookedness and fight over the remaining resources of the decaying family. The brother duo, in particular, comes down heavily on the women and reveals the shocking politics played over the female bodies. Ramakant's wife Rama and sister Manik exemplify the amount of oppression men can exert on women. The brother duo's ultimate goal is financial gain, and this calls for the manipulation of the female bodies. The crude nature of oppression becomes vivid and even troubles the refined audience, thanks to Tendulkar's outspoken and dangerously close-to-reality style. Like *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Sakharam Binder*, this play, too, brutally removes the veil off the society.

In *The Vultures* pregnancy becomes a very important issue. It is used by patriarchy to produce a backward image of woman as docile and dependent. Pregnancy projects itself as a negative condition that is used either to physically outplay a woman, justify her dependence, or to adjudge her worth to have a healthy line of progeny. The masculine power in this play enforces this oppressive definition of womanhood and pregnancy. Two pregnancies are there in the plot – one of Manik, and the other of Rama. Both come under the male supervision. While Manik's pregnancy is regulated by extreme violence, Rama's is monitored with extravagant care, though the male intents behind remain the same.

Manik gets pregnant from her affair with a rich man whom she later plans to trap by her pregnancy. But her scheme is foiled by her jealous brothers. At first, they break her leg so that she cannot visit her man and, meanwhile, they can blackmail the guy by the threat of a scandal. But when their plot to milk the rich man comes to end because of his sudden death, they feel threatened by the pregnancy which may now reduce their share of the property. This urges another exercise of the masculine power over the female body, and Manik is brutally aborted in a gruesome scene that depicts a graphic control over woman's sexuality.

The other example of regulated pregnancy involves Rama. She is childless and normally blamed for it, though the fault lies with her husband. She is subjected to multiple experiments of the mystics, swamis, doctors, astrologers against her will. Her body is monitored for the larger interests of the family. When Rama becomes pregnant from her extra-marital relationship with her brother-in-law Rajaninath, the masculine ego of her husband ironically rejoices at the triumph. We shall examine the utility of this pregnancy from Rama's perspective later when we analyse the counter actions of the women. As of now, her husband's male ego is satisfied at the sight of the swollen womb. Medication, expensive drugs, nurses are applied to take care of the pregnancy because it will ensure the system of hierarchy. In this system, almost all the males, Sakharam, Jaisingh, Ramakant, sound alike, as we see Ramakant silencing Rama, "In this house, we're not accustomed to listening to any smartness from women! No man in our family's been a bloody henpecked husband, . . . ?" (251).

The 'code' continues in another play of Tendulkar *The Threshold*. *The Threshold* is a film-script, which is made into a film starring Smita Patil and Girish Karnad. It belongs to the line of "social problem plays" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 290) that politicises the domestic space, against the larger social context, to expose gender oppression. The shocking violence of *Sakharam Binder* and *The Vultures* does not trouble the refined eyes here, perhaps owing to the cinematic requirements. However, the implied shock and horror over the common misery of women is no less appalling than their explicit display. It presents a woman's encounter with the sexually biased condition in and outside the family, compounded by other factors such as middle class hypocrisy and political corruption. Though the other factors of oppression can only be termed as extensions of the patriarchal attitude to woman, they have their peculiarities to complicate her situation.

A placid joint family with a matriarch at the top comes to be disturbed by the awkward desire of its young 'bahu' (daughter-in-law), Sulbha. She wants to do something that she loves in her life. She wants to go outside, some other town, to join the post of the superintendent at the Sangamwadi Mahilashram. But her desire is opposed by all in this modern and liberal house, her social activist mother-in-law as well as her husband. They want her to stay at home, look after her child and do some work so that a balance can be achieved. Or at best, she can join the social work of her mother-in-law. But against all the expectations she leaves home for her goal only to discover a cruder world of sexual oppression outside. She decides to come back to her family, which is presumably less hazardous than the outside world, and discovers that her last hope, i.e. her husband, is no different from the lot. In her absence he has started keeping a mistress outside the home.

The Threshold provides a very useful insight into the structural mechanism of an urban, educated middle class-family, sustaining gender oppression under the garb of sophisticated norms and decorum. Its hegemonic structure relies on some refined tools to construct the sexual relations between the 'active' male and the 'passive' female. The mother-in-law is devoted to social service with apparently 'modern' disposition and no time for petty family squabbles. Though she never looks like a traditional mother-in-law, her indifference to her bahu's desire virtually makes Sulbha non-existent in the family. Subhash, her husband, also appears to be understanding and accommodative – so much so that the readers might even be tempted to justify his secret liaison. That a helpless man needs company in the absence of his wife, selfishly pursuing her career, might have a lot

of takers. But what goes covertly is his smooth and less-coercive technique of domination. Sulbha's trouble is highly compounded by her location in this middle class home. The normal attributes of a standard middle class home, such as modernity, education, liberal and intellectual outlook, seem to render the patriarchal bias sophisticated, hazards-free and almost unrecognisable in her case.

Outside the family, Tendulkar investigates another social domain – the Mahilashram where Sulbha works. Two implications seemingly arise from this examination. First, the sexual prejudice is almost unavoidable in the society. Secondly, the multiple types of hazards women have to confront in it. Like the mother-in-law in the family, Mrs. Sampson is at the helm of the Mahilashram. But its mechanism is different from that of the family. It resembles the Foucauldian madhouse where the mentally or physically challenged people are kept. The meta-narratives of social science and medical science prevail here and define the subjectivity of the inmates. It identifies the insane, isolates them under restraint and then monitors them for the sake of order and sanity. They have to be treated, and therefore gruesome methods of cure become humanitarian and legitimate. Though she stays out of station, Mrs. Sampson monitors the inmates through apparatuses such as time-table, duties, dress-code, and guards. The inmates obey her dictates, presuming that she still oversees. In many ways, the asylum resembles Foucault's Panopticon, where also prisoners are centrally monitored through the apparatuses by a presumed authority.

Although Foucault never attributes any sexual dimension to the central power in Panopticon, the Mahilashram exemplifies how and what happens when predominantly sexist power designs such institution as mental asylum. Multiple interest-groups join hands for social, political, financial and even personal gain and produce this institution strictly on the gendered roles of women. Numerous examples in the play show that the authority does not accord even the minimum dignity to its female inmates. Its manifold utility doubles when Sulbha discovers that it supplies women to the local MLA, Bane. *The Threshold* thus exposes a 'nowhere situation' for the women who want to be self-reliant. Sulbha quits this place and returns home only to find her husband wasting no time to get her interim alternative in the meantime.

Terrible realities in and outside the family involving human relationships continue to be the focus of Girish Karnad as well. His plays also expose a powerful male dominance at different social levels. He examines female subjectivity through different characters, such as Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*), and Padmini (*Hayavadana*), and reveals how a section of the society is kept oppressed and dependent chiefly on the sexual line. The oppressive code of gender proves extremely unaccommodating to women and employs clever techniques to marginalise them.

Naga-Mandala exposes the patriarchal grip over society through its highly suggestive story as well as subtle style. Karnad here does not follow any particular folk form but adapts different conventions (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 314) to create an anti-realist world pregnant with cognitive possibilities. This is a 'performance text' invested with literary craftsmanship. The folklorist framework, which is inherently blessed with a self-reflexive nature, is adapted to talk about the different possibilities of meaning or imply the hidden realities. The Prologue exemplifies it beautifully. We find some inanimate objects, along with a human being, preparing the ground for the story to roll on. In the darkness of night in a temple, a Man is cursed by fate, for writing some bad plays, to have to remain awake at least one whole night to save his life. He comes to find a group of Flames gossiping among each other after the masters of their homes go to bed. The humorous gossips ironically refer to common domestic problems, such as the tragedy of an aged mother in the house of her son and daughter-in-law, the daily feud of an aged couple in their story-less life over the husband's suspicious motives. The Flames are also joined by a Story, a feminine form wrapped in a sari. At this moment, the Man intervenes as he finds in the Story a way out to pass his time and keep himself awake. On some preconditions of folk and oral aesthetics, the Story agrees and narrates the tale of Rani. The manifold significance of this form can be understood by Karnad's own point of reference. The oral tales or stories have a paradoxical nature. "They have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they are passed on from the possessor of the tale to the listener" (Karnad, *Three Plays* 17). Thus the Story becomes a metonymy of the 'naturalised' status of a daughter, for example, the one who plays the central character in this play. In spite of their independent desires which lie heavily under suppression, the daughters exist only in their customary shift from one home to another — more specifically, in their relation to men. In this tale of a woman's manoeuvre for self-assertion, this aspect of dramaturgy enriches the overall possibilities of meanings. The

ending of the play is also a technical marvel in this respect, but that will be studied later during the women's responses to the system.

Rani is married away before she has learnt anything about the man-woman relationships. Following the customs, the moment she attains puberty she is packed off from her parents to the house of her husband. The tears of her mother at her puberty are crude reminder of the status of girl child in our society. At first, the tears indicate the ordeal of getting a suitable match for the girl. Then, they also forebode the post-marriage anxieties that typically end with dowry death, polygamy, or sexual perversion. Rani's nuptial ride is derailed right in the beginning as her husband turns out to be a polygamist, having an extra-marital relation with a prostitute. He stays with Rani during the daytime and goes off, when the sun sets, only to reappear in the morning. In his absence she rots behind a locked door and finds no reason to cheer about when he comes back sexually gratified from the prostitute. It becomes a life-in-hell for a young girl like her, a state which can be called, in the words of Rama (*The Threshold*), the "living death of my wifehood" (242). She even thinks of exotic ways of applying magic roots on her husband on the advice of a blind, elderly woman but cannot execute it out of fear. At this moment, Karnad brings in the magical Naga, a king cobra, to show its illicit affair with the dissatisfied, young wife.

Rani, seemingly, finds no wrong in sleeping with the Naga, which incarnates her husband. As she becomes pregnant in due course of time, much to the anger of her original husband who never touched her, the male society springs up and demands proof of her innocence. The way she is put under the trial reminds one of Leela Benare's mock-trial (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) where also patriarchy defines the woman under the pretext of social and cultural purity. It exposes how the sexist paradigm is sustained by the 'knowledge-makers/keepers', who lay down "dire, horrifying and obnoxious punishments for the erring wife" (Bhattacharji 31), though "for similar offences men suffered nothing except occasional social censure" (Bhattacharji 31). The court of elders, something like the modern day 'panchayat' in rural India, puts the onus on the woman to prove her innocence and asks her to hold a red-hot iron ball in hand! The attitudinal aspect of the society betrays a clear gender prejudice – a persecution motif that holds the woman as inferior, gullible to sin, and untrustworthy. This kind of trial of woman, which frequently features in the media reports and often leads to even suicide of the victim in

fear of castigation (A. Mitra, *Panchayat* 7), is a favourite exercise of the male-dominated society. The objective remains the same – to retain its sole right over the female body.

Karnad's narrative uses the folk and mythological figures with their "established associations" (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 217) to infer new significance of the contemporary situations. His understanding of the woman question in the play *The Fire and the Rain* is another occasion where mythologies are adapted to reread gender politics in and outside the domestic world. The story is derived from the myth of Yavakri which "occurs in Chapters 135-38 of the Vana Parva (Forest Canto) of the *Mahabharata*" (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* ix). Bharadwaja and Raibhya were two sages and good friends. Yavakri, Bharadwaja's son, felt angry over the lack of recognition that his father received compared to Raibhya. He went for ascetic penance and was rewarded by Lord Indra. Emboldened by the divine blessing, Yavakri thought of taking revenge on Raibhya and therefore cornered his daughter-in-law, Vishakha, in a lonely spot and molested her. This incensed Raibhya and he created a demon to kill Yavakri. After the end of Yavakri, the second part of the myth tells the story of the conflict between Paravasu and Aravasu, the two sons of Raibhya. One day Paravasu, who was conducting a fire sacrifice for the king in order to bring rain on the dry kingdom, "mistook the black deerskin which his father was wearing for a wild animal and unintentionally killed him." (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* 64). He put the blame on his innocent brother, Aravasu (spelt Arvasu in the play), so that he can continue his fire sacrifice uninterrupted to ascend the highest glory of priesthood. Aravasu retired to the jungle and prayed to the Sun God who finally granted a moral end to the story – all the dead came back to life, Paravasu was pardoned by the gods, and Aravasu restored. Karnad has given some political twist to some sections of this mythology of morality and disrupted the placid water of Brahminic asceticism to understand the politics involved in caste and gender.

Among others, Vishakha, the wife of Paravasu, has become a very important character in Karnad's rendition of the story – a focal point to reread the given sexual realities. Like Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Vishakha seems to stand for the oppressed womanhood. Her marriage is against her will. Whatever space she had before her marriage, she has lost all within one year in Paravasu's house. The initial fun dries up, and Paravasu becomes an ascetic to join the fire sacrifice, leaving Vishakha with all her unfulfilled desires behind. This suppressed womanhood receives Karnad's utmost

concern because it shows the signs of gender injustice and the possibility of a challenge from the oppressed. The case of a newly married woman neglected by her husband and humiliated by a hostile father-in-law is important enough to invite a gender reading. And, in addition to this, Karnad has imagined a pre-marriage affair of Vishakha with Yavakri, a thematic ingenuity that renders her entity pregnant with aberrant possibilities.

Unlike Tendulkar's Sakharam and Ramakant, most of the males here epitomise dignity and purity. Parvasu embodies this purity-consciousness. But behind this clean image, there lies an attitudinal disrespect for women. He wants to attain the highest spiritual glory of priesthood and considers his wife a hindrance to his ascetic practices. Woman is regarded as the gate of hell, a distracter tempting the dutiful man with her lascivious charms. Importantly, Parvasu's attitude to his wife is largely determined by his deep faith in caste obligations and personal ambition. His Brahmin caste demands total asceticism for the holy post of the chief priest. On the other hand, sheer ambition further strengthens faith in the caste norms. Personal glory lures him to eliminate his father, sideline his brother and, not to mention, dump his wife. So Vishakha's condition suggests that a woman is oppressed not only by an exclusively-sexist bias but also by other factors such as caste, spiritual/material ambitions of a man. These, too, contribute to the derisive attitude to women.

Vishakha is tormented by the other males as well for the similar reasons. Yavakri, her former lover, tries to use her as a stooge to inflict a psychological blow on the Raibhya family. Her father-in-law, Raibhya himself torments her not only from his sexist contempt but also from his jealousy for his son and pride over his family prestige. Therefore, a woman's suffering is motivated by many a factor related to her specific context. Here, the Brahminic world of purity and spiritual glory seems to be an unavoidable aspect to understand Vishakha's sexual misery. However, it is also observed that these factors often work as extensions of a patriarchal attitude to the women in general. For example, the Brahminic caste-hierarchy can also be termed as an extended patriarchy as far as man's relation with woman is concerned. In both cases, an asymmetrical feminine identity is constructed. In the former (Brahminic caste-hierarchy), the discourse of purity/impurity defines the ideal womanhood; in the latter (patriarchal hierarchy), the same womanhood is defined from a sexist point of view. In this connection, the most feasible way is, perhaps, to recognise the suffering of the women in

different social positions, and take note of the special features of their positions, which compound their sufferings. Vishakha's sexual misery in a Brahminic zone of silence becomes visible from this perspective.

Karnad's critically acclaimed play *Hayavadana* can be described as a philosophical quest on the stage. Karnad approaches the question of human identity through the irreconcilable duality of mind and body. He explores the philosophical debate over human identity, unmistakably, against the backdrop of post-Independence national identity-building. Importantly, *Hayavadana* also provides a critical perspective on gender, beside its other levels of engagement. It shows the limited space of woman's subjective desire in a patriarchal society. Sexual stereotypes of masculinity and femininity decide woman's relation to her husband and her role after marriage. The rigid 'ideality' of her image renders her agency almost powerless. On the other hand, the play also presents a possibility, though interim, of subversion of the patriarchal code of conduct through the counteraction of a female character.

The plot of the play is based on a story from the ancient collection of tales in Sanskrit, *Kathasaritsagara*, and its re-interpretation by Thomas Mann in his *The Transposed Heads* (1940). Three characters, Devadatta, a fair, comely and intelligent Brahmin, his beautiful wife Padmini, and his dear friend, Kapila, the muscular, daring son of an iron-smith, enact this drama of confusion. The friendship of the two men turns sour when Devadatta discovers his wife's secret fixation over Kapila's masculine physicality. Out of despair, he goes to a temple of Goddess Kali and beheads himself. When Kapila comes to know about it, he follows his friend and beheads himself too to avoid the impending social persecution. Now, when Padmini prepares to commit suicide in fear of social scandal, Goddess Kali intervenes with a blessing. The woman has to rejoin the heads to the bodies, and the men will be back to their life. In her excitement, Padmini mixes up the heads and puts Devadatta's head on Kapila's body and Kapila's head on Devadatta's. "The result is a confusion of identities which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality" (Kurtkoti qtd. in Karnad, *Three Plays* 70). As to who the real husband is, the Sanskrit tale adjudges the person with the husband's head (Devadatta's) the real husband, since head represents the man. Thomas Mann retells it to show that the bodies will change to fit the heads, since head is the supreme, and go back to their earlier forms and "ridicule the mechanical conception of life which differentiates between body

and soul" (Kurtkoti qtd. in Karnad, *Three Plays* 69), i.e. physical and spiritual. In Karnad's rendering, this issue of physical and spiritual is converted into a problem of human identity that indicates the absurdity of a definitive or perfect identity in a world of fluid reality.

Taking clue from the imperfection of human condition, the issue of gender in *Hayavadana* can be approached. It first reveals that men like to construct an ideal femininity on some essential qualifications. Chastity, loyalty, self-sacrifice and dependence are some of the 'essential' attributes of this womanhood. Secondly, *Hayavadana* contests this patriarchal perception of woman as a sexual 'fixity'. Padmini's character is a challenge to the male discourse. Her intelligence, wit, outspoken style of conversation and, above all, the desire to have the best fusion of the two men destabilise tradition. Besides, Karnad's ironical use of the figure of Goddess Kali also serves to unsettle the male notion of femininity. Thirdly, the play extends further to imply that neither the ideal femininity designed by the patriarchy nor even the 'ideal masculinity' fashioned by the independent feminine desire is possible. Whatever response Padmini gives to the norm of monogamy, it ultimately suggests the impossibility of her desire of having the ideal – the amalgam of Devadatta's intelligence and Kapila's phisic.

Regarding the first issue of ideal femininity, there are plenty of instances in the text where the woman is stereotypically inscribed by the men. Padmini's husband, Devadatta and his friend, Kapila, represent masculinity in different forms. The husband's seemingly 'normal' jealousy over his wife's free ways of talking betrays reality. Padmini's praise over Kapila's body splits even the two best friends. Suspicion grows in the male mind of Devadatta. His suicide at the Kali temple happens solely because of his insulted male ego. Notably, neither he nor Kapila ever thinks of Padmini's future before the self-immolation. Their indifference to Padmini becomes clearer in their second life after their heads are transposed. Now all friendship is gone, and they are ready to "fight like lions and kill like cobras" (130) to possess the woman they desire. They both stake their claim over her and kill themselves twice, and all is for the woman. This might be anti-patriarchal as both the men seem to be dancing at the tune of a woman's desire. But, as also pointed out by Aparna Dharwadker, Padmini finally finds herself as the loser (*Theatres* 339). Patriarchy seems to remain at its place with its perception of woman as the prized object to be fought over for possession. However, it is still to be seen how

much or what type of challenge Padmini offers to this idealisation of femininity – a subject to be explored in the following section of this chapter.

The women's responses to the oppressive regime of silence become the focus of the second part of the present discussion. Different female characters in their backward state are already studied. Patriarchal hierarchy is found to have been compounded by other oppressive hierarchies such as caste, class, religion, tradition, many of which are in fact coloured by a male attitude to women. All this relegates the women to the margin. It is now to examine if the women characters have been able to achieve any space of self-assertion in their interaction with the dominant power. Whether they can offer any counteraction or at least the potentials for it and have survival strategies are to be looked at.

In *The History of Sexuality* (Vol.1) Foucault once said, "where there is power, there is resistance" (qtd. in Smart 132). Power relations cannot exist without the means of insubordination and struggle. Foucault's concept of resistance is, however, criticised by many on the ground that it does not offer a means of effective challenge to a prevailing order. His resistance must exist within the power relation and never be in a "position of exteriority in relation to" (Thompson 113) it. It is always situated within the domain of power and, therefore, alleged to offer no effective change. Another point is that Foucault does not ascribe his power and resistance to any particular form of class struggle such as men's power over women or the power of administration over the way people live (Smart 135). He seems to talk about "non-class" (Smart 135) power relation or struggle. However, Foucault remains valid in the present discussion for he asserts the indispensability of resistance or, at least, counteraction. This potentiality of challenge to domination, whatever is its outcome, renders Foucault relevant here. Moreover, many feminists argue that the intrinsic position of resistance in relation to a power-regime does not exhaust its freedom. To be clearer, a body constructed in the context of a regime is "never wholly determined by it, but always carries the possibilities of resistance to that regime" (Cahill 53). This view, mooted by many others such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, argues that the feminine body produced by a powerful discursive order can still remain indeterminate within the order (Cahill 53).

All these arguments encourage one to read some women characters of the plays with a view to assessing their responses to the male discourse. It is, of course, questionable whether the responses can be called resistance at all. But what is evident is they try to raise their voice in a different way, showing a sign of self-consciousness. Their responses would be important so far as the possibility of their self-formation is concerned. Further, their reactions would help expose the oppressive system that torments them in many a way.

Let us first take up Leela Benare (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) who dares to defy her gendered role. She is an aberration to the social norms. For her, "Life is not meant for anyone else. It's your own life. It must be" (61). Her claim over the right to self-formation reminds one of the Beauvoirian woman. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman espouses the free and equal individual. People "with female bodies do not have to fulfil any special requirements to be considered women." (Beauvoir qtd. in *Moi, Sex, Gender* 77). The male-dominated society has scientifically determined the female body as inferior, dependent, and purity-centric. But, as Beauvoir argues, women have to defy this norm of body as sexual fixity and use it as situation (qtd. in *Moi, Sex, Gender* 62). The body-as-situation or as "lived experience" (Beauvoir qtd. in Tidd 65) can permit the female to manage her life vis-à-vis her situation or context. She can become independent, without conforming to "sexist stereotypes or to feminist ideals of womanhood" (*Moi, Sex, Gender* 77). She does not have to fall into any sort of sexual specificity that might curtail her freedom.

Benare wants to lead her life full and be "Leela Benare, a living woman" (61). This dream for "a living woman" seems to defy all kinds of sexual criteria. She wants to use her body as her own, not as a preset destiny. It would be neither a-sexual nor sexually predetermined but an independent possibility without the compulsion to fulfil any stereotype. But her life of dream is never a cakewalk. She falls in love with her maternal uncle at the age of fifteen, but this independent way of using her body proves unacceptable to the society. Her next man of hope, Prof. Damle, too turns out to be another clichéd agent of the male society. These repeated failures to use her body as the way she dreams create confusion, "I despise this body – and I love it!" (118). This dilemma, however, does not last long. She regains her position, "It (body) will be there. It will be yours. Where will it go without you? And where will you go if you reject it?"

(118). Despite the antagonistic verdict of the mock-court to abort her unborn child, she again proclaims to use her body for a new cause. She will give birth to the baby and become a mother, defying the normative motherhood within marriage. She claims, "I want my body now for him – for him alone" (118). This motherhood outside marriage poses a challenge to the patriarchy and enables Benare to wrestle for the right on her body.

The question remains how much freedom Benare has achieved in the play. The verdict thumps its intention quite clear, ". . . the child in your womb shall be destroyed" (119). Does it terminally blockade Benare's dream of "whole existence" (118)? Typical of his theatrical style, Tendulkar avoids a decisive conclusion. He engages the entire issue in the format of a play-within-the-play which is done in a spirit of "good fun" (120). The unmistakable irony of this style, which works through the deliberate overlapping of fiction and reality, fun and seriousness on each other, upholds the possibility and impossibility of a change, i.e. the success of Benare's dream. There is an unconscious quip from one male character, "The *show* must go on" (my emphasis) (120). The play ends with Benare sitting alone with the light on her and the rest of the stage in darkness. The light, perhaps, suggests her self-consciousness strengthened by her final assertion of womanhood. But the darkness around seems to imply the continuation of the "show" and the near impossibility of its total removal.

Compared to Benare, neither woman in the play *Kamala* is more outspoken and rebellious in her relation to the society. Benare has to live with the verdict of the mock-court, but still her position of unmarried motherhood challenges the society. Sarita and Kamala, on the other hand, do not possess such challenging status as Benare's. Women's self-recognition in a rather compromised situation is what the play offers. Sarita questions and exposes marriage but, ultimately, chooses to compromise for the present against the hope of a 'liberatory' future. Another important aspect of the play is that it presents a gender-site shared by the two females with markedly different responses. Women's responses to a given situation of sexual oppression can be variable, depending on their socio-cultural background. Multiple specificities, such as caste and class, determine their reactions. And this also shows the presence of an extended patriarchy that oppresses women in the name of different social norms, avoiding an overt sexual discrimination.

The dissimilar responses of Sarita (an urbane housewife) and Kamala (a tribal village girl) point out this aspect of socio-cultural context as an important determinant.

The domestic space of the Jadhav house is heavily conditioned under the patriarchal surveillance of Jaisingh Jadhav. Sarita is reduced to a docile subject, firmly grounded in the master-slave principle of male-defined conjugality. She does, however, show timid signs of discontent over her subjugated existence, and this seems to refer to the variable insubordination of body constructed within a discursive regime (Cahill 53). Her discontent over her condition finds expression only in the sporadic oddities of 'normal' physical gesture and non-verbalism. This suppressed non-conformity comes to gain an evident self-awareness only after the arrival of the tribal, village girl. Even in her wildest dream Sarita could not find any social/cultural affinity with Kamala. But her physical proximity with Kamala is translated into a psychological intimacy by the apolitical correspondence of the illiterate rural woman. She becomes empowered to see the status of her slavery, hidden under the conjugal 'normalities'.

The impact of the association is, however, limited to Sarita alone and does not extend to Kamala. The tribal girl from a remote village is a victim of double oppression. Her social backwardness owes as much to her gendered status as to her economic and class condition. The economic misery of a tribal group comes to be aided by its social customs in an effort to get rid of poverty. And this deliverance from poverty is supposed to come through the auctioning off its women in a flesh-market. So women are objectified and gendered in a condition which is determined by multiple factors. Poverty, unemployment and lack of education create backwardness, and if it happens in a social group with rigid customs and norms, its women become the most vulnerable target of manipulation. They can be made scapegoat in the supposed enterprise of removing poverty. This seems to be the case with Kamala. She is a tribal woman whose oppressed status has lot to do with her link to the community, deprived of the basic amenities of life. And the fact that she is a woman multiplies her risk. Her sex makes her already unequal, and the socio-economic backwardness of her community renders her doubly oppressed. She has to live under the regulation of a patriarchy extended to other types of social hierarchies such as caste, community, economic condition etc. There is no wonder that she fails to share the sort of sexual enlightenment Sarita seems to gain from the similar situation.

Although she herself fails to fathom the gender politics, Kamala unintentionally opens up Sarita's eyes. From her positional backwardness, she draws a simplistic line of analogy between her and Sarita memsahib and concludes, "Fifteen days of the month, you sleep with the master; the other fifteen, I'll sleep with him. Agreed?" (35). The analogy revokes Sarita's gender amnesia and opens her eyes to the crude realities of marriage. Undoubtedly, her better social status in terms of access to different modern facilities of life makes it possible for her to grasp the implication and see through the fact. Kamala unknowingly facilitates this awareness, while she herself remains unaware because of her total backwardness.

Sarita's self-knowledge, however, seems to be questionable on a certain ground. Although she reasonably problematises the masculine authority over woman, her method invites reconsideration because it tends to, unintentionally and dangerously, support the masculine-feminine hierarchy. She criticises the definition of manhood, "What a man does is manhood. Even if he washes people's dishes, that's manhood. . . . This must be changed. Those who do manly things should be equal to men. *Those who don't, are women*" (my emphasis) (47). While critiquing the oppressive categories such as husband and marriage, she seems to sacrifice the identity called 'woman' to the power she opposes and glorify the 'masculine' in the process. This notion of womanhood seriously undermines the prospect of her critique.

With the above problem in mind, Sarita's final posture becomes understandable. Fired and lost, Jaisingh comes back to her, and Sarita decides to switch over to her role of a dutiful wife. She finds reason to support her husband at this moment of crisis and thinks it better to rescue the home than allow it to disintegrate. ". . . at present I'm going to lock all that up in a corner of my mind and forget about it. But a day will come, . . . when I will stop being a slave" (52). Despite her self-awareness, she decides to compromise for the moment to protect the home, though she does not know when exactly the day of her freedom will come. What Tendulkar here seems to emphasise more is the acquisition of self-knowledge than any immediate articulation of it. He seems to limit the female self-assertion within a condition where the woman comes to self-recognise but refuses to articulate that recognition on practical ground. Keeping in mind the current situation, the self-belief that "a day will come" (52) is said to matter more than how and when. Sarita

exposes the sexual oppression inside a marriage in a modern, urban locale but chooses to remain content only with the knowledge and the hope for a better future.

The domestic world co-inhabited by two women under the oppressive rule of a single male is again found in *Sakharam Binder*. In the 'masculine home' of Sakharam, Laxmi and Champa struggle to survive in their respective ways. Unlike in *Kamala*, their coexistence is marked by mutual intolerance, each trying to dislodge the other to gain space. For this, they display two different forms of female subjectivity. At the end, one wins over the other and ensures her position in the house. Tendulkar explores here the varied nuances of sexual experiences that can be found in women's survival strategies in a highly gendered space. It might denote the difficulty in forming a homogenised association of the oppressed sisters to counter patriarchy. Besides, the success of Laxmi over Champa seems to imply some authorial insight into the means of survival under certain circumstances.

Let us begin with Laxmi's tender sexuality that displays, as the religious connotation of her divine name suggests, normative femininity. She evokes the paradigm of a dutiful housewife in the patriarchal edifice of 'home'. Thousand lashes of Sakharam cannot even draw a word of visible protest from her. While with Sakharam, she does not even forget to wear the *mangalsutra* (holy chain of marriage) of her past marriage as she is bound by the rules of a Hindu woman. At the time of her entry into the house, she looks for the kitchen, which symbolises her fantasised domain of security and escape from all persecutions outside.

In contrast to the diminutive and tender Laxmi, Champa is the blatant expression of female sexuality. She is a social-heretic who seems to be clever enough to use her bodily resources in order to control the masculine fixation over it. She distrusts the idea of traditional womanhood as it passively surrenders to the male needs. Her bold and unashamed use of sexuality tries to convert the strength of the male gaze into its weakness. And, this, she believes, is the way to counter Sakharam's sexual aggression and survive.

Tendulkar seems to have made a comparative analysis of the two women in terms of their hold over Sakharam. Under critical examination, Champa's physicality comes to

reveal the compulsions behind her stand and is shown as self-defeating. Her horrible memory of marriage compels her to consider her body, almost cynically, a destined object of allurements to be used only to arrest the male desires for self-security. It is not that she loves to use her body this way; rather she has to do it to ensure the minimum security for her life. Her awareness of the situation makes her outspoken about it, "Instead of having ten beasts tearing at me everyday, I'd rather do what one says to me" (184). This compulsiveness seems to render her physicality insufficient as against the alternative subjectivity of Laxmi. Sakharam is awe-struck at her for a moment but gradually yields to Laxmi. In the play, her defeat points out the weaknesses of her survival strategy.

During her first stint in Sakharam's house, Laxmi is able to leave "a mark" (153) on him. Her silent presence aided by her deep faith in spirituality and religious norms proves unbearable to Sakharam who, despite his will, fails to ignore her. This becomes evident when she comes back second time. Interestingly, Champa welcomes her in the house and proposes a shared space for survival in a manner reminiscent of Kamala-Sarita partnership. But Laxmi has different thoughts as she wants to survive alone with Sakharam. Her influence begins to tell on him as the unabashed norm-breaker now comes to feel a sense of guilt in making love with another woman in the presence of his 'lawful wife'. Nothing more Champa can do than running in a liaison with Dawood desperately to avenge her loss of control on Sakharam. But this also proves self-defeating as Laxmi leaks it out to Sakharam to manipulate his masculine ego against her immediate foe. The result is manifold – Champa perishes to the squeezing clutches of Sakharam, and the man, after the last flicker of his remaining male gusto, shows the sign of being worn out. The final spectacle of Laxmi undertaking the secret burial of Champa's body in the darkness of night with immobile and impotent Sakharam looking "lost" (198) tells it all – the subordinated image of femininity manoeuvres to the position of authority by a calculative manipulation of her situation in the relations of power. Laxmi's triumph surely implies the usefulness of the traditional femininity when used for the profit of woman. But it unmistakably glorifies somewhere the normative wifedom as well. Notwithstanding her win, Laxmi ardently believes in the passive and docile wifedom. She is taught to respect her 'mangalsutra' (holy chain of marriage) despite all injustice and continues to do so till the end. Not even in her wildest dream she has ever thought of debating the authority of her male master. Her sole aim is more to dispose off Champa and live 'happily' thereafter with her master than to have a life of equality and freedom. She does not even have, at

least, the self-recognition of Sarita. For all this reason, Laxmi's empowerment seems to be a problematic issue.

Survival within and outside the family becomes nearly impossible for the loyal-yet-aspiring wife in the film script, *The Threshold*. Sulbha initially comes out of her house in order to do something herself. But the outside world proves to be more sexually hostile to the women than the refined sexism inside a home. She has to quit her working place in favour of her home with the hope of choosing the relatively better option between the two unfavourable ones. But to her utter shock, she finds that her husband, Subhas, has started keeping a mistress outside during her absence. The border between in and outside the home fast gets blurred to her. The middle class sophistication of her family totally peels off. She has lost her faith in both the worlds she has tried to live in. Finally, we see her leaving the house for some unknown destination but, unmistakably, with a mind fully aware of her condition. This is, perhaps, the only positive sign in Sulbha's exit as it was in Sarita's case.

The case of Rama, the housewife in *The Vultures*, is interesting because it expresses a different type of survival technique. Inside the home, Rama is seen to be struggling to counter the impotent masculinity of her husband, Ramakant. She rejects the womanhood where pregnancy is seen merely as a way of satisfying the male ego. She wants to become pregnant for her own pleasure. But the pressure of the husband, who wants to disprove his impotency, is immense on her. She cannot thrash out the fact at him and goes out blatantly to fulfil her desire. Women, generally, do not tread on that way in Tendulkar. She can neither commit suicide nor kill her husband (242) to get rid of it because that would spoil her dream for ever. Considering the practicality of her situation, Rama explores a path that, she hopes, can get all interests served. Through Rajaninath, the illegitimate son of her father-in-law, she plans to realise her autonomy. Pregnancy arrives through this liaison to make many ends meet. First, it assures the husband of his manhood. Secondly, it gives Rama the right to her body. Although the disclosure of the illegitimate pregnancy to the husband threatens any prospect of autonomy, this negative aspect can be taken for the play's larger thematic need to visualise the degeneration of a middle-class family in all respects, not in terms of gender alone. This setback to Rama's dreamt happiness does therefore never undermine the potential strength of this counterstrategy in gaining some power for the woman.

What we find in Rama's illegitimate pregnancy is a daring attempt, rare in Tendulkar, at self-autonomy. For a housewife totally dependent on her husband for her livelihood and nowhere else to go, Rama's way seems to be the only feasible option. However, this type of tactful attempt to manipulate the oppressive condition to one's own benefit seems to be better handled by Karnad in some of his women characters such as Rani (*Naga-Mandala*) and Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*). These oppressed wives, castigated inside conjugality, seem to be more clever and manipulative than Rama to exploit the male power to their profit. They provide patriarchy with a sense of self-assurance by displaying a calculated conformity and prepare the ground for their work. Instead of overt disavowal of norms, which might immediately invite the punitive actions, they covertly manoeuvre them to gain some freedom. The success rate of this technique is of course variable, but it surely offers these women a scope of self-expression under the specific circumstances they are located in.

Conjugality comes to be a 'naturalised' sexual imprisonment for Rani. Her seemingly unintentional liaison with the Naga and act of self-defence at the village panchayat represent a covert opposition to oppressive norms. In this play, however, extra-marital comes not as a deliberate choice on the part of the female subject, unlike *The Vultures* where Rama chooses it on her own. It seems to be more like the authorial intention to explore unconventionality in order to arrive at a liberating mode of living. Karnad seems to be keen to push Rani on the unusual path in order to find the possibility of dissent. A woman having multiple male partners is vigorously discouraged by the mainstream Hindu religious texts (Bhattacharji 30), be it a secret liaison in the form of extra-marital or polyandry inside the legitimacy of marriage, though it may have been permissible in some region or tribes in India. The presence of extra-marital relation in some of the plays is, therefore, tantamount to travelling into the forbidden territory as a mode of dissent.

Karnad's dramaturgy relies on the mythological and folk elements so as to capitalise on their power of irony and 'complex seeing'. The magical world of the Naga works as a garb that expresses different thematic tropes as understatement. The issue of extra-marital relation and pregnancy is underscored but without a bang so as to avoid direct confrontation with society. The metaphysical intervention deliberately creates a

confusion regarding Rani's unawareness about or consent to sex with a man other than her husband. Her un-intentionality is quite clear in her accidental throwing out of the magic root, the herbal medicine meant for the sexual arousal of her husband, near the cave of the cobra. So, as an understatement, it is the magic (the root-cum-the Naga), and not Rani herself, that initiates the extra-marital. Then the question, as to whether she remains unaware all through, persists till the end through Karnad's deft fusion of the real and the magic. This style of keeping the question under suspension almost till the end and exploring different possibilities understates the aberration and its outcome. The use of the Naga, instead of a human suitor, is however the most important ploy of understatement in the play. In her opposition, the woman here is not found to be eager to script a man-less space. All she tries is to redesign the traditional roles to rectify the sexual imbalances existing between man and woman, and that is too through a covert manipulation, ensuring lesser reprisal and greater success-rate. For this purpose, the understatement of the folk style is appropriate because it helps to hide all implications of aberration and avoids direct clash with the society. A normal human being, instead of the magical Naga, might exaggerate this challenge and endanger it in its very inception.

Rani's pregnancy drags her to the court of the village elders. Here we find her unfolding a clever technique that exploits the male mindset to her own advantage. But, the question remains – is it Rani's independent manoeuvre that gets her through? Obviously, it is the cobra that suggests Rani the way to prove her innocence. This assistance of the cobra suggests the usefulness of a male presence in woman's struggle. In two other plays, *The Vultures* and *The Fire and the Rain*, similar male assistance can be located. Karnad's 'supernaturalising' the male assistance has a lot to do with understating such assistance that, as mentioned before, could draw more severe punishment if it had come from an ordinary human. However, the 'supernaturality' might also suggest the unreliability of this sort of help from a human being. Such a case as male-aid turning abortive will be discussed later in Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain*. As to the credit of whether Rani or the cobra, it can be said that the cobra's help is surely limited to an extent. Till a certain stage of her nocturnal pleasure with the cobra, Rani believes that her husband is duplicitous enough to change colour with the rise and fall of the sun – that is, seduce at night and deny by day. But the fleeting sense of unnaturalness of the 'man' she is sleeping with comes just the night before the snake ordeal, and thenceforth she seems to be a new woman altogether who has chosen her goal. Therefore, despite the importance

of the male assistance, Karnad seems to explore the folk conventions to indicate the limitation of such help and, simultaneously, the effective agency of the woman in redesigning her identity.

Rani's words during the ordeal show her changed subjectivity. Putting her hand inside the snake-cave, she says, "Since coming to this village, I have held by this hand, only two . . . My husband and . . . And this Cobra. . . . If I lie, let the Cobra bite me" (58). The snake remains content with this truth, and she proves her innocence. The society, which was up to castigate her as fallen woman, now comes out to worship her as a divine being, a goddess or a 'devi' and order her husband to spend the rest of his life in her service (59). It is true that Rani fails to dismantle the male discourse that condemns as well as valorises woman for its own needs. But that does not seem to be her aim at all. The dream of this little bride was only to have a home that would be less oppressive and more accommodative than it was given to her, and finally she seems to have got something more than she ever expected.

The ending of the play is again a technical marvel that exploits folk style to enrich the thematic issue. There are three versions of the conclusion. Karnad performs 'complex seeing' of the story by offering three probable ways to end, each of which denotes the amount of Rani's agency in her self-formation. He brings back the natural and supernatural characters, introduced in the Prologue, to enact the endings. The first ending tells that Rani lives happily ever after with total control over her home. But the Man, a listener, objects to it as it fails to tell what happens to Rani's husband, Appanna, who is pretty sure that he is not the father of the new born child. Likewise, it does not clarify about Rani herself, who must have realised the difference the first night her true husband has slept with her because "No two men make love alike" (60). The fate of the cobra is also left out here. Without these nuances the woman's self-formulated subjectivity still remains vague. So, there comes the second version. It tells about the return of the love-struck Naga only to choke to death on Rani's thick hair and her heartfelt gesture of cremating it by her son – the first overt-textual evidence of her awareness of sharing her bed with a man other than her husband. Although it was suggested the moment before the snake ordeal, this present recognition of her awareness indicates her pre-knowledge of the situation and her calculative design. Now the Flames are upset over this tragic ending and ask for a happy one. The final one that follows seems to suggest the ultimate point of

Rani's empowerment where she welcomes the return of the Naga and hides it inside her lock to continue with a blissful life of marriage. This self-styled co-existence with the legitimate husband and the suitor indicates the redesigning of family and the given sexual roles. Without dismantling the system, the woman here remodels, through her clever strategy, the power relations inside the traditional spaces and makes them as spacious to her as they are to men.

Manipulation of the patriarchal mindset can also be found in Vishakha's counteraction (*The Fire and the Rain*). She struggles to rewrite her status in the domestic space marked by masculine indifference and exploitation. The negligence of a careerist husband committed only to his spiritual self-glorification and the threat of a not-so-friendly father-in-law compel her to rethink her life. She, however, never tries to dissolve her conjugal alliance and come out in total disavowal of society; on the contrary, she wants to retain her family and remain as Paravasu's wife but only after having the dues she deserves. Her challenge surely brings change, however small it might be in significance.

Vishakha's survival technique involves two aspects. One is the liaison with Yavakri, and the other is using Paravasu to her gain. Extra-marital relation remains to be an expression of the betrayed femininity in this play as well, though it is shown to be abortive to Vishakha's desire for self-formation. Her sour conjugal life, dried up due to Paravasu's masculine asceticism, renders her subject dissatisfied. She looks for a material sign of assurance in her pre-marriage suitor, Yavakri. This act of aberration on the part of Vishakha fails to become an effective resistance because it seems to be a mere combination of her urge to respond to the call of her body neglected for long, a hurried expression of her insulted ego longing to avenge her tragedy and a nostalgic sentimentality for a pre-marriage lover. Unlike Rama's (*The Vultures*) engagement with her brother-in-law, this present liaison is not motivated by any strategic design of the woman to consolidate her subject position. As a result, Vishakha comes to be an easy prey to Yavakri's design that schemes to use her as a tool to destroy the Raibhya family. But the moment this becomes clear to her, she spoils Yavakri's plan by pouring out the holy water from his 'kamandalu' (pot of holy water) meant for killing her husband's family, and in the meantime a demon, sent by Raibhya, kills Yavakri. Her act proves that

family, home, husband, and wifehood remain her priorities, but they must come free from the sexist bias and be equally accommodative to woman.

After her lesson from the Yavakri episode, Vishakha masterminds an ingenious scheme to achieve a two-fold purpose – first, the elimination of the oppressive father-in-law and, secondly, the return of Parvasu to her. Karnad here modifies the original mythology of the unintentional patricide of Parvasu, mistaking the deerskin his father was wearing for a wild animal. The purpose is to empower Vishakha with the agency to manipulate Parvasu's mind, as though he comes to kill his father under her spell. Parvasu is shown, for a moment, as goaded by his wife into killing his father. However, the fact is that he has his own reason for it and, therefore, lets himself be a part of her design.

The report of Vishaka's affair with Yavakri and his death at the behest of his father brings Parvasu home only for a night. He wants to clear his path to spiritual glory, which, he believes, is threatened by his desiring wife on the one hand and his clever father on the other, though he is still unsure about the way of settlement. Vishakha's scheme offers him a scope. On the other side, Vishakha pours out a vicious string of words to translate Parvasu's anger into an act of revenge on his father. Mark her words.

We're three of us here. Your brother's never home. That leaves me and your father. (Pause) Something died inside your father the day the King invited you to be the Chief Priest . . . (Pause) On the one hand, there's his sense of being humiliated by you. On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's curdled lust. And there's no one else here to take his rage out on but me. (Pause) At least Yavakri was warm, gentle. For a few minutes, he made me forget the wizened body, the scratchy claws, and the blood, cold as ice. . . . (32-33)

The moment Raibhya's steps are heard in the distance, Parvasu suddenly shoots his arrow to his direction. It is indeed Vishakha's victory because she succeeds in removing her father-in-law, ostensibly, by manipulating her husband's male ego. But her success is not complete. Parvasu's blatant explanation that his patricide has more to do with his father's growing threat to his fire sacrifice than any concern for Vishakha largely undermines her objective. All her dream for a home is shattered by this expression of the male ego that seems to be cleverer than her in using her position to serve its own interest.

But this partial success cannot totally dismiss the significance of her attempt. Her daring play on the male ego is an intelligent attempt to survive in a hostile situation.

The last woman to be discussed in the present section is Padmini (*Hayavadana*). She does not belong to the type of women such as Rama, Rani and Vishakha who survive somehow utilising the given situations to their profit. She is not there for devising any new mode of counter strategy to male oppression. Padmini is created mostly to express the female desire to have the best in life. And in this respect, she is unorthodox because desiring the best is traditionally a male prerogative. It is not a female's domain since she is more desired than desiring. Like a male, Padmini desires to have the best sexual partner – the combination of Devadatta's brain and Kapila's body. Opposing the traditional wifehood, she admires Kapila's physique while living with her legitimate husband Devadatta. This is why she fits in this final part of women's counteractions as somebody who dares to express the innermost female sexual desire.

Padmini's desire for the best of both men is a critique of the sexual roles. It destabilises the principle of female monogamy and the limitation of her sexual desire. It seems to betray an extremity, trying to reorganise the sexual division of power and showing the readiness to go even to a symbolic point of polyandry for it. She is said to have erred in transposing the heads in her excitement, but this can also be called her subconscious desire for a perfect husband. There are many instances in the play supporting this point. Immediately after the transposition when Padmini is overjoyed at her newly designed husband (Devadatta's head and Kapila's body), Kapila, now in Devadatta's fragile body, divulges, "I know what you want, Padmini. Devadatta's clever head and Kapila's strong body . . ." (108). She, therefore, whispers to Kapila to console, "It's my duty to go with Devadatta. But remember I'm going with your body" (111). It appears very calculative all through. She marries the intelligent man, longs for the muscular other, mixes up the heads and goes away with the better one, without forgetting to secretly console the other. Her action seems to upgrade her subjectivity to a position of desiring from that of being desired always.

The use of Goddess Kali in the play is another way of disturbing the traditional notion of womanhood. The adapted folk conventions allow free interaction between human and non-human worlds, and this mix of reality and magic provides innovative

penetration of gender. The use of the Goddess explains it well. Traditionally, Kali or Shakti occupies a central position in the conceptualisation of Indian womanhood. The pre-Independence nationalist discourse revived the images of the ten-armed Durga and the naked Kali “with her garland of skulls standing on a supine male Shiva” (Bagchi, *Indian Women* 3). However, many opposed the image of Kali for its woman-on-top posture of naked femininity (Sarkar 2012) and regarded it as degeneration of the glorified ten-armed Durga. So, the militant Kali came to be refined as tender, soft, and motherly. She was brought near to the paradigmatic mother, Durga. Thus, both Durga and Kali formulated the typology of national femininity. Despite their anti-colonial stance, these images allegedly sustained the sexual qualifications of chastity, purity and self-sacrifice for women (Bagchi, *Representing Nationalism* 71). Interestingly, Karnad has subverted this nationalist image of Kali and thereby contested the traditional notion of woman sustained by this image. Kali, in this play, has become a tool of problematising gender roles.

Karnad demythologises Kali by making it a comic figure. In her temple, the Goddess can be found as drooping down in drowsiness, disturbed by the interruptive worshipers, and sometimes even jealous like a common housewife. Her ‘human’ features oppose the divine incarnation of female power. The hilarious effect around her figure is created by well-managed spectacles enriched by ironical dialogues. When Padmini is about to commit suicide, she appears in a terrifying manner. Her fanatical dance with the tremendous noise of drums, however, comes to be juxtaposed by a sudden lull as she is found to be exhausted by the long history of overnight ‘managalarati’. Her disgust over it seems to suggest the authorial critique of the past (nationalist) consolidation of this feminine archetype. Her yawning and exhaustion serves to ridicule this build-up. Unlike her divine denomination, she comically envies Lord Shiva, who, she alleges, always receives better gifts than she from the worshippers and reduces her to the point of being absurd. Womanhood is, thus, subverted by the absurdity of Kali. This subversion is very much in tune with Padmini’s counteractions that try to get the female desires recognised, unsettling the preset notions about them.

Beside critiquing the feminine stereotypes, *Hayavadana* performs another important task. Padmini unconventionally desires to have the best of the two men but finally ends up being ‘left out’, without having either. The challenging aspect of her

desire is duly recognised in the text, but its objective is undermined. She aims for the 'ideal masculinity' – the best fusion of the soul and the body. Any recognition to her aim would ask for, in the same vein, an 'ideal femininity'. This would endanger her challenge against the male-made feminine 'ideality' and also Goddess Kali's critique of it. How could she herself long for an essential masculinity while challenging the same in the case of her own sex? So her failure to have the ideal husband can be taken for a protest against any sort of sexual idealisation, whether of male or female.

In the final part of the assessment, let us focus on the main findings. One obvious aspect is the variety in sexual experience the women undergo. In spite of their shared experience of exploitation, each of them has a different tale to tell. And subsequently, they also offer different modes of contestation. To an oppressive social system, no two women stand up similarly and survive in a pre-programmed manner. This variety can be ascribed to the diversity of their socio-cultural backgrounds. Their gender is always influenced by such factors as class, caste, social milieu, economic status. A variation in these factors often decides the extent of gender oppression. An extended patriarchy seems to have been created by these other forms of hierarchies that sometimes multiply oppression. An affluent, upper class/caste woman's suffering hardly matches that of a woman belonging to the lower strata. Because of such difference in caste and economic status, Sarita and Kamala, for example, cannot be straight-jacketed as a coherent group of the sexually oppressed. For the same reason, no two women react in a similar manner to their oppressive realities. Their survival techniques vary because Sakharam's sexual domination does not match that of Jaisingh Jadhav or, let us say, Paravasu. So it can be said that Tendulkar's and Karnad's treatment of the contemporary Indian women avoids any "sociological notion of the 'sameness'" (Mohanty qtd. in Ashcroft 262) of women's oppression. Rather, they expose the heterogeneous sexist discourses in different situations and assess the varied expressions of discontent or opposition from a long range of sexual 'Other(s)'.

Notwithstanding the variety among all the women, two groups of them could roughly be viewed according to the writers' respective styles of presentation. Tendulkar's women seem to lack in courage that often visits Karnad's women in their ingenious ways of survival. Leela Benare (*Silence! The Court is in Session*) undoubtedly displays her guts in her 'free lifestyle' but finally yields to the cruel society. Except the

hope for a redefined motherhood, she does not have much to be contented with in this male society. The same applies to Sarita (*Kamala*), Laxmi (*Sakharam Binder*), Sulbha (*The Threshold*), and Rama (*The Vultures*). Among them, only Rama seems to have shown some ingenuity. Her well-planned use of the extra-marital pregnancy gains her some respite, though interim in nature. This is why she is perceived, in this study, together with Karnad's Rani (*Naga-Mandala*) and Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*). In resourcefully tackling the male society, Rani exceeds all. Let alone her snake ordeal, the deft ending of the play shows her as a clever woman who knows how to reply verbatim to the male idiom. Vishakha's way is also to cleverly manipulate the male mindset, though she is not as successful as Rani in getting her 'own' husband and family. Another woman character, who proves less calculative but more daring than others, is Padmini (*Hayavadana*). She is, perhaps, the only female who dares to desire the best of two men and, magically, gets four types of men in one lifetime (125). Though the disastrous end implies the impossibility of any sort of sexual 'ideality', or of human perfection – for that matter, her unorthodox desire could not be overlooked. Thus, Karnad's women can be said to score against Tendulkar's as far as the unconventionality of their opposition is concerned. Tendulkar seems to have stressed gaining self-consciousness for the present for a freer and more accommodative future, whereas Karnad seems to encourage his females to be unconventionally resourceful so as to bargain for a better deal right now!

The patriarchal mindset is, however, the most obvious social reality in the plays. Though varied in forms and expressions, a male-dominated system seems to be always at work. Its mode of operation depends on changing contexts and is therefore diverse. Different local specificities influence its presence and function. But this variety cannot undermine its role. Along with other hierarchies, this sexual hierarchy continues to be a major factor to influence a large section of the society. For example, Sarita's oppressed status is certainly different from Kamala's owing to their class-difference. But, this class-difference fails to ensure Sarita's freedom from oppression. Her exquisite and refined middle class home finally turns into a sophisticated replica of the rural flesh market in terms of its bigoted mindset. The change of context, as in this case, has been able to alter only the sexist expression but not the condition itself. The male domination is overwhelmingly active across the varied social domains.

The attempt to rearrange life within the existing social structures is the other commonality found in the women characters. They want to end sexual exploitation but, in the process, do not wish the extinction of the social institutions such as marriage, family and home. They prefer to live and struggle within them that are visibly designed to serve male interest. Leela Benare (*Silence! The Court is in Session*), Sarita (*Kamala*), Laxmi (*Sakharam Binder*), Rani (*Naga-Mandala*), Vishakha (*The Fire and the Rain*) – all display a desire to re-script womanhood without radically challenging the given realities. The Benares and Vishakhas remain always located in their immediate context and seek liberation, importantly, not from the institutions but from their oppressive grips. They can be found as longing for womanhood, motherhood and willing to become/remain wife in a family. But that should not be surprising inasmuch as they actually want to be a ‘free’ wife or mother in a family that has to be made more accommodative and liberal. It is true that Karnad’s women prove more daring than Tendulkar’s as far as their exercise of will is concerned. They are evidently more manipulative to attain their goal. Rani, Vishakha and Padmini exemplify it. But, obviously, none of them ever rejects the traditional categories of woman. The struggle to redesign the inner power relations of the system, keeping its outer structure intact, seems to be the most obvious and immediate concern of the women both in Tendulkar and Karnad.

Inevitably, the above style of opposing male authority can be perceived as self-defeating since none of the women visibly comes out totally free from sexual oppression. To simple logic, they willingly or unwillingly seem to choose to compromise their total freedom for the sake of larger social interests. Traces of the notion of the traditional Indian woman are still found here. As an epitome of sacrifice, Indian women are said to compromise more than confront to ensure social stability. They are unwilling to self-assert and therefore isolated from their own space (Kishwar 31). It is even said that they “consider compromise positively to view it as the most acceptable accommodation of conflicting obligations, of pressures satisfactorily resolved” (Chitnis 24). The women in Tendulkar and Karnad obviously compromise in not rejecting everything that is male-made. But their act should not be devalued as simple surrender to male power. Their compromises should also be read vis-à-vis their contexts. Truly, they are not blind in their rejection. They accept more than reject, but their choice is always curbed by their immediate contexts. In their situations, these women appear to be bold and sometimes resourceful enough to register a note of dissent and do what they think most profitable.

That is why Sarita Jadhav (*Kamala*) chooses to stay in her husband's home, while Sulbha (*The Threshold*) goes out. It would be an overstatement to say that Tendulkar's and Karnad's women ultimately uphold the conventional Indian womanhood, extolling their self-sacrificial aspect. On the contrary, they emphasise women's self-awareness that can lead to a voice of dissent. As Naomi Wolf once observed, "I don't see Indian feminism bashing men the way that we (The American), unfortunately, did rhetorically in the 1980s. What I recommend is that feminists spearheading change, especially in the developing world, tread more gently than we did . . . but play hardball . . . where it counts . . ." (58). The women characters here perhaps try to do this – getting self-aware and treading gently. Their main objective is to maximise profit under the given circumstances. Instead of outright rejection of the male-made code, this can be called contesting it from within with varied outcomes. The most visible profit of these actions is that women gain self-knowledge and feel the need to re-script their life. The contestation is indeed worth the gain.

Chapter III

The Perils of Casteism

In their critical reading of post-Independence Indian life, one of the main contributions of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad may be a dialogue with caste (ism), or caste politics. Through the interpretative possibilities of theatrical idiom, they investigate the caste experiences in a social space, predominantly governed by the Hindu tradition of stratified hierarchy. Their plays, under discussion in the present chapter, seem to reread three domains of discursive configuration – first, the orthodox image of the Brahmin and its associated traditions of religious purity or “dharmic piety” (Bayly 370), secondly, the so-called oppressed Dalit in a (to use contemporary political jargon) ‘Manuvadi’ discriminative society and their ‘incontestable’ position of powerlessness, and thirdly, the narrative of anti-caste, emancipatory movements. The rereading leads to dismantle some predominant notions of caste reality and clearly hints at the possibility of a fresh insight into it. The age-old sanctified status of the Brahmin as the “god on earth” (Michael 24), which still wields significant power over a large part of the society and helps to create a notional superiority across the ‘touchables’ to the untouchables, is contested by the two authors (*Flowers, The Fire and the Rain, Sakharam Binder, His Fifth Woman*). Brahminic ideals are deglamourised to expose their loopholes, and untouchability and purity consciousness, which find acceptance even in some non-Brahmin castes as well, are thus challenged. The popular notion of the victimised Dalit, an issue much sensitive in the present political culture, is also addressed and critiqued (*Kanyadaan*). Its viability is boldly examined vis-à-vis an interrogation of the upper caste dominated Dalit-welfare narrative. The present chapter also examines the intervention (*Tale'-Danda*) in the politics around the anti-caste movements that discloses further nuances about caste-identity and strategic formations of subject-position. Given the present volatility around caste, the emerging perspectives may be helpful to better appreciate the situation. With these issues under focus, the present study is to infer the fuller implications of how these plays penetrate into one of India’s most persistent social realities, keeping in mind its pre/historical constructions and consolidations by different

religious and political powers and also negotiations by social thinkers, namely, M. K. Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar.

Any attempt to define caste as a social and religious system draws as varied responses as the politics around it. The origin of caste can be traced back to the time of the 'Aryan' arrival around 1500 BC (Michael 17), though it seems to have received its theoretical sanctification later in the *Manusmriti* (probably between the second century BC and the AD second century), an "encyclopaedic treatise in verse on human conduct, morality and sacred obligations" (Bayly 14). *Manusmriti* makes clear the classification of caste in terms of a hierarchy "based on occupation and degree of pollution" (Michael 17). As an ancient code of social life, caste has its inevitable religious signification, which helped its perpetuation in primitive, especially non-Brahmin, mind, as something like a divine calling to be observed out of 'dharmic' (pious) obligation. The cosmic body of Brahma gave birth to four main castes and endowed each of them with "a particular quality necessary to enact the sacrifices necessary to sustain the universe" (Michael 24). From the mouth of Brahma emerged the 'Brahmans' (Brahmins), the holiest of holies, the 'Kshatryas' i.e. warriors from the arms, the 'Vaishyas' (tillers or merchants) from the thighs, and from the feet the 'Shudras' (servants). Each of their duties was segregated from the others, and their salvation rested on the loyal observance of their respective callings. This social order of four castes (or 'varnas'), enunciated by the ancient lawgivers with the support of religious sanctification, came to be inherited by generations of people and resulted in the formation of a society marked by the principles of hierarchical stratification and segregation. The concept of untouchability (or untouchables) was a contemporary by-product of the caste system. It was articulated by the Brahmin lawgivers as a preventive measure against the 'sin' of miscegenation and disobedience to caste norms. The children of upper caste-lower caste pair became untouchables. There was variety even in the status of the untouchables, which depended on the social gap between the two parents. If the match was between a Brahmin father and a Shudra mother, the child was called 'Nishāda' (fisherman by profession); but the result was extreme if the reverse happened – a Shudra father and a Brahmin mother. The child was most degraded and condemned as 'Chandala'. The punitive concept of untouchability was, therefore, exercised solely to secure and sustain the pious authority of the Brahmins over others in an 'incontestable' normative system.

Caste has always been a “real and active part of Indian life” (Bayly 3). According to Susan Bayly, caste consciousness in the formation of social order, however, becomes increasingly evident only in the post-Mughal and pre-British period (5) and gradually comes to be substantiated during the Raj owing to colonial administrative policies towards the native population. By virtue of forging broad allegiances across geo-linguistic-economic groups as well as disempowering certain sections of people, caste always remains in close proximity to the rulers, Hindu and non-Hindu alike, and their state policies. “To rule was to name, order and classify” (Bayly 369), and rulers have often proved to play active role in endorsing caste-specific identities of their subjects so as to capitalise on the disharmony of stratified existence. Before the Islamic rule the Brahmin interest was well secured by the Kshatrya rulers, who required the support of the sacred to their political power. The mutual needs often called for alliance between these two castes that normally wanted to see the perpetuation of this hierarchy (Ingalls 212). The Muslim rulers, in fact many of them, were also rational enough to see the talents of the Brahmins and other upper castes which could be utilised in more than one way for the advantage of the state and, as a result, continued to endorse the caste system (Bayly 369) in a manner that consolidated hierarchical segregation as never before. This perhaps resulted in an emergence of caste consciousness, more rigid than before, under non-Hindu rule where “Indians found advantage in embracing the tradition of dharmic piety” (Bayly 370). Another factor which might greatly accelerate caste formation, particularly among the elites, was the need to retain distinguished socio-religious identity uninterrupted by foreign interventions, an urge that was later witnessed in the nationalist narrative against British colonialism as well. During the post-Mughal period, the hectic exercises of state (re)formation brought caste consciousness/affinities, till then being utilised mostly by the ruling class (the Muslims), to the fore again in a more evident manner (Bayly 369). They came to be utilised to forge broad alliances among people (the Hindu subjects) so that new states or empires could be formed (Bayly 370). A desire to revive the Brahminic formulation of caste order with the aim of consolidating the culture of purity, as distinctive and autonomous, became powerful. The revivalist desire began to re-assert the purity of body as the essence of caste system, which hierarchically demarcated different groups within an organic order. The physical purity of the upper caste body and the mutual separation of different endogamous caste groups were heavily insisted upon, and it resulted in a revival and consolidation of the mythic upper caste (read ‘Brahminhood’) chiefly on the basis of the purity of body. This rendered the society, in general, crudely

caste conscious, a condition which was later exploited by the British through a much more sophisticated version of state apparatus and policies.

Caste as a social institution captured the colonial imagination for more than one reason, chief of which was its perceived status that it “centrally and essentially characterised Indian society as radically different from Western society . . .” (Chatterjee, *The Nation* 173). This essentialist position of caste as the marker of ‘difference’ proved useful as it helped to legitimise the colonial superiority to the premodern society. During this period, the colonial engagement with caste reshaped it as more systematically ranked, standardised and applied code of social existence through multiple caste-specific laws and policies. The always-already caste-informed Indian society became explicitly caste-conscious owing to the formation of armies on caste lines (a policy still practised after Independence) and, also, “modern colonial city” (Bayly 372) comprising numerous forms of official-social occupation and labour, such as burning-ground attendants, pollution-removers, municipal sweepers, tanners, factory hands. It is indeed a debatable matter as to whether the transfer of power in 1947 has contributed significantly to minimise caste oppressions. Independent India’s constitutional guarantee for social justice undoubtedly indicates the change of guard in ‘Lutyens’ Delhi’ (after Edwin Lutyens, the chief architect of colonial Delhi), but much remains to be answered as numerous modernising policies of the state continue to inherit the colonial baggage left over by the Raj. A whole list of post-colonial recycling of colonial caste stereotypes stands obvious (Bayly 275; Chatterjee *The Nation* 204). It ranges from the caste regiments of the Indian Army, the Census, the civil service, the civil and criminal laws to the operations of the Anthropological Survey of India. The emergence of a Dalit consciousness during 1970s effectively intervenes in the continuity of casteist oppression, but the promise of social justice still remains a far cry. The constitutional urgency to strike a balance between the creation of a secular-casteless republic on the one hand and, on the other, the arrangement for the caste-based compensatory discrimination to safeguard the historically disadvantaged sections seems to have failed to produce its desired result. An appropriate solution is still pending. The state declares the steadfast abolition of casteism and untouchability (Article 17) in more than one constitutional way (Jogdand qtd. in Michael 316-17). But the compensatory discrimination policy (Article 46), notwithstanding its rationale for creating a “level playing field for the perennially disadvantaged” (S. Kar 6), seems to create caste specificities that expedite segregation and unlock “vested interests” (R. Kothari 1589).

These vested groups initiate politics of reservation and quota, rendering the policy a “vote-catching device” (Bayly 296). Further, this constitutional provision is misused by the (much debated) “creamy layer” (Palshikar 8) that steals away the majority benefit depriving the truly needy ones (R. Kothari 1593). The absence of a self-sufficient mechanism to address the loopholes makes the provision a tool to perpetuate rather than eliminate the caste problems (Bayly 7). The whole issue of caste(ism) snowballs in the socio-political life mostly in the late 1980s with the alleged ‘Mandalisation’/‘casteisation’ of politics, i.e. the political impact of the Mandal Commission recommendations for extended caste-reservation. Thenceforth, Indian political discourse exhibits an unprecedented preoccupation with caste-specific/casteist jargons to gain political mileage, putting issues of development backstage. The multi-faceted tradition of anti-caste(ism) movements, initiated by divergent figures such as Gandhi and Ambedkar, seems to have been tight-legged in the murky politics, and almost all anti-caste exercises despairingly hover on the ‘race for quota’, dismissing the possibilities of any productive discourse. The political exigencies render most initiatives appeasement-centric and prevent them from being the tools of “abolishing the continuing sources of tangible disadvantage of our unequal and unjust society” (Deshpande and Yadav. 2424). In this highly politicised context of caste, different notions of caste-identities are always worth reconsideration as they can offer new significances.

The image of the pure and refined Brahmin becomes problematic in the present caste-conscious/caste-exploitative society. In today’s political relocation, Brahmins seem to have lost much of their inherited power, and the credit perhaps goes to two factors. First, the growing strategic needs of realpolitik, arguably, consider the Brahmins a political minority powerless enough, against a vast number of disadvantaged, to be disregarded in the political game of ‘numbers’. The loss of political agency of the Brahmins takes a heavy toll on their stature and renders them displaced from their erstwhile position of authority. They stand as a politically less-powerful category which cannot influence power owing to its small size and segregated nature and therefore fails to receive any attention from the same. Secondly, the emergence of the Dalit consciousness, which comes as a corollary of the Ambedkar movement and the continuous tradition of caste disparity, brings the Brahminic piety and authority before sheer contestation. The pro-active configuration of the Dalit voice of dissent and a ‘liberatory’ category called the ‘Dalit’ takes away much of the shine from the mythical Brahminhood. Under the new

circumstances, the Brahmins seem to stand as an ordinary, demythologised category comparatively less-influential and less-powerful than other caste categories. Thus the age-old class of power seems to suffer a socio-cultural displacement and reflect new significations of powerlessness, which were originally associated with the traditional caste-Other(s).

Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder*, *His Fifth Woman* and Karnad's *Flowers, The Fire and the Rain* can be read as critical probes into the contemporary de-mythologized Brahmin subject. He has indeed been reduced from his "inviolable" (Dumont 69) status of a "great deity" (Ketkar 161) and "an eternal incarnation of the sacred law" (Indradeva qtd. in Sharma 47) to an ordinary caste-group among many others. However, the plays, here, study this group from the view-point of neither the current realpolitik of 'numbers' nor the emergent Dalit discourse. On the contrary, they try to understand the 'commonplace' in Brahmin-life hidden behind the norms of purity and piety. Their humane desire, lust, anger and jealousy come to the fore to contest their mythic divinity. The contestation assumes significance because it takes place against the contemporary socio-political backdrop of the demotion of the Brahmin status, though for altogether different reasons.

Although the Brahminic background is an additional attribute in Sakharam's character (*Sakharam Binder*) and serves chiefly as a contributing factor to the atmosphere of shock and surprise in this play of sex and sexuality, the Bohemian Brahmin is a perfect example of how Tendulkar wants to see the myth busted. Sakharam is "coarse" (125) and opposed to the Brahminic soft, weak and feminine disposition – one that Karnad's Devadatta (*Hayavadana*) is bestowed with. He is born in a Brahmin family but becomes like a "Mahar, a dirty scavenger" (127) for his "don't care" (125) attitude and being allegedly "a rascal, a womanizer, a pauper" (126). But most importantly, he is a proud "Mahar", who can take on the given world of customs and traditions to pull it upside down. As if fed up with the hypocrisy of rituals and oppressive religion, he wants to throw aside his religious and caste identity and create a domain – "Sakharam Binder's palace" (127) – where he can re-write norms on his own terms, which are clearly anti-Brahminical, sometimes even at the risk of being a male chauvinist.

Sakharam's anti-caste/religion stand is reflected in each and every corner of his "red-tiled house" (125). His tongue-in-cheek attitude to the gods and goddesses (127, 142) comes as a slap on his born Brahminhood. He rises above religious prejudice in his friendship with Dawood. But his violent beating of Laxmi when she disallows Dawood to participate in the 'aarti' (chanting of the holy scriptures) makes his anti-religion status extraordinary. The amount of ruthlessness he shows to maintain his 'code' of order dismisses any scope of the so-called Brahminic pity. Sakharam's violence is combined with his seemingly inexhaustible desire for sex. He brings in destitute women who are rejected by all but sexually still capable. Outside the institution of marriage, he keeps them in his home and provides food and shelter in exchange of sex. He claims to be dispassionate about his sex-objects as he mechanically brings in a new woman to fill the gap of the old one. However, his claim proves futile at the end. He murders Champa out of his sexual jealousy that was excited by Laxmi. A sensualist and violent man now guilty of homicide, Sakharam totally stands opposed to the mythic Brahmin and his piety and purity.

Sakharam's anti-Brahmin/caste status can best be understood if his character is seen together with his reappearance on the stage after nearly thirty-two years. *His Fifth Woman* (2004) is written as a prequel to *Sakharam Binder* (1972). The interrogation of the rigid, orthodox Brahmin ideals continues in this play. It enacts the situation immediately after the death of the fifth woman in Sakharam's life. She precedes Laxmi and Champa. The sharp irony and humour of the play and its deft fusion of fact and fancy in a pseudo-real world show Tendulkar's ceaseless energy to explore reality in a manner which grows bolder on the strength of mature cynicism. Beside being a critique of sexuality, the play interrogates Brahminhood in a more direct manner than its sequel. The play is special for several reasons. It was written at the behest of The Lark Play Development Center as a part of the Tendulkar Festival sponsored by the Indo-American Arts Council in New York. So in all probability, Tendulkar had to be aware of an American audience while composing the play. This is, perhaps, reflected in the economy and preciseness of expression. Originally meant for staged reading in the Festival, the dialogues are sharp and concise in their irony and humour. The play was also one that Tendulkar had penned after a long break. Most importantly, he writes a play in English for the first time. Initially, he had doubts about its success (Warner 43). But what finally comes out is a "marvellous addition to the world of *Sakharam Binder*" (Warner 44).

Although a bit younger, Sakharam still shows the same gusto for his don't-care style. He remains abusive and proud as well. His "deal" (56) with women continues, and he is never ashamed of it. For he believes, he is not a hypocrite to hide anything and will never live according to someone else's wishes. He does not want to perform the customary last rites of the fifth woman whose name he does not even know. But he finally yields to the pressure of Dawood, the only person he lends an ear to, and agrees to do the rites. The play's critique of the Brahminic insistence on rule-bound piety begins when the scene shifts to the funeral site. The entire process of the last rites is ironically presented, exposing the hollow within the rigid and rule-centric religiosity.

Scene Three at the burning 'ghat' is the theatrical space for contestation. An unwilling Sakharam is nearly forced by Dawood, his Muslim friend, to perform the last rites of the dead woman. The Hindu burning 'ghat' is invested with black humour as it shows signs of moral and religious degeneration. People who come to perform the last rites of their near ones are totally unaffected by the loss and interested more in monetary matters or will of the dead than anything else. They jokingly discuss about the rise in kerosene price making the last rites costlier. Social scandals also feature as crispy topics. Sakharam is guided by a Brahmin on the rites with Dawood helping from a safe distance. The business-like manner of the supposedly holy rites, which involves the unbeliever Sakharam, the commercial priest and a serio-comic Muslim helper, makes the entire episode look like an exercise in irony. All the three characters seem to know quite well the futility of the rites but are guided by their respective obligations to participate. For Dawood, it is the sudden opportunity of getting helpful and serving somebody whom he called 'bhabhi' (sister-in-law). For Sakharam, it is merely Dawood's insistence and a waning pity for the miserable woman. The Brahmin priest, on the other hand, is purely motivated by his financial profit and ready to overlook all the oddities with money being pressed into his hand by Dawood. The dark humour mounts to the peak when the crows refuse to eat the food. Traditionally, the food on a banana leaf is placed on the ground for the crows to eat. It is believed that the crows are the earthly incarnations of the dead souls and their accepting the food indicates the satisfaction of those whom they represent. But if they refuse, it means that the dead souls are still dissatisfied with the rites and unwilling to quit the world. In such a case, the custom advises to convince the crows by promising the dead souls the fulfilment of their desires. Their conviction will depend on the level of

sincerity in the promise. In spite of Sakharam's promise and then words of abuse and request, the crows turn a deaf ear to him and do not touch the food, pointing to his insincere promise. But they jump on the food the moment he doubts that they perhaps ally themselves with the priests in order to extract money from the relations of the dead. This gesture proves that Sakharam's doubt about the crows is true because, according to the belief, the crows will respond to truth alone. There exists, as it were, a nexus between them and the Brahmin priests. The target is the common man who is gagged by bizarre set of religious rules and norms.

The last part of the burning 'ghat' episode is the most powerful critique of religiosity. The crows' accepting the food is ironical because it undermines the religious sanctity associated with such gesture and exposes the shabby condition of some Brahminical rites, relying largely on the impression of mechanical austerity to survive. The rules, meant for serving the dead and their bereaved relations, no longer stand for them. They are, on the contrary, customised to serve some vested interest-groups. They offer financial opportunities to the priests and an occasion for social obligation to the disinterested relatives. All claims to afterlife become farce as the magical crows point out the hollowness of the system itself. Thus we have a sardonic picture of a rule-bound world inhabited by people, who either exploit its norms for personal benefit or flout them openly or undermine them through ironical conformity. The world of Brahminic purity is already subverted in the earlier play, *Sakharam Binder*, which is in fact the chronological prequel. But the subversion of this world becomes more sarcastic and humorously critical in style in the thematic prequel, *His Fifth Woman*.

The preoccupation with an impersonal world of rigid rules and a notion of inviolable piety often reaches an unnecessary level. Girish Karnad's monologue *Flowers* (2004) critiques this obsession with the normative excesses. In Karnad's dramatic oeuvre, this monologic form is a novel experiment that, perhaps, becomes theatrically more powerful in his other monologue *Broken Images* (2004). This technical experiment is matched with an experiment in subject as well (Dharwadker, *Introduction* xxxi). It is about suppressed male sexual desire. The play shows the difficulties of a circumscribed life of religious austerity that constrains the natural desires of a male. The Brahminic ideals, which rely on the piety of the mind and the body, are confronted with a Brahmin subject who is split between the callings of tradition and his life-long repressed desires.

The confrontation is immensely productive as it reveals the un-accommodative nature of religious configurations based on a superficial manifestation of purity and their suppressive understanding of the human mind. Karnad makes use of the folktale of Veeranna, popularised by the Kannada writer T.R. Subbanna in his novel *Hamsageethe* (1952). Veeranna was a married priest, who lied about his mistress's hair in the 'prasada', called it God's hair and discovered, to his utter surprise as well as of all, that God (the 'Shivalinga') indeed sprouted long silken hair. When a tuft of hair was pulled out to verify its originality, blood began to trickle from the wound of the 'lingam'. Submerged into a sense of sin, Veeranna committed suicide. By his typical style of appropriating the resources of folklore to understand modern experiences, private and public alike, Karnad recasts the legend of Veeranna. The purpose is to critically read the male subjectivity which is highly regulated by an ascetic regime of Brahminic discipline. The irony, which derives from the fact that a male/Brahmin-made system has become oppressive to one of its members who never consciously contemplates dissention, undermines the very qualitative nature of the system. Its mode of operation becomes debatable for its misplaced emphases that disregard the human subject for the sake of impersonal rules and misconceive a notion of piety and pollution.

The monologue of the unnamed priest presents a ritualised life dedicated exclusively to the service of the 'Shivalinga' in the village temple. It is his private domain guarded by indissoluble customs and traditions. The daily ritual of flower art over the 'linga' is his sort of worship of the divine. At the time of the floral decoration, he becomes lost in it; so much so that "the linga is my step-wife" (244), as complains his wife. But this adulation of the divine symbol betrays the circumscribed existence, where life has become mechanically ritualised and monotonous within the ossified wall of norms. Behind the praise and admiration of the devotees as well as of the ruler lies his suppressed desperation for having no free space.

The culture of purity and pollution of the Brahminic ideals is pervasive. It does not only limit itself within the temple precinct but also proliferates in other domains to determine subjectivity. The domestic world of the priest is an extension of his temple. His home which comprises his parents, wife and two children exhibits 'dharmic' refinement and restraint. It is a Brahmin's domain which must be made different from a lower caste house, say a Dalit one, where drunken fathers beat mothers and make love with them

before their children, all in their muddy gutters (Tendulkar, *Kanyadaan* 44). In such a context of religious/caste regulation, woman seems to bear upon a dual oppression; one springs from the immediate situation of religious/caste supervision, and the other comes from the traditional obedience to patriarchy which chiefly formulates these disciplinary systems. Wifehood, in the priest's home, is quite normally subjected to such dual regulation that produces a dutiful, pious wife, who even shivers at the thought of full-fledged sex with her husband lest it should awake the entire household and she should see herself naked beside her husband. When the tired body of the priest comes back home after the strenuous ritual in the temple, it meets a woman's body equally (or even more) circumscribed by the binary of piety and pollution. The suppression of subjective desire multiplies resulting in a growing loss of space for all.

The only "breach in the invisible defences" (245) occurs when Ranganayaki, the affluent prostitute, visits the temple and catches the eyes which are hitherto unfamiliar with what it means to be lust for a woman. The corollary emasculation fast creeps in, but the "fire" (245) is hard to control. Then starts a passionate affair uncapped after years' repression. Suddenly, the mind begins to un-coat customs and runs to the prostitute's house after the evening puja to re-utilise the flowers on her bronzed nudity. Tradition appears to be weak and cannot hold against this outburst of passion inasmuch as Ranga's body and her house provide a better alternative to both, the 'linga' and the temple or also to his Brahminic home. First, the magical curves, indents and shapes of her body which inflame the imagination of a floral artist are missing in the smooth, bland and stony phallus. The living quality of the object of worship weighs more than the visibly lifeless stony stump that cannot even give a slightest note of appreciation to his brilliance. His heart still beats for the 'linga' since he grows with it, but Ranga's body kindles the hidden fire within and therefore proves irresistible. Secondly, the prostitute's house totally undermines the holy precinct of the temple and also the customary validity of the Brahminic home. Ranga's exotic chamber outshines the lifeless temple that only offers the monotony of rituals. Further, her chamber dismisses the rigidly formulated Brahmin home as a circumscribed state of existence, where the idea of sex-for-pleasure is rejected as un-Brahminic. It is a home where human instincts are to be conditioned according to the given norms. The priest laments,

At home, we all bathed in the open, in the corner formed by the neem and the banyan trees in our backyard, so my wife covered herself with a sari

even when she bathed. On the days I wanted her, I would give her a look she had come to recognize and late at night when everyone was fast asleep, she would crawl up to my room for a *furtive scuffle* in bed which demanded the minimum of uncovering. There were our two children and my old parents in the house and you never know who might call out for help. (my emphasis) (248-49)

The basic problem, however, lies somewhere else. The discursive home administers the construction of a particular wife who must be chaste and dutiful. Such codified category as chaste and dutiful wife falls in sharp contrast to the prostitute whose socio-cultural position makes her immune to similar regulations, as she is conditioned by her category of 'impurity'. Her external status to this regime of purity renders her alluring to the repressed priest, who now finds the 'linga' as simplified dullness and his dharmic and chaste wife as a "wet rag" (253) with "all excitement for life drained out of her" (253).

If the priest's involvement with Ranganayaki devalues the religious norms, his miraculous acquittal from the alleged blasphemy is another way of undermining the oppressive system. As the news of his nocturnal adventure spreads all across, the ruler plans for a sudden visit to the temple at the late hour of night to confirm his alleged absence. He has to free all the flowers from Ranga's naked body and run back frantically to the temple in order to reuse them on the holy 'linga' before the ruler comes in. But in his hurry, he forgets to clean the flowers before using them on God, and the ruler discovers a long strand of hair tangled in the flower given to him for his 'prasada'. This act is now labelled as a blatant evidence of his heinous sin of redecorating God with the "polluted discards" (256) of a prostitute's body. He is alleged to have subverted the traditional binary of purity and impurity and invited God's retribution. In this critical condition, his tumultuous consciousness replies, "If we believe that God has long hair . . . He will have long hair" (257). It is the only reply that he could give under such circumstances. But now he has to prove his claim. After twelve days when the door of the inner sanctum opens, all awe-struck eyes witness "waves of jet black hair" (258) billowing out from the 'Shivalinga'. When a courtier pulls out a tuft of hair from it, the inanimate stone-stump bleeds. General scepticism suddenly gives way to mass hysteria over and adoration of the priest and lifts him to the status of a saint.

Paranormal miracle adds to the ironical power of folk tales that are known for their plurality of meaning and contestation from within. Such use of miracle as ironically questioning the validity of a prevailing order is found in Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* as well. Rani puts her hand inside the cave of the cobra and stays alive just because the cobra does not bite anybody who speaks truth. This miracle helps bring an entire oppressive system under question. The mysterious hair of God has also a similar purpose that seeks to question the system from within. First, through its deification of the priest it seems to draw a divine validation of the Brahmin's alleged immorality. Although he is blasphemous to the society and fallen even to his own eyes by all norms, God thinks otherwise! To Him, the priest's piety remains intact even after his sexual laxity, which is considered the most dreaded sin by any religious standard. God's different judgement, which is the paranormal miracle here, seems to undermine this social system of validation that misplaces its emphases. Piety of the soul is overlooked for a recognisable piety of the body to create a visible system of discipline. God's intervention subverts the basic principles of the discipline, leaving its outer structure intact. Secondly, the mysterious hair exposes the cognitive deficiency of the institutionalised religion. The easy transition from scepticism to veneration suggests its fallacy about the purity and contamination of human soul. The punitive crowd promptly becomes apologetic about their misreading of the priest and ready to believe in his asceticism. Their switch-over, which apparently glorifies Brahminic austerity, originally exposes the unnecessary preoccupation with unalterable rules and serves to de-legitimise their understanding of religion. It reveals how conveniently the definitions of purity and pollution are made/remade. When something incomprehensible (God's hair) comes before them, the crowd readily believes the present 'illogic' (the so-called purity of the priest) to get rid of the past 'illogic' (his so-called pollution). The use of the divine intervention is, thus, manifold. It is a marvellous tool of exposure. As a device of irony, it apparently assures the society of the priest's ascetic purity but challenges the preconceptions about that purity from within. It is a typical folk instrument that ensures a 'complex-view' of the situation without overt disavowal of it. The obsession with body-centric purity is challenged, and the people's superficial understanding of purity and pollution also becomes evident. Finally, all is achieved, and the institutional religion also stands intact, though emptied from within.

The final blow to orthodoxy is provided by the self-immolation of the priest – an act that seems to highlight another aspect of the miracle. As a theatrical device of

exposure, the miracle contests the popular notion of purity, certifies the priest's self-purity and exposes the fallacy of religious understanding. But it also presents a case, where an individual is shelled back into the circumscribed condition which he tries to transcend and where subjective freedom has no place. His deification, owing to the miracle, brings more restriction than before. He is "the state saint now, to be prized, protected and shown off to visiting envoys." (259). He loved God and still loves him. All he wanted was the courage to live like a normal human being, even "to live in disgrace" (259). But there lies the limitation of institutionalised religion. It remains suppressive and contractile even in its glorification. It makes him saint but unmakes his normal life. In this perspective, God's recognition of his innocence seems to be problematic. To God Himself, the priest might seem innocent and therefore He rescues him from punishment. But God's magical act ultimately proves suppressive because it brings more restraint on the priest's life. To the common people, the divine hair proves that the priest is still 'pure'. Thus, it glorifies the prevailing narrative of purity and pollution. Ideally, God's act might justify the priest, but in reality it re-asserts the norm of purity, which the priest opposes. The self-immolation at the end is therefore the priest's disavowal of this rigid orthodoxy. He dies not because of any fear for social castigation or sense of sin. He dies to protest. "God must understand I simply cannot live on His terms." (260).

Flowers can be viewed as a study of how religious orthodoxy can heavily restrict subjectivity. The Brahmin priest's psychological conflict between erotic love and religious responsibility, which is dramatised as the "triangulated desire" (Dharwadker, *Introduction* xxxii) between a man and two women, ends in his self-immolation. His repressed life looks for a break from rigidity and exposes an equally repressed domesticity where his wife betrays the burden of double conformity; one is to the traditional patriarchy, and the other to the Brahminic/religious obsession with piety. For the priest it becomes ironical because he has to suffer at the hand of a system which has been historically formulated by male prerogatives. The play's significance multiplies when it is read as a text on Brahminic/religious excesses vis-à-vis male desire. It then exhibits the process of contesting the 'incontestable', relying chiefly on folklore's strength of irony. The style of monologue seems to befit the situation because it aptly captures the sense of a lone act of confessional self-defence in the court of socio-religious persecution. As the priest goes near the temple tank to drown himself, he rewinds his past experience in a long utterance, leaving multiple questions before the authority, bestowed

with the sole power of questioning. He is alone in his 'impure' act, and his loneliness is also supported by his lone figure on the stage. The monologue has all the potentials to be successful on the stage, but lot will depend on the individual execution of the actor in the priest's role.

The Brahminic world of ascetic order is again examined in Karnad's *The Fire and the Rain (Agni Mattu Male)*. The play relives the ancient rite of fire sacrifice ('yajna') as the central metaphor in its theatrical fabric and unfurls its subject through the multiple implications of this metaphor. In his explanatory addendum to the text, Karnad has referred to the varied relation between fire sacrifice and theatre. In the Vedantic society, the spiritual sense of sacrifice was integral to the Brahminic life (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* 69). In almost all the possible ways of life, be it academic discussions, love-making, or marriage, the importance of 'yajna' was undeniable. Theatre, which was considered the *Fifth Veda* or the *Natya Veda* in Bharata's *Natyashastra*, has lot of parallels with fire sacrifice. In fact, a whole range of striking similarities can be drawn between these two apparently unrelated domains. Both stand close together in terms of "human performances, precise gesture, speech, and a carefully worked out action leading to a predetermined denouement" (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* 69). But, more importantly, both have the "perennial possibility of disruption" (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* 69). From inside, it might be sabotaged by any of its own members, and from outside the disruption might come from the demons (in the case of sacrifice) and the audience (in the case of theatre). And to prevent this disruption, there were the Chief Priest of 'yajna' and the director of drama. On the other hand, difference is also visible in the relation. 'Yajna' was exclusive and disallowed the non-Brahmins to enter its inner precincts, whereas theatre was to be performed by the 'shudras'. A casteist as well as ironical prejudice can be found in the co-existence of these two. Theatre was performed within the premises of sacrifice as a way to please Lord Indra who handed over this *Fifth Veda* to Bharata (2). Further, it was allowed within the premises because it offered a comic relief to the strenuous rituals (Karnad, *The Fire and the Rain* 67). But the irony was that it had to perform at a safe distance from the sanctum for its non-Brahmin denomination.

With the mixed relation between 'yajna' and theatre in his mind, Karnad situates the fire sacrifice at the centre of his thematic design to achieve multiple purposes. First,

through a detail engagement with the different nuances of the sacrifice he builds up a rigid Brahminic world. Secondly, the construction of this Brahminic world through the sacrificial metaphor inherently embodies the possibility of subversion. Thus the normative world, so created, logically presents a base for (self-)contestation. Different subject-positions, from within/without, (e.g. Parvasu, Arvasu, Nittilai) are shown to problematise the order. Thirdly, the casteist dichotomy between the sacrifice and theatre creates another possibility of critiquing the Brahminic world. Through the opposition of a Brahminic tradition, such as fire sacrifice, to a non-Brahminic culture e.g. theatre, the casteist Brahminic world is made to stand before a probe. The presence of theatre and performance in the plot facilitates the probe and serves as a base for countering of the dominant thought by the dominated. However, the countering between the Brahminic and the non-Brahminic worlds is never simplistic in this play. The complex association of 'yajna' and theatre, both being two complementary and contradictory strands of a religious system, renders this countering complicated. The challengers themselves, e.g. the tribal, sometimes display suppressive mindset that they supposedly challenge.

The use of mythology provides authenticity to the Brahminic world of purity and discipline in the play. Karnad chiefly draws on the myths of Yavakri and Vritra, both of which occur in the *Mahabharata*, and recasts them to construct a system of life that tends to be impersonally and superficially normative. Life here centres on inviolable customs and seeks sustenance from divine rules to perpetuate them. When there is a drought for ten years, the mythological land surrenders itself to the fire sacrifice, a customary rite in ancient Indian society, to please Indra, the god of rain. The image of sacrifice as the sole and sacred way to redemption is built up through the well-knit plot. It will be a seven years' long process of ritual that goes on through a sustained and uninterrupted observation of rules. It is obviously the sole prerogative of the Brahmins to conduct the rite. The king of the land is the financial sponsor, who endorses such an event as to have the blessings of the gods and priests, but within the sacrificial precincts the priest speaks the last word owing to his "contextual superiority to his patron, a superiority derived from his knowledge of the ritual and his indispensability" (Srinivas 11). It seems to be a perfect marriage between politics and religion for the sake of mutual sustenance. The entire precinct must be pure and clean, which means it is sex-free and lower-caste-free. The participants, i.e. the priests, cannot go outside, have sex even with their wives and talk with the lower-castes till the end of the rite. Parvasu, the son of Raibhya, is chosen as the

chief priest of the sacrifice for his knowledge, youth and piety. His selection demands sacrifice as he has to renounce his newly wed wife and conjugal romance for an ascetic life. For the chief priest, the religious honour counts above all material ordinaries. The lower-castes cannot participate in it; nor can they even enter the precincts. Theatre, though considered an integral part of the entire performance of the sacrifice, is held as the domain of the lower-castes and, therefore, denied proximity to the sanctum. Parvasu's younger brother, Arvasu, violates his order, "If you value your Brahminhood, don't act on stage" (30), and gets demoted to the Shudrahood. He, again, becomes a non-Brahmin for his alleged patricide, which is also a disqualification for the sacrifice. Through such opposition between qualitative states (knowledge/ignorance, profligacy/asceticism, Brahmin/non-Brahmin, pure/impure), a sacred image of the sacrifice as a Brahminic virtue is created.

The Brahminic aura gets sanctified through many other manifestations of religious austerity and divine power. Yavakri, the son of Bharadwaja, goes to the jungle for a rigorous meditation for ten years. The objective is to achieve the "Universal Knowledge" (13) through a stringent method of worship. Although it is to level his spiritual status with the Raibhya family, Yavakri's feat highlights Brahminic sacrifice and spiritual concentration. He indeed masters magical power to destroy his opponent but proves to be beaten by luck and Raibhya's superior power. The sacrifice itself proves to be beneficial for the people as Indra, the rain-god, reveals at the end and showers rain over the drought-affected land. The abundance of such magical and paranormal events, which is an essential feature of mythology, is skilfully used by Karnad to build up a world maintained and monitored by the Brahmin power. Their austerity, discipline, meditation and divine power make them exclusive and superlative in the social hierarchy.

The superior world of piety, which is created largely around the central metaphor of sacrifice, however, carries along with it the possibility of contestation. The sacrosanct code of life often proves to be ironical. They are inviolable, but their austerity seems to betray their vulnerability and render them debatable. The excessive preoccupation with an impersonal set of rules proves self-degenerating and prepares a ground for subversive challenges that may come both from within and outside. The challenges from within arise from the strictest supporters of the system whose ruthless conformity only helps undermine the solid garb of rationalisation. They upheld the system through self-

exemplification and contain any dissention by either coercion or co-option. But the very strategy of maintenance interrogates the validation, resulting in an unmasking of the system. Yavakri, who is renowned for his extraordinary meditation and spiritual power, is one prominent example. He seems to be the only Brahmin who performs the most stringent of meditations for ten years and meets the god, Indra Himself. This feat of spiritual excellence glorifies not only Yavakri but also the entire Brahmin order for its unwavering faith and tenacity. But Yavakri himself problematises his glorified act. He struggled for the spiritual power not for any universal knowledge (13) but to settle score with the Raibhya family. He had to master the mystical art to avenge the injustice meted out to his family. Apart from such a selfish motive, his description of the meditation to Vishakha, Paravasu's wife, seems to de-glorify the act. The hard life in the jungle infested with flies, giants, pests, leeches is compounded by the uncertainty surrounding the appearance of the god. It is not simple because the gods appear only in response to the rigorous penance and grant prayers. Yavakri himself was unsure about his encounter with the god. After a period of ceaseless meditation, he drew the conclusion that he met the god, be it his hallucination or fever in brain (13), and came back to declare himself victorious. This deglamourised depiction of an act, considered highly prestigious and desirable, turns it upside down and presents it as the whimsical expression of the Brahmin ego. Apart from challenging the myth of selfless meditation, Yavakri also undermines the Brahminic ideals of morality and ascetic purity. His main ambition is always to destroy the Raibhya clan, and for this he plans to revive his pre-marriage affair with Vishakha only in order to malign her in-laws. His unscrupulous scheme to gratify self-interest does not only destroy his defamed life but also presents an ordinary picture of a Brahmin, who is self-centric and devious.

Raibhya and his son Paravasu are the two other forces that contest the pious image of Brahmin from within. In Karnad's adaptation of the myth, the father-son relation exhibits the presence of a murky politics over the question of priestly authority. Both are learned and widely respected, but their virtues are overpowered by a keen desire for earthly power and authority. The sanctified position of the Chief Priest in the fire sacrifice proves too alluring for them to renounce. And it is more for the social prestige associated with it than any higher and spiritual yearn that they become hostile to each other. Raibhya's displeasure at the king's choice of Paravasu for the highly sought-after position is evident in his contemptuous and even lustful attitude to Vishakha, his daughter-in-law.

But Parvasu appears to be more calculative than his father. Incensed at Vishakha's report of his father's deep-rooted jealousy for him and lecherous character, he cleverly eliminates him so that it looks like an accident. As if not enough, he asks the naïve and theatre-loving Arvasu to perform the last rite of their dead father with a hidden plan to accuse him of patricide. A Brahmin is inviolable and cannot be killed (Dumont 69), and Arvasu's alleged sin is sure to condemn him to a position, from where he can never challenge his elder brother's stake in spiritual inheritance. *The Fire and the Rain* is indeed a composite illustration of the cycle of intrigue and revenge, reminiscent of the Greek tragedies. This legacy of conspiring jealousy and suspicion projects two of these eminent priests and their operations in a murky light, resulting in a devaluation of their sacred category.

Vishakha, the most important female character in the play, gains importance less for being a dissenting member of a renowned Brahmin family than for her identity as a self-assertive female. She contests the Brahmin patriarchy mainly from her sense of suppressed femininity. She proposes to challenge the circumscribed condition of betrayal rather than assailing any specific Brahmin order. Her betrayed womanhood compels her to speak out against her husband's selfish masculinity and her father-in-law's lechery and formulate a strategy for revenge (aka self-empowerment). She is unconcerned about any opposition between Brahminic and non-Brahminic worlds and not interested in holding the Brahminic order of her household solely responsible for her misery. What she exposes is the manipulative and pretentious masculinity of Yavakri, Raibhya and Parvasu, which, combined with other social peculiarities like caste consciousness, creates a comprehensive system of sexual exploitation. Vishakha's contestation, which is motivated purely by her sexual deprivation, is therefore a challenge from the outside. More a manipulated woman than a manipulated Brahmin woman, she disturbs the sacred order by her sexual assertion. Either through the revived Yavakri-affair or by manipulating Parvasu to kill Raibhya, she critiques the self-centric, impersonal socio-religious system. Its corrupt nature is exposed, though her goal is not finally achieved. Yavakri's opportunism is unmasked, and so is Parvasu who uses Vishakha's allegation against his father as a mere pretext to kill him only to clear his own way to fame.

Parvasu's younger brother, Arvasu (Karnad avoids the mythological spelling Aravasu, perhaps, to emphasise the opposition between them) represents another force of

challenge. Arvasu's inherited Brahmin status, which normally positions him as an insider, is replaced by his non-Brahmin association, and he seems to hold up an outsider's opposition to the dominant order. He is an amateur theatre-actor, contrary to the tradition, and has therefore degraded his position. He becomes a Shudra not only for his passion for acting but also his love-affair with the tribal girl Nittilai. After he is accused of patricide by his brother and brutally thrown out, he becomes a vocal critic of Parvasu (or the Brahmin culture in general). He wants to "make them all pay. Yavakri, Father, Parvasu" (43), for he knows that "It's a conspiracy . . . Because I was ready to reject my caste, my birth" (43). But this is actually Arvasu's misconception that his brother is up against him for his non-Brahminic life-style. Parvasu is exclusively motivated by his selfish aspiration for spiritual fame. Arvasu's unconventionality hardly bothers him, except for the fact that he only wants to exploit this aberration to clear his own way. However, Arvasu stands as a forceful challenge to the casteist ossification since he successfully unveils its corruption like Vishakha. The epilogue, where he unsettles the sacrifice through theatre, is his final disruption of the order.

The other overt opposition comes from Nittilai whose tribal background is an established contrast to the Brahmin culture. She blatantly criticises, perhaps by virtue of her alien background, the secrecy and self-centred nature of Brahmin way of life, which totally opposes the see-through life of the tribal. The myth of spiritual power is also rejected by her on the ground of its futility to solve day to day problems (10-11). Karnad, however, avoids any simplified opposition between these two different living conditions, the Brahminic and the tribal or, so to say, non-Brahminic. A black-and-white opposition is not what the play implies. Signs of oppression can also be found even in the so-called free and wild tribal life. Aparna Dharwadker points out the presence of suppressive/corrupt factor even in the opposing narrative of the tribal. In the Brahmin order "the transgressive woman (Vishakha) is chastised but not punished, whereas among the hunters Nittilai pays with her life for choosing Arvasu over her husband" (Dharwadker, *Introduction* xix). The barbaric punitive action over the woman seriously questions the validity of the non-Brahminic critique of the Brahminic culture. Despite its oppressive politics, the Brahminic order stands noble only for this moment. The opposition between the two discursively opposite lifestyles is therefore multi-dimensional. While exposing the Brahminic politics behind the norms, Karnad has also taken care not to disregard the possibility of similar suppressive politics in the non-

Brahminic order. And this validates the play's critique of corrupt religiosity all the more. Finally, *The Fire and the Rain* can be said to have penetrated into the myth of Brahminic purity and renunciation more elaborately than *Flowers*.

Apart from the mythic Brahmin as an embodiment of piety, the present study seeks to understand the negotiation of 'Dalit' as a traditionally oppressed caste category. Like the demythologised Brahmin, the demystified Dalit also becomes a focus of the study. The emergence of the Dalit as a distinguished, separate and autonomous caste identity is the most significant thing to happen in the post-Independence discourse on caste. The political autonomy in 1947 rouses among the masses an unprecedented enthusiasm for a comprehensive change in life. Through the multiple state-initiatives such as the five-year plans, elections, decentralisation of power, spread of education (Limble 91), it is assumed that a welfare state can be created to address all forms of social injustice. But this assumption of tackling backwardness through development, which is one of the chief qualifications for the nation-building project, has since seriously been undermined (R. Kothari 1589). The constitutional promises are in place, but they are manipulated by the political parties governed by the upper-caste (traditionalist) narrative to encourage segregation of the untouchables, minimise their social and political participation and gradually ghettoise them to remain lucrative only in the vote-market. The coinage of the term 'Dalit' may have a pre-Independence origin, as it was perhaps first used by Jotibha Phule (Zelliot 271), but it gains currency only in the post-Independence period (Michael 16) as a radical reaction to the independent and post-colonial state's failure to deal with caste discrimination. In this respect, it can be said that the transfer of power from a foreign to the indigenous hand works as a further stimulus to the anger of the disadvantaged because the sense of being exploited and disillusioned in their own country, by their own people, seems to multiply the already/always consciousness of betrayal. B. R. Ambedkar's resignation from the union cabinet in 1951, his conversion to Buddhism and formation of the Republican Party of India (RPI) in 1956 owing to his frustration over the new-born state's parochial treatment of the untouchables (Zelliot 173) are indicative of this growing unrest. After RPI, the Dalit movement becomes increasingly self-assertive and militant in nature. In line with the Afro-American Black Panthers (1966), the Dalit Panthers is established in 1972. It is a "radical socio-political programme" (Wankhede 53) which tries to create a canon of revolutionary literature and culture on the basis of pride over the Dalit identity. The Dalit Panthers dies

because of its fatal dispute over ideology (Wankhede 53), but its legacy of self-pride and revolt remains undeniable in Dalit politics till date. In the allegedly secular-in-constitution-but-communal-in-culture condition of the country, the Dalits come to play a vital role in the political power-sharing. Espoused by Ambedkar as one of the ways of emancipation (Wankhede 53), capture of power seems to become an important preoccupation of the new aggressive-Dalit. They are eager to challenge the upper-caste dominance through every possible mode of participation into the system. Against the politics of caste-specific vote banks, they propose a counter participatory-politics that seeks access to power as well as education, employment and special rights; in short, they seem to launch a struggle against the system by challenging injustices from within it.

The emergence of the Dalit consciousness brings forth a situation where, on the one hand, the self-confident Dalit asks for privileges and rights, hitherto unavailable to him, in an idiom intelligible to the dominant power and, on the other, a seemingly welfare but largely power-hungry political culture goes unbound to exploit the new voice of demand. This situation seems to lead to the contemporary casteisation of politics. In this context, Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan* (1983) becomes meaningful for it proposes a critical study of the new, militant Dalit vis-à-vis the prevalent social/political culture. As the play, on the one hand, tries to understand the nuanced nature of the upper caste dominated narrative of Dalit welfare, on the other, it critically examines the stereotyped-notional realities of caste victim and its counter assertion. India's post-Independence socio-political history shows that almost all the interest-groups, be it the dominant welfare voices or the counter-active, self-assertions of the dominated, seem to be prone to a self-crisis. The crises come mostly from their ideological/theoretical/operational uncertainty, along with other peculiarities of the country's political culture. The upper caste continues to be messianic in their approach to the whole issue of caste problem. They love to act like the saviour of the lower caste and thus betray their traditionalism. Their approach seems to lead to the politicisation of the issue of caste indiscrimination. The self-interested, short-sighted politicians, largely guided by the upper caste mindset, try to reap political benefits from their caste-welfare projects. Tendulkar takes on this mindset of the dominant political narrative to show that this welfare segregates more than integrates. The Dalit counter-voice is also not free from internal problems. First, its movements are historically vulnerable to theoretical/operational crises. The Republican Party of India, being "grasped by the self-interested Mahar leadership" (Wankhede 52),

works against its ethos and fails to deliver its goal. The Dalit Panthers as well splits over the issue of Buddhist/Marxist orientation (Wankhede 53). Secondly, the Dalit movements find it very hard to remain free from the corrupt influences of the dominant political culture. To gain access to political power, supposedly for caste emancipation, they are making opportunistic alliances and letting themselves open to the “virus of endemic co-optation” (R. Kothari 1593) into a system which they ideologically oppose. A “blurred, narrow and a power-centric perspective having limited effects on social, cultural and economic status of the community” (Wankhede 53) comes into being, and it seriously undermines the traditional notion about the Dalit. In this critical moment of identity (de)formation of the Dalit, Tendulkar intervenes in to understand its character and role at the level of private relations. *Kanyadaan* is, therefore, to propose an important insight into the two most powerful narratives of contemporary caste politics – one, the upper-caste welfare enterprise, and the other, the so-called oppressed Dalit getting conscious of his right.

Nath Devlalikar, a full-time social-political activist, is highly motivated by the ideals of social justice and caste-equality. His liberal and modern attitude permeates his entire household, which represents an educated, affluent, and intellectually-sound middleclass family. A Brahmin by birth, Nath thinks it proper to set his mission to uplift the poor and the Dalits (the so-called ‘Untouchable’ in the caste idiom) and propel the creation of a caste-free society, almost from the Gandhian belief of the caste Hindu’s obligation to the untouchables (Zelliot 153). His “maniacal urge to uproot casteism” (61) comes to be greatly satisfied when his twenty-year-old daughter, Jyoti, a disciple of his ideals, proposes to marry Arun Athavale, an upcoming writer and a Dalit. Much to the discontent of the rest of the family, he rejoices over the prospect of his dream of a casteless society getting materialised through this micro-experiment of social synthesis. But cultural fissions begin to erupt as Arun proves to be an abusive husband who does not hesitate to kick at pregnant Jyoti and blackmail his Brahmin father-in-law to avenge the backwardness of his own community. Completely “trapped” (57) in Arun’s ‘self-assertion’, Nath finds himself in a situation where he can neither denounce his Dalit son-in-law at the risk of being self-denouncing nor send back his daughter to her husband to prove himself a careless father. Both he and Arun, the erstwhile-oppressor-turned-saviour and the traditionally oppressed respectively, stand exposed. Jyoti’s final act of self-resignation and return to Arun’s hostility implies the completion of this ritual of

'kanyadaan', where the girl is given away as a gift under the supervision of paternal authority to the bridegroom's custody (P. Mukherjee 54-55). If Arun's clever politics against Nath's messianic enterprise helps to critique the prevalent discourses of caste experiences, Jyoti's protest delivers the final blow to expose the irrationalities of caste and its effect on a woman.

The textual dichotomy between Nath and Arun can be read against the pre/post-Independence presence of opposing approaches to the issue of caste/casteism in this country. Among the many emancipatory ideas proposed by different thinkers and reformers, the two most prominent approaches seem to be provided by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956). The Gandhi-Ambedkar conflict is a well documented historical controversy that rocked contemporary Indian politics during the last decades of the British rule. As the historical co-presence of these two ideological perspectives signifies India's continuous attempt to address casteism and untouchability in a democratic manner (Zelliot 150), their supposedly ceaseless differences indicate the enormous complexity of the problem and the lack of a unanimous solution. Whereas Gandhi has a holistic approach to the essence of the caste system ('varnashramadharma') that explains the divinely ordained division of society for the sake of harmony, spiritual growth and traditional values, Ambedkar has lambasted it for its exploitative structure and operation and summarily rejected it. Untouchability, which Gandhi condemns as "an excrescence on Hinduism" (qtd. in Zelliot 154), should be abolished to have a reformed caste system where a scavenger's work will be as honourable as a Brahmin's, and it is the upper-caste who must come down to initiate this reformism. Ambedkar, however, believes in a "cultural revolution" (Michael 34) to annihilate the caste system itself and opposes any sort of reformism that will only help to perpetuate traditionalism. An autonomous cultural identity is imperative for this revolution. Similarly, participation in the existing system is important in order to be able to radically change the society. His legacy is evident in the later movements which continue to think about a cultural-social-political revolution to render the present situation upside-down. Nath seems to be an unintentional representation of the dominant agency (partially Gandhian/allegedly upper-caste), which owes much to his own educated, affluent and Brahmin denominations. He inherits a lot of Gandhian ideals on caste, though it will be a grossly simplistic here to club him fully with Gandhi. The influence of the liberal narratives on caste discrimination makes him conscious about the

history of upper caste atrocities and its obligatory duties to rectify the injustice perpetrated for centuries. The upper caste has to be the initiator of the mission for uplifting its oppressed brother and making him equal. This urge to rectify past mistakes by setting compensatory examples on personal level (Tendulkar, *Interview* 17) and sacrifice for the sake of the underprivileged renders the mission problematic. It smacks of a messianic approach of the powerful to the powerless and encourages inadvertently the caste stereotypes. Like Gandhi, Nath also believes that the ex-centric Dalits need a mild and tractable behaviour to be redeemed and brought back to the mainstream of life. They are the "unrefined gold" (31), or an ever-suffering cow (Gandhi qtd. in Zelliott 170), needed to be melted and moulded by a liberatory upper caste touch. They are, on their own, unable to initiate self-elevation because they are too powerless to do it and therefore deserve help from above.

The text shows ample proofs of Nath's caste-orientation. He tries to imbibe, in his own way, the liberal idealisms of the great reformers but develops an approach which is paternalistic and superficial in nature. Here is the situation where Arun is being introduced to Nath.

JYOTI. His name is Arun Athavale.

NATH. A brahmin?

JYOTI. No, he is a dalit.

NATH. Marvellous; But the name sounded like a brahmin's. (8)

When his son, Jayaprakash, wonders, "Why? What if he were a Brahmin?" (8),

NATH. I know. I know it doesn't make a difference. But if my daughter had decided to marry into high caste, it wouldn't have pleased me as much

...

JAYAPRAKASH. This is also a kind of casteism, isn't it? (8).

This casteism is superficially preoccupied with the 'Dalit' nomenclature and delivers authoritative judgment about emancipation. The marriage between a Brahmin girl and a Dalit boy can be a wonderful experiment because it will set a micro-example for macro-reformation in the country and compensate for the ancestral mistakes. Besides, it also supports the image of a political leader. Presumably, he is familiar with Gandhi's statement on inter-caste marriage, "If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands" (qtd. in Zelliott 153), but his different context, limited understanding of the high principles and a hurried effort render

the entire situation critical. When the marriage is in crisis, he insists, “We must save this marriage. *Not necessarily for our Jyoti’s sake . . . This is not just a question of our daughter’s life...this has a far wide significance . . . This experiment is very precious experiment*” (my emphasis) (41). Nath’s dream for a casteless society is indeed benevolent, but the fault lies in the implementation. It ends in a catastrophe where his dream is busted and its shortcomings as a welfare discourse with upper-caste connotations are exposed. The higher caste’s obsession with the ‘Dalit’ thus comes under probe to reveal several inadequacies of its approach to the problem. Tendulkar himself comments, “what he (Nath) forgets probably is the human aspect of such experiments. During the times when he indulges in social experiment, the humans become scapegoats in the experiment” (*Interview* 17). Jyoti, who takes pride in her father’s idealism, is the scapegoat whose life is sacrificed under the paternal yoke of social reformation. The bridegroom, Arun, could be another helpless victim of this welfare, but he responds in a different way that saves him from this hidden casteism and calls for a re-reading of his stand-point as well.

To Nath’s “cultured and civilized” (52) discourse, Arun Athavale brings in a raw, unsophisticated way of aggressive self-assertion. Arun’s moment of meeting Jyoti creates a situation where two different cultures stand face to face in an inexperienced mode of mutual understanding. But the effort seems to be marred by the exigencies of Nath, eagerly pushing for a trend-setting outcome of this meeting. Now, the point of consideration is what role Arun has played in his interaction with the Devlalikar family. And what the specialities are in his counter discourse that seems to ‘baffle’ the dominant authority. Arun’s anti-Brahmin and anti-upper caste standpoint relates him inevitably to the Ambedkarite thought-process that seeks a total disavowal of the prevailing caste system instead of any allegedly conformist reformism, though he is never seen as a whole-time activist of the Dalit cause in the text and can never be regarded as belonging to the core of the Dalit intelligentsia. However, his irrevocable Dalit background empowers him with a Dalit agency to counter the upper caste. It also renders him relevant for understanding the Dalit subjectivity.

Arun’s subjectivity is predominantly governed by a deep-rooted sense of casteist betrayal and neglect. His Dalit home stands in sharp contrast to an affluent, civilized Brahmin home. He describes it thus, “From childhood I have seen my father come home

drunk everyday, and beat my mother half dead, seen her cry her heart out . . . we don't know the non-violent ways of Brahmins like you. We drink and beat our wives . . . we make love to them . . . but the beating is what gets publicized" (43-44). Tendulkar's introduction to Namdeo Dhasal's poetry, *Golpitha*, vividly recaptures the peculiarities of this world:

This is the world of days of nights; of empty or half-full stomachs; of the pain of death; of tomorrow's worries; of men's bodies in which shame and sensitivity have been burned out; . . . where leprous women are paid the price and fucked on the road, where children cry nearby. . . . (qtd. in Zelliot 277)

The awareness of this stark difference of his world renders Arun revengeful towards the upper caste society in general. Compounded by the visible rejection of Seva (Nath's wife) and Jayaprakash, his already-wounded ego holds each and every member of the Devlalikar family responsible for the injustice. Even Jyoti cannot escape his vindictive ire after marriage for being an alleged agent of the higher caste. To fulfil his revenge he develops an anti-upper caste strategy. Fully aware of his worth in the Dalit-centric political culture his father-in-law is in, he exploits his caste identity as a safe-guard against any punitive measure and continues to torment the life of his in-laws. He tortures his wife, knowing well that his father-in-law can never come out against him as nobody in the political world will buy the report that a Dalit can be a torturer and, moreover, tortures even a Brahmin! To get him trapped, he invites Nath to preside over the discussion of his autobiography, which he proclaims to be a realistic account of his downtrodden life and a sure shot for the Sahitya Akademi award. This clever stroke will either draw acclamation for brave truth-telling from a Brahmin Member of the State Legislative Council or spread out rumour that the "rise of the Dalit son-in-law to literary height caused heartburn in the upper caste, socialist father-in-law" (55). Both ways he will be credited. Although Nath knows the book to be a scrap, he can neither refuse to preside over nor slam the book down because it will endanger Jyoti's life as well as his public image. Furthermore, nor can he blatantly praise it and its author because it then proves him a liar to himself and his daughter as well. Nath, however, chooses the second way of damnation out of his (newly-but-late-emerging) fatherly concern for Jyoti and loses it all there. Here, the scheme of the 'Dalit powerless' proves so ensnaring that it makes the predominant notions of caste victim/victimiser largely debatable. Arun's cunning and duplicitous character unsettles the stereotypes about the caste victim and the possibilities of any 'pure knowledge' in this

regard. In this world of changeable realities, “yesterday’s victim is today’s victimizer” (51).

Jyoti’s character serves as an extension to Tendulkar’s reading of the caste narratives. She is the most prominent victim who suffers most at the hand of the so-called ‘liberatory’ initiatives. At her paternal home, she serves as a guinea pig in a noble experiment (69) and is encouraged to enter into the calculative barbarism of her husband. She proves to be a scapegoat not only to her father but also to her husband who uses her as a hostage to unfurl his casteist strategy. Jyoti’s misery and outburst to her father at the end becomes extremely important here because it seems to situate the caste narratives vis-à-vis their outcome on woman. Her educated and modern home provides Jyoti ample freedom to decide about her life. But this modernity and liberalism brings other kinds of constraints for the woman. Her father’s modern and liberal urge (also called, maniacal) to uproot casteism by setting a Gandhian example on private level compels her to move ahead with her choice. Her upbringing in the liberal idealism of her father makes it a filial duty for her to honour his principles and enter into the noble experiment only to find it an abyss. She explodes out at his lie about Arun’s book as it nakedly proves the superficiality of the beliefs she has admired for so long. Her heart-break strips the self-deceiving lie, i.e. Nath himself. Tendulkar brings Jyoti to brutally pull the curtain off Nath alone because Arun is already self-exposed. Her return to Arun’s strategic hostility is ironical since it is a cynical self-resignation of a woman who, through her disdainful rejection, exposes the irrelevances of all these powerful discourses.

The importance of *Kanyadaan* probably lies in its bold handling of the post-Independence degradation of the anti-caste(ism) discourses into petty caste politics. Gandhi’s holistic view of the caste system sans untouchability and Ambedkar’s demand for social and political rights of the Dalits, however inter-opposing they might be, had one thing in common; they both helped to keep the Dalits’ urge for self-development alive, though their definitions of this development differed from each other. Apart from the Panthers movement and sporadic efforts of some committed social workers, India’s caste movements come to be arguably imprisoned in an endless politics of reservation and quota system. Advantages are seized by a selective few at the cost of proper development of the needy Dalits. In the context of this degeneration of political culture, anti-caste(ism) forces seem to have become either superficial imitation of the welfare ideals (e.g. Nath)

or crudely opportunistic, self-serving strategies for instant and short-cut success (such as Arun). None of them display the desire or ability to penetrate into the core of the issue. On the contrary, they look upon the 'Dalit' as a circumscribed category lucrative enough to serve their own profits. The upper caste Nath Devlalikar uses it to strengthen his social image, whereas the Dalit boy Arun maximises his caste background for personal profit. *Kanyadaan* proposes to critique these tendencies and expose the dangers involved in the political obsession with caste and the intolerant, opportunistic caste-radicalism turning wild. At this point, the play stands relevant to contemporary caste-dialogues.

Girish Karnad's take on the issue of caste(ism) in *Tale'-Danda* seems to be in tune with Tendulkar's. They both seem to realise the difficulty of arriving at a polemical stand for caste emancipation. Although the 'logic of inequality' of caste hierarchy proves to be provocative enough to draw numerous protests in history, the varied complexity of the problem always eludes a unanimous mode of emancipation. Both Tendulkar's and Karnad's negotiation of caste is therefore, at one level, an acknowledgement of its undeniable presence in contemporary Indian society and, at another, a probe into its complex mechanism, instead of giving easy solution to the problem. *Tale'-Danda* is such an attempt that tries to initiate a dialogue with caste(ism) through a historical relocation of the issue in the twelfth-century Karnataka, with connotative reference to the present crisis and absence of a solution. The re-interpretation of history, which is a favourite tool of Karnad, allows the required space and scope to investigate the issue through the advantages of remoteness and hindsight and also the freedom from the constraints of immediate reality. From such vantage point, the perils of casteism are scrutinised to examine why and how the counter discourses fail to arrive at a position, where they should have been, for a comprehensive liberation from casteist oppression.

Tale'-Danda, which was written in 1989 in Kannada and translated into English in 1993, literally means death by beheading. The play enacts the tumultuous decades between AD 1148 and AD 1168 when the city of Kalyan in Karnataka witnessed the rise of Basavanna and his Bhakti movement, known as the Virasaiva movement. The spiritual-cum-social movement aspired to usher in a life of equal right and opportunity for all by radically problematising the traditional 'Sanatan' dharma and its oppressive structure. Under the sagacious leadership of Basavanna, they espoused anti-caste, anti-Sanskrit, anti-war principles to reform the rotten society, where equality of sexes and

castes, hard and dedicated work would be valued more than the artificial rituals of Brahminism. They surrendered themselves to their sole God, Lord Shiva and called themselves the 'sharanas' who shed all that divide and deprive for a casteless and classless society. It was, as Karnad puts it in his Preface, "an age unmatched in the history of Karnataka for its creativity, courageous questioning and social commitment" (i). Their opposition to the Brahminic system of caste hierarchy, however, invited the wrath of the orthodox. The Brahmins, along with other interest groups, conspired to destroy the movement, and the people of Kalyan missed the chance to witness a revolution, both religious and social in nature.

The twelfth-century Kalyan has always been the focus of literary and intellectual attentions that have tried to understand Basavanna and the historical moment of spiritual and social awakening (Krishnamurthy qtd. in T. Mukherjee 232). Karnad's attempt to revisit this moment of history is therefore not unprecedented. Among the many sources, Karnad is substantially indebted to A. K. Ramanujan, who translated the free verse lyrics of Vasavanna used in this play. "M. Chidanda Murthy's *Basavanna* in National Biography Series published by National Book Trust and H. Thipperudra Swamy's *Basaveshwara* in the Makers of Indian Literature Series published by Sahitya Akademi" (Nayak 94) are some of the other sources that he has exploited.

The play begins during the reign of King Bijjala when Basavanna's movement is at its height. The city of Kalyan is highly divided on casteist line where each of the streets is named after the caste of its inhabitants. In the first act of the play, Karnad has presented a detailed picture of the situation to capture the moment of dormant tension awaiting an outburst. The state has an able administrator in the figure of King Bijjala who knows how to run a government and is evidently a sympathiser of the sharana movement, he himself being a barber by birth. But unfortunately he is surrounded by a pack of incompetent and hungry wolves, the powerful Brahmins of the royal court and his own son Sovideva who claims to represent the Kshatriyas. The alarming rise of the sharana cult sees these people preparing for a power game. In the beginning, Karnad however concentrates mainly on the growing popularity of the movement and also how the fast growth is bringing upon substantial deviations from Basavanna's humanist principles, endangering the prospect of the entire mission. He sometimes uses King Bijjala as a sane and able ruler to point out

where the sharana movement is treading dangerously and on other occasions lets the movement itself roll on to self-discover the rifts within.

Notwithstanding Basavanna's revolutionary effort, the sharana movement seems to be entrapped within its own discourse of Bhakti. In its attempt to root out a social disease, it itself becomes vulnerable to many of the ingredients of that disease and appropriates some of the styles of the dominant discourses that seriously undermines its ideological distinction. The first instance of intervention in such appropriation occurs when Prince Sovideva makes a sudden visit to the treasury and tries to accuse the royal treasurer Basavanna of "systematically defrauding the Treasury" (8). This act of conspiracy to malign Basavanna results in a vehement protest of the sharanas who sit around and besiege the treasury for eleven days till Basavanna comes and gets inside with the prince to check the accounts. It proves to be total fiasco for Sovideva as Basavanna comes out clean, disproving all allegations of fraudulence. This incident, which undoubtedly asserts Basavanna's glory, is however used by the playwright to denote the dangers involved in such vigorous outburst of support and solidarity on the part of the disciples. Fifteen thousand sharanas, incensed at the insolence of the prince against their beloved leader, flock to the place of incident within an hour and sit there till the leader comes to handle the matter. No wonder they could have been more aggressive with a little more provocation, and the situation could deteriorate. Such boundless enthusiasm is always risky as it tends to overstep in its struggle against an age-old, powerful and complex system. Basavanna's impeccable character was sure enough to come out clean from the conspiracy, and so does it. But the devotional frenzy of his followers misreads the event and interprets it as an act of miracle. They indeed believe that Basavanna has stolen the money for good cause but Lord Shiva has refunded the whole amount (22). Basavanna is thunderstruck at this display of spiritual hysteria, which indirectly proves him to be a thief! The administrative eye of King Bijjala can see through it and cautions Basavanna about this "mass hunger for divine grace" (23) and the "delirium of bhakti" (24) which can derail his movement and club him together with the forces he opposes. But it seems to be too late for anybody to control the course of events and, 'bhakti' continues to get the upper hand over logic and reason.

The text reveals another crisis within the movement when it comes to the issue of religious conversions. The sharanas reportedly wage a war against the caste system in

order to liberate millions of people from this '(il)logic of inequality'. They preach the principles of liberty, equality and creativity and uphold the vision of a new world so much so that the barber-by-birth king comes to be elated by this humanist and non-casteist approach to mankind. But much to the dismay of their leader, they indulge in violence against and forced conversion of other communities like the Jains and the tribals. The reports of the sharanas occupying the Jain temple by force and turning it into a Shiva temple and their jeer at the primitive disposition of the tribal gods disturb Basavanna to the core. He tries to assert his values, though without effect, over his frenzied followers, "Violence is wrong, whatever the provocation. To resort to it because someone else started it first is even worse. And to do so in the name of a structure of brick and mortar is a moment of stupidity" (29).

Basavanna's wisdom inevitably draws contextual reference to the turbulent period of the late 1980s and early 90s that saw the religious and political frenzy over the Ram Janmabhumi movement, leading to the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. However, it would be wrong to read this wisdom against a specific historical context. The distorted exercises of the sharanas, which go against the principles of the Virasaiva movement as espoused by Basavanna, raise questions not only to a specific moment of history but also initiate a critical dialogue with the contemporary history of social movements, chiefly the anti-caste activisms. The neo-aggressiveness of the caste-backwards, augmented largely by the Mandal Commission recommendations (submitted in 1980, implemented in 1989) and represented through newer social/political formations, provide a valid context to the debates raised by the play. The use of the spectacles of religious conversions as caste emancipation has always been a way of self-assertion and protest for the Dalits since Ambedkar's historic conversion on 14 October 1956. However, it can be regarded as a highly debatable issue as to whether the recent buzz over the Buddhist conversions of the Dalits (Huggler; *Mass Dalit*) has a positive impact on the life of the downtrodden or not. The strategic interests behind these conversions seem to be crucial in determining their effectiveness as emancipatory mode. Self-serving and politically motivated attitudes often render such exercises mere showbiz, much in opposition to the spirit embodied in Ambedkar's valiant step. The sharanas' obsession with conversion of other communities suggests a deviation from their true objectives and an unwholesome reliance over short-cut and superficial means. This trend greatly disturbs Basavanna and also holds the current caste discourses, especially the moments of caste-

related conversions, in a mode of critical understanding. The over-enthusiasm of Bhakti, which knows no rational bound, proves counter-productive and destroys the movement from within. Under this critical observation, the present-day issues such as caste violence, militant activism, the alleged dilution of the challenger's expected position of difference (as it happened with Arun Athavale in *Kanyadaan*) come to reveal new implications.

The play intervenes in caste rationalisation most crucially in Act Two, where the sharanas and the rest, chiefly the Brahmins, are poised for a final show-down, contrary to the expectations of Basavanna and King Bijjala. Karnad's presentation of the Brahmin power is in tune with one of history's most evident fact about the oppressive caste-privileged. From their self-given status of dominant agency, the Brahmins had acquired the ultimate power to define religion and social system. To maintain the hierarchy of power and keep their agency crucial in the overall system, they often forged alliance with subordinate castes like the Kshatriyas, who were traditionally bestowed with the duty of administration, to create a mutually shared platform of power. The chief objective behind such alliance remained to liquidate the untouchable agency and any form of 'aberration'. Basavanna's revolutionary spiritualism, which ultimately tends to subvert the Brahminic status quo, draws its inevitable enemies. The Brahmins of the royal court take the initiative to consolidate others against this new threat. The sharana concept of caste-equality sounds abominable to them for its renunciation of rigid rituals and norms of religion. The idea that simple Bhakti can bring down gods to their devotees without any ritual is absurd as well as dreadful because it jeopardizes their hold over gods and scriptures. They extol the divinely ordained "logic of inequality" (56), which teaches "One's caste is like one's home" (56), as an unalterable solution to the social anarchy. But their well-thought 'logic' proves too weak to resist Basavanna's simple and honest 'illogic', and at the fear of being sidelined and rendered useless, they prepare to hit back hard.

The tension between the sharanas and the Brahmins finally erupts over the incident of a marriage between a Brahmin's daughter and a cobbler's son. As in *Kanyadaan*, inter-caste marriage here also appears to be a highly troubled/troubling issue: Karnad deliberately places this incident at the centre of the conflict in order to use it as a prismatic tool to critique the sharana movement. All through his life, Basavanna has espoused the policy of free inter-caste traffic in the forms of sitting together, dining,

praying and, if possible, marrying with a view to promoting solidarity and brotherhood among people. But his dream of social equality through inter-caste marriage, which seems to be Gandhian (Zelliot 153) in spirit, receives its major setback when his followers propose such a marriage to show the world that they preach their principles not only in theory but also in practice. The mere idea of it horrifies Basavanna as he is well aware of the probable repercussions, but he has to relent to the pressure of his followers. Hell breaks upon the city of Kalyan. The Brahmins find a useful Kshatriya ally in the stupid but ambitious prince Sovideva who wants to be the king. But Karnad thrusts on the happenings in the sharana quarter, which stands wide open and irrational to this critical probe.

The marriage episode exposes the rift between Basavanna and his followers that has already reached an incurable stage. The power of Bhakti reportedly fails to divest the sharanas of their individual egotism. Personal rivalry and jealousy make inroads into the movement, as Jagadeva, an important sharana, tries to outshine Basavanna's popularity as a 'miracle man'. He uses the proposed marriage as a tool to capture the centre-stage. The marriage of the two souls hailing from two different cultural worlds, which could have been a beautiful example of caste harmony on personal level, is politicised and spoiled. The sharana urgency over it reminds one of Nath Devlalikar's exigency over his Brahmin daughter's marriage with a Dalit boy in *Kanyadaan*. Both the playwrights seem to critique such tendency of anti-casteism that ignores personal wishes of the people concerned and objectifies them through the strategically-motivated imposition of harmony. In opposition to Basavanna's caution against hasty multiculturalism, Madhuvarsa, the bride's father, declares, "I shall not hesitate to sacrifice my daughter's life to forward the cause of our great movement" (39) and literally pushes her, like Jyoti Devlalikar, to a disaster. The growing disputes within the community reveal several other irrationalities, which were kept hidden by the "delirium of bhakti" (24) and the common anathema to the Braminic excesses. They all now begin to show that emotional frenzy has gained more power than logic in the movement, and this now proves self-defeating. Besides, the concept of total self-renunciation for the larger cause remains still far away from the majority of the sharanas. Their failure to grasp Basavanna's idealism leaves them as a group fragile enough to face any serious threat from within or outside. When the spiritual zeal vanishes, they remain to appear as a large horde of murderers, which is no better than their adversaries.

Apart from his insight into the sharana polemics of anti-casteism, Karnad has given a serious thought over the post-marriage bloodshed. This violence is largely the handicraft of the opposing Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance, thriving on the inner confusions of the reformation movement. The critical engagement unveils a crude game of power as the worst consequence of a potential revolution. Both the king and Basavanna are dumped by all for their people-friendly stand. Jagadeva and his goons unnecessarily murder the powerless king to avenge the killing of the inter-caste couple (85). The Brahmins exploit Sovideva's greed for the throne in order to destroy the sharanas. In the turmoil when the whole of Kalyan burns, Sovideva, the psychotic-whimsical prince, captures all power and emerges as the cruel dictator of a military state that upholds all the norms and customs Basavanna fought against. The ending of the play shows the dreadful consequences of hasty and irrational actions coupled with vested designs over sensitive social issues. The inadequacies of the movement are revealed. They lead to a situation of chaos and let it roll in favour of the dominant power to exploit the situation and reassert its authority. The radical dream of social equality comes to provide the upholder of caste hierarchy an opportunity to regain their strength and continue oppression in a way worse than before.

Under Tendulkar's and Karnad's critical gaze, the contemporary realities of caste stand strikingly unveiled. The present chapter brings forth some of these realities as negotiated by the plays. Caste(ism) can be said to survive through the politics of maintaining the stereotypes and rationalising the irrationals. The plays boldly examine this political process and foreground realities to challenge several notional facts about caste. The Brahminic idea of purity is one such fact that is ruthlessly contested. Several types of Brahmin characters, such as the inquisitive and iconoclast Brahmin, the other who is a passionate lover, and even the schematic one, appear to deglamourise the mythic Brahmin and challenge his concept of piety and purity. This contestation is immensely important not only to locate the Brahmins in the contemporary caste context but also to understand the position of almost the entire upper caste. The purity culture seems to be a contagious condition that affects the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas as well and helps construct a superiority consciousness across the entire upper and lower caste domain. These non-Brahmin-touchable castes, mostly categorised as Other Backward Classes in the state lexicon, are reportedly no less influential than the Brahmins in continuing untouchability in the present society (Cybil 82). Since the rural elite is now largely

constituted by the OBCs, the untouchables or the Dalits in villages seem to suffer most at their hand, instead of the Brahmins (Soumitro Das 16). From this point, the contestation of the Brahminic piety seems to critique the caste prejudices and stereotypes still prevalent in the upper and lower segments of the hierarchy.

Apart from the culture of piety, the post-Independence characteristics of Dalit assertions, the upper caste dominated welfare enterprises and the volatile situation of contemporary caste politics are also negotiated. What emerges from this negotiation is not the possibility of a utopian world free from discrimination. There seems to be no ready-made way-out from the complications of casteism. Both the playwrights have explored the present condition of disparity and distrust and scrutinised the subtle aspects of caste experiences often kept unacknowledged. The hidden versions of reality are brought to the fore to provoke fresh insight into the widely familiar and taken-for-granted situations. The knowledge does not provide easy solution to be sure but helps understand how caste(ism) functions in today's society. It presents a world stagnated by murky caste politics, where a perfect harmony between Devadatta, the fair and feeble Brahmin and Kapila, the dark and rugged low-caste (*Hayavadana*) still looks inconceivable. The investigation into the various nuances of this world may prove helpful towards a sociable and productive co-existence of these opposing sections. Tendulkar's and Karnad's study of caste reality largely remains an attempt at this end – that is, to formulate a fresh methodology of cognition and arrive at an understanding of the situation, free from dogmas and stereotypes.

Chapter IV

The Middle Class Demystified

The Indian middle class as a social category has a significant presence in Vijay Tendulkar's dramatic oeuvre. Girish Karnad, on the other hand, arrives late to initiate a direct and close reading of this segment of social reality. However, the post-Independence Indian middle class as an object of critical study can be taken for an important point of common interest between both the writers. And the reason is Karnad's growing curiosity about this class. His newly found interest has the potential to match Tendulkar's enduring observation of it. They both seem to be remarkable in their treatment of this clearly-visible-yet-variously-inscrutable category by exploring its nuanced nature and functions in different temporal and spatial conditions. Quite interestingly, the growing importance of this class since India's independence seems to have found a befitting scrutiny in these two writers who themselves hail from the class under focus (Tendulkar, *An Interview* 10; Karnad, *Theatre* 333). Andre Beteille, perhaps, correctly observes, "The Indian middle class has many critics, the most eloquent, almost without exception, being members of that class itself" (*Indian Middle*). Besides, Tendulkar's and Karnad's long and extended presence in literary and intellectual circles has also added an edge to their observation. They both have the privilege to witness the multi-faceted development of this class from its post-Independence growth in the Nehruvian era to its formidable presence in the fast changing world. This extended familiarity, informed by intellectual insight, leads to a deep understanding of the middle class households vis-à-vis related social conditionalities. Through their wide thematic spectrum, they propose to negotiate several problematic issues, kept stable by the dominant discourses of continuity, and produce a critique of the said class. Whether it is the (re/de)formation of the middle class joint family in a fluid social context and its disturbing locale of traditional domesticity, the individuals caught in the doldrums of a highly consumerist society, or their unavoidable vulnerability to the emerging social atmosphere, each has been negotiated in the domain of individual relations within the home/family. Tendulkar's *The Vultures* (1971), *Kamala* (1981) and Karnad's *Wedding Album* (2009), written from varied spatiality of the post-

Independence situation, are examples of the middle class addressed and exposed. What these plays offer is a critique of the predominant discourses of the middle class condition. They closely observe how a certain group of individuals and their families operate against a social backdrop of transition and instability. The present chapter seeks to assess this observation, keeping in mind the configurative and functional developments of this class in an independent and consumerist India.

Tendulkar and Karnad engage the middle class to penetrate into its critical relation with a fast changing social environment. The educated, urbane, and liberal class, which has always a crucial role to play in the larger social context, cannot escape different conditionalities and finds itself in a peculiar situation. Its 'modernity' finds it hard to cope with some aspects of the present condition. The relation between the middle class, embodying 'modernity', and the contemporary surroundings, which manifests pervasive corruption and crude consumerism, rocks this category to such an extent that it stands wide open to a probe. Its so-called claim to 'modernity' becomes debatable for multiple reasons. Karnad is concerned about this problem in its image, and his immediate interest seems to be in a slow and subtle exposition of the 'mythic' middle class. Such type of exposition, as Karnad's, indirectly refers to the middle class crisis that Tendulkar focuses on in a rather straightforward manner. Both the writers attempt to understand this category at the backdrop of a socio-economic change and adopt a demystifying method. This process of demystifying the middle class is inevitably variable; the outspoken style of Tendulkar does not often resemble Karnad's restrained manner, though both seem to be equally effective in capturing the critical situation that this class is in.

Before we move to discuss the plays, a brief survey of the critical development of this social category, called the Indian middle class, might prove useful. The Indian middle class has its undeniable origin in the colonial discourse, which saw the emergence of the class of the 'Bhadralok' or 'Baboo' as a consequence of Lord Macaulay's desire to form a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (qtd. in Varma 2). Basically germinated in the three presidency capitals of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras (Beteille, *Indian Middle*), this class came to acquire enormous influence upon the fate of the nation for some reasons – their largely upper caste background, economic affluence, and, most importantly, modern outlook. Their modernity is invariably rooted in the premise of Western ideals of progress, and from this

theoretical position they play a major role in formulating the nationalist approach to modernity. They represent the powerful nationalist discourse that seeks to accept the modernist ideals for the vision of an independent nation-state. Their participation in the nationalist movement, which is allegedly 'Bhadralok'-centric (Batabyal 3835), consolidates their hold over the mainstream political culture of the country. Independence brings a new historical situation before this class. Their unquestionable sway over pre-Independence nationalism seems to have remained almost undisturbed in the post-Independence discourse of nation-building. Their inherited professional reputation and modern outlook ensure them prominence in the official mechanism of the new state. From their side, they also self-prepare to meet new challenges and enhance acceptability. Their former role during the colonial era is no more, but new possibilities emerge to empower them again under the new circumstances. In the form of educated social elite, urbane intellectual and stake-holder in the major state-apparatus, they come to perceive their 'rightful' responsibility for and role in the nation-building project. They enthusiastically develop an axiomatic role of leadership to implant the latest of modernist and liberal values, which they have learnt from the West, in the growth of the newly born nation. Pavan K. Varma has termed this phase of post-Independence middle class formation as the "Age of Hope" (26-68). In this "Age", which is historically the Nehruvian era, they are the inevitable instrument to facilitate the modernist goal of democracy, secularism, abolition of untouchability, education, health-care and so on. They become the most prominent agent of Nehruvian nationalism. But one important thing to note is that they also remain instrumental behind the formation of state-institutions with inherent colonial legacies, and this, perhaps, is to do with the theoretical premise of their modernity, which is European/colonial. The parliamentary democracy, the civil service, the judicial structure, the armed forces, the education system, all are in tune with the British/Western model, and this poses a serious question to the claim of postcolonial character of the middle class. Their reliability as a true facilitator of development and everything modern and progressive seems to come under scrutiny and become increasingly unstable and complex.

The post-Nehruvian dilution of value and erosion of an ideological commitment, seen first in the political culture of the country since Independence, impacts the middle class immensely. The euphoria of nation-building turns downward, owing to failures in several fields of development. Power politics seems to step in to compensate for

developmental failures. 'Legitimisation' of corruption, criminalisation and centralisation of power, casteisation and communalisation of public domain – all these are on the rise, while politicians shamelessly resort to sycophancy and vote-bank politics to retain power. This plebianisation of the political culture makes the middle class disillusioned and discontented (Visweswaran 25). They become sceptical of development as well as of the state and maintain a self-imposed distance (Krishna 2327). Their modern principles of reason and progress, as they claim, cannot co-exist with this vulgarisation of public service. But this display of modernity as the sole motive of protest seems to be problematic. They themselves have taken active part in the state machinery and power and therefore cannot claim, historically/empirically, immunity from corruption. Their discontent seems to betray a different reason. The reported plebianisation of politics witnesses the rise of other elements in politics (Visweswaran 25). They are the lower classes and castes with an anti-modern outlook, which have so far been marginalised by the upper-caste-dominated middle class modernity. Thanks chiefly to vote-bank/number-based politics, these elements begin to assume significance, undermining middle class centrality. A gradual displacement from power begins that sees the eventual exit of the middle class from electoral politics (Visweswaran 25). It is their displacement that seems to make them discontent about the state of affair. Eventually, they lose interest in it and have to exit. They openly criticise the state for corruption, and the core of this criticism springs rather from their growing dislodgement from it (Visweswaran 24) than from any moral faith. The dislodgement and discontent seem to cause an alleged double-standard in their class-character. Ideally, they espouse something but practice something else, thus creating a gap between 'ideality' and 'practicality'. The class claims to be the chief harbinger of modern values, but more for their theoretical posture than any practical application. This seems to be true in various domains of their social life – whether the working place, or the domestic sphere of home, family and marriage. When situation demands, the middle class individual never hesitates to throw off his liberal-moral values and covertly adopts illegal means. Ironically, it is supposed to be their modernist ideals that have seen the nation prosper, but in a moment of crisis the middle class seems to be unhesitant to compromise on the very ideals they stand for. This alleged gap renders their honest and progressive image untenable. Their 'ideality' comes at stake.

Ever since 1991 the middle class has drawn special attention for purely economic reasons. The 'liberalisation' and 'globalisation' of the Indian economy has turned them

into a category which is commonly perceived as a giant consumer class. Their ability to consume and sheer size fascinate the market, and they seem to have gained an unprecedented status of prominence. This new phase of development shows that the middle class has indeed come far away from their pre-Independence elite and exclusive status. The upper caste 'Bhadraloks' and 'Baboos', who flourished chiefly by the power of English language, western education and access to government jobs, were small in size but powerful as an intellectual group. They were perceived as "the subject and agent of nationalism" (Visweswaran 23). This perception continued even after Independence in Nehru's India, where the middle class proudly participated in the nation-building. "This began to change in the 1960s and 70s, and more dramatically after 1991" (Varma xviii). The cultural exclusivity of this class, comprising educated and refined intellectuals who were financially comfortable if not affluent, now fast declines. There are countless new entrants to this class in the forms of " 'bullock capitalists' from the countryside...small time entrepreneurs, property agents, semi-skilled industrial and service workers, salaried households" (Varma xviii) with working husband and wife. This new configuration of the class helps bring changes in its overall outlook. The new entrants do not depend solely on government jobs, as the private sector (e.g. the Multi-National Companies) opens up new possibilities to become rich. Boundless consumption, which was vulgar to "Gandhian austerity and Nehruvian socialism" (Varma xix), is no longer a taboo to them. By virtue of the new economy, they prosper and grow in numerical size and therefore unhesitatingly accept its mantra of consumption. Under the circumstances, crisis seems to be acute for the traditional members of this class. Their amazement knows no bounds at the rapid rate of prosperity around. They find consumption more feasible than the once espoused Nehruvian ethics of middle class "modesty and understatement" (Fernandes qtd. in Visweswaran 24). But their popular image is hard to be done away with. As a result, the gap between 'ideality' and 'practicality' widens.

The sudden focus as a purely consuming class increases the level of crisis within the entire middle class category. They achieve recognition as a powerful agency and facilitator of development in the 'new economy' but come to be afflicted with multiple problems in the new context of consumerist culture. They seem to be carried away by the sudden focus they get, and their modernity, which is already suspect, begins to be influenced by the consumerist system of thought, which also comes from the West. The middle class man still wants to be modern, but modernity now seems to be a consumer-

based identity. In the current econo-cultural idiom, he becomes modern inasmuch as he qualifies to be a consumer. The chief qualification of his present identity, i.e. ability to consume, undermines his other attributes, and he ends up merely as an unrestrained consumer. This seems to increase his always-already distance from the rest of India (Krishna 2327). He again feels alienated from his tradition and root and, therefore, strives to overcome this loss by getting nearer to cultural signs and symbols. Sudhir Kakar observes that the middle class largely comprises the urban, educated flexible Hindus (90). They are globalist, ideologically open, though religion and rituals occupy significant space in their concern (Kakar 90). For the flexible middle class Hindu, religious occasions and rituals are "important expressions of his identity" (Kakar 90). This attachment with culture, which is criticised by the Hindu traditionalists/nationalists for its superficiality (Kakar 94), can be viewed as his effort to avoid being rootless. Importantly, this coexistence of consumerist modernity and tradition is not always smooth and easy. He seems to be extra-cautious not to be fully clubbed either with the traditionalists or with the so-called rootless 'gen-next'. Perhaps, this is why the popularity of the spiritual "healing gurus" (Kakar 91) is on the rise along with McDonald's/KFC among this class. Somewhere it implies a tension or anxiety in the self-understanding of its identity. They seem to be confused about themselves as well as about their social surroundings and, as a result, stand volatile in the present situation.

So the middle class suffers from multiple tensions within. Beside the modern-traditional dilemma and mistakenly equating consumerism with modernist principle of progressive life, he is equally disturbed by the growing gap between his theory and action as an agent of social justice. Truly, he moves away from active politics as a protest against the debasement of political culture. But this is more because he is displaced by the rise of the lower classes/castes in politics than for the reason of debasement as he claims it to be. His new-found identity of vigorous consumer also disallows him to fight all he is supposedly opposed to. Here, we have an individual who protests against social and political decadence and at the same time finds himself prone to it. Against the backdrop of these unresolved crises, the middle class stands open to the critical probe undertaken by some of the plays of Tendulkar and Karnad. Written from varied post-Independence perspectives, the plays try to capture the uncertainties and tensions increasingly found in this category. They try to know, in a demystifying method, serious but generally unrecognised issues, hidden inside the private zones of the family, and thus uncover both

the tensions and their causes. For certain, this probe proves highly productive to capture different challenges to the traditional image of the Indian middle class. In Tendulkar's *The Vultures* and *Kamala*, middle class individuals and family against a backdrop of crude consumerism is the subject examined. Similar issues surface, though in an altogether different manner, in Karnad's *Wedding Album* which scrutinises the extreme interior of a household to reach out to the untenable and problematic character of the middle class in a fast changing time.

The Pitale family in *The Vultures* seems to be an archetypal image of middle class degeneration. Through its "raw brutality and lewdness" (Mitra qtd. in Chari & Renuka 33), the utter failure of a household to deal with its surroundings and its loss of power to survive is revealed. Almost all the characters show a vulnerability of the middle class condition, arising from the irresolution within its identity. The gap between appearance/illusion/claim on the one hand and reality on the other becomes so crude that their life stands insubstantial. The family boasts about a social reputation which actually rests on the corrupt accumulation of wealth by the father. As the wealth vanishes the very way it was hoarded, the off-spring of the ailing father continue to live under the mythic reputation and try to regain the lost wealth through every corrupt means possible. So reputation is very important for Mr. Hari Pitale's sons, who try to sustain it for a modern look of the family and go unbound in their quest for money. This causes the gap between theory and practice. The family tries to be modern the way it understands modernity, exposing crude corruption and its volatile image. The gap between appearance and reality is further widened by the revelation of some other odd aspects of their condition. First, the authority is predominantly masculine in nature. It is the male members who decide about every mode of operation and thus expose a crude gender bias. Secondly, violence and lewdness know no bound among the family members. Thirdly, unlimited self-centric desire, despite the preconditions of a joint family, becomes a determinant factor behind almost all actions. The individual dreams always tend to undermine the definition of family as a co-operative space. Grounded in a highly consumerist condition, the very existence of a middle class family thus comes under challenge.

The literate and urbane look of the Pitale family has a crude underbelly. The first patriarch, Hari Pitale, is now old and ailing, living on the mercy of his sons. But his chauvinist legacy continues through his 'able' sons, Ramakant and Umakant, who

exercise their power to retain the masculine set-up of the household. The two female victims are Manik, who is their sister, and Rama, Ramakant's wife. Though shown as one of the 'vultures', Manik is, however, less powerful than her brothers for being a woman. Against the sexist threats of her brothers, all she has as her resource is her withering body, and she wants to cash on it. She sexually lures a rich guy for multiple profits. First, it definitely asserts her right over her body. Secondly, this act, which inevitably draws the wrath of standardised morality, empowers her to escape the male-vultures. She intentionally becomes pregnant to entrap her prey. But her strategy is violently opposed by her brothers as they decide to use her pregnancy to their benefit. But the sudden death of the rich guy turns the pregnancy from a profitable situation into a loss to the brothers. To eliminate any further stake in the family-share, the foetus has now to be aborted. This gruesome treatment of Manik's pregnancy explains the loss of woman's control over it and the simultaneous tight grip of patriarchy – a condition that is the Pitale household itself.

The male power victimises Rama as well. She is childless even after twenty-two years of marriage. Her life is ruined by Ramakant's unbound masculinity that resorts to several strategies to cover up his impotency to produce a child. He wants a male-child to continue his legacy and, for this, subjects his wife to different esoteric/medical modes of scrutiny. From her less-empowered position, Rama, however, formulates her counter-action. She becomes pregnant through her liaison with Rajaninath, the illegitimate brother of her husband. With pregnancy comes her husband's attention to her, and this seems to serve two purposes. One, the masculine power is (though temporarily) satisfied, and the other, Rama's right over her body is established. However, the disclosure of the extra-marital liaison casts a spoiler to Rama's dream of autonomy as Ramakant, at the end, threatens to abort her womb. What is important in this site of sexual oppression is the exposure of the underbelly of a middle class family. The so-called image of educated liberals comes to be heavily undermined as we find that a family, supposedly built around some of the modernist principles such as education, sophistication, affluence, civility, nakedly exposes itself to be a domain of sexual exploitation and gender-backwardness. Here, the mask of modernity gradually falls down, and the ugly masculine face comes out.

As a play, *The Vultures* is said to have blasted a bomb in a complacent marketplace (Banerjee xii). Through its gory and violent events presented through a graphic detailing on the stage, the play successfully sends a shock-wave across the complacent middle class psyche. The self-professed conscience of society and protector of values, the middle class is ruthlessly examined here, and its consumerist orientation is exposed. Violence, crookedness, lechery seem to be the common indulgences for them to get their pound of flesh in the competitive market of life. Brothers kicking at sister's swollen womb, sons beating up abusive father for money, the deliberate connotation of incest in the extra-marital relation between the sister-in-law and the "Bhaiya" (241), i.e., her brother-in-law – all holds up a gruesome picture of total degeneration destroying a family from within. This spectacle of the supposedly civil middle class blowing all norms to air and revealing a ghastly side is enough to destabilise their identity and uncover the unsettled issues therein. Tendulkar strongly believed that violence did not exist in isolation; rather it had a lot to do with the contemporary situation, norms, and traditions of society (*The Mind* 18). This belief, perhaps, propels his realisation that the middle class as a category is not immune from society and sometimes can go to such a level of excess that calls for a review of its prevalent image.

Another destabilising aspect of the middle class household is the sheer self-centric attitude of its members. In spite of their physical location within a joint and shared family space, each member of the Pitale family is isolated by his/her personal interest. The concept of 'joint-family' is said to hold a key position to the traditional Hindu society, and the middle class, predominantly with a cultural Hindu background, can be found to have upheld, to a certain extent, this tradition. But the social and historical developments down the decades after Independence bring the middle class before a dilemma, which arises from a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Modern values, empowered by education and financial affluence, bring with it individualism which the modern man seeks as necessary for his self-development. But the commercialised society reshapes this individual-desire, basically concerned about self-space and expression, as a grossly self-seeking motive and demeans modernity so as to posit it as totally opposed to and unaccommodative of any traditional value. This change of outlook produces mutual intolerance among the members on the basis of narrow self-centrism. It redefines the hard-earned value of individuality and causes misplaced emphases where the selfish scope of boundless consumption appeals most to the 'modern' middle class. He/she

becomes self-centred and ruthlessly competitive to consume materials – a tendency that delivers a serious blow to the traditional concept of joint-family.

The basic tenets of the joint-family, as it is mostly found in India, are common habitation; joint kitchen, joint property, kindred relationship, common worship, mutual obligations, authority of the head. These are some norms which hold all the members together in a system where each is required to play his/her stipulated role. It is evidently a condition of shared interests that asks for willing conformity to certain codes of conduct for the sake of sustenance of the system. The extended version of this joint structure is the greater society, which is also based upon similar principles. The Pitale family here shows the degeneration of these principles. Individual urge takes the crudest form possible among the siblings of the corrupt father, as the brother-duo and their unmarried sister contrive to have their own share of the family property. Ramakant, the eldest son, appears the most self-centric and destructive force. He harbours a dream of having a 'home', which will be financially affluent and where a non-existent show-piece, called wife, will be provided with facilities like cook, car, cosmetics and club only to strengthen her husband's social status. It is a dream about a home, where husbands are not henpecked and wives are allowed to be smart only in producing sons. Importantly, among many of his violent and socially unacceptable characters such as Sakharam and Arun Athavale, Ramakant remains close to Tendulkar's heart (Tendulkar, *An Interview* 10). His despicable qualities, in fact, allow Tendulkar to shake off the middle class inhibitions in order to explore the zones, prohibited by standard morality.

What comes forth from the above study of the Pitale household is a grim picture of a middle class family caught in a critical conflict between a liberal, progressive image on the one hand and the consumerist compulsions on the other. First, they have to keep externally a progressive look, which is an important class qualification. Secondly, they have a misconception of modernity as a permit for boundless consumption. Their over-emphasis on material status makes them easy prey to the prevailing situation. The middle class dream of a posh lifestyle accompanied with car, chauffeur, chef, other beautiful materials including a wife, is considered modern, and this aspiration asks for corrupt modes of amassing wealth. They resort to all sorts of violent and crooked ways to squeeze the last drop of money from the family and look like vultures tied to each other through a cruel relation of power. Violence becomes a familiar method to contain not only the

women, but also the male competitors; financial scam is no longer a taboo; the traditional joint set-up of family is inwardly destabilised by ruthless self-centricity. As a result, the family stands hollow as a petty subscriber to the culture of consumption, rendering itself bereft of all liberal and progressive attributes. Although *The Vultures* was written in 1959 as *Gidhade* in Marathi and the English edition was published in 1974 (Chari and Renuka 29), the play offers a prospective view of the critical developments in the middle class down the decades. Its portrayal of a family as a commercial unit, whose members are knit to each other solely for material needs, has lot of implications to offer in the present context of unbound consumerism.

If *The Vultures* is an explication of middle class hypocrisy at the domestic level, Tendulkar's *Kamala* performs it through an individual's relation with his surroundings within and outside the family. Here, we have a play at hand that draws upon an individual, Jaisingh Jadav, to uncover the dark side of the so-called middle class modernity and liberalism. Jaisingh is equipped with all the qualifications, supposedly required to belong to the category, called middle class – education, income, sophisticated-urbane culture and a refined wife. Moreover, he claims to have a great sense of value. A journalist by profession in a new-age English daily, he considers himself to be a crusader against corruption and wants to reform the society by mass-awareness against all kinds of exploitation. But in spite of his clean image, Jaisingh stands extremely vulnerable in this play. Through his relations with his family members and the people outside, he seems to display the crises of consumer-based modernity. Commercial gain and personal success hold highest importance for him, and he mistakes them for social service and progress. His commercial approach to life exposes a lot of unknown issues safely hidden behind the modern-mask – the crude masculine side in the master-slave conjugality, the opportunistic use of media to ensure career-benefit and many other hollow sentiments and conceits associated with a successful middle class identity.

One important attribute of the intellectually sound middle class is their stance against all sorts of exploitation and corruption. The voice of conscience and social reform is said to be an essential quality that sets them apart and ensures currency in the society. Their moral self implicates politics as the source of general disorder, and hence their distance from it. But this political invisibility does not necessarily bring any social or cultural invisibility for them. After their departure from politics, they do not sit back idly;

rather they try to hit back through different modes of participation, presumably incorrupt and capable of critiquing the culture of corruption. But presumption differs from reality, as this alternative and other-than-political participation fails to bring the desired result and ends up compromising with those conditions, theoretically they are opposed to. The anti-corruption and anti-politics role, which tends to play a moral crusader in the society, is thus heavily undermined, rousing serious concern about the validity of such role. This seems to be the case with Jaisingh.

Jaisingh Jadav represents a maverick journalist, risking his life and receiving life-threats for the sake of a 'mission'. From a sense of social commitment, he takes up his pen to expose all the rot in society and make people aware of it. He wants to blow the whistle on corruption, upholding "moral principles, moral norms, moral values" (24). In short, he claims to represent a middle class intellectual-activist, who stays away from politics and resorts to alternative modes of protest to change the society. Media is that socio-cultural apparatus of protest which seems to suit Jaisingh's anti-politics and anti-corruption mission. It is theoretically an apolitical instrument of shaping and mobilising people's orientation and beliefs. It has an enormous command over the public opinion. People, according to N. Couldry, believe in the authority of the media discourse because they believe that most others also believe the same (qtd. in Sinha 2803), and on this basis, media can shape/reshape the public sphere. Evidences are in plenty in contemporary India where media's aggressive campaign exposes corruption and ensures justice to the victims. Jaisingh wants to exploit this authority of media over people in order to form strong public opinion against corruption. The play shows him risking his life by going to Luhardaga, a remote village in Bihar, to eye-witness the auction of women and purchase one as an evidence to be shown at a press conference in New Delhi. His endeavour, as it appears, strengthens the image of a conscious and intellectually sound middle class individual, who feels disturbed at the slightest instance of corruption and does not give a damn even if some mighty and powerful get hurt for his exposure.

The play *Kamala* is, however, more about the exposure of this 'great' prober himself and his social context than the very issue probed by him. The play is not about the auction of women in rural India. It delves deep into something else, something perceived as progressive, liberating and modern and busts it out to review the preset meanings. The outcome of this exposure clearly renders the middle class image more vulnerable than

before, as many of its popular attributes come to be questioned. The exposes show us that a modern middle class man, despite his anti-corruption stance, can be utterly corrupt and exploitative to push his career-graph up. And media, on the other hand, can miserably fail to perform its supposed role of a watchdog and play in the hand of the power quarters to act just like another apparatus of the prevailing system. In this play, Tendulkar sets two different schools of journalism against each other. One is the old-styled, vernacular, traditional and ethical journalism represented by Kakasaheb, uncle of Jaisingh's wife Sarita; the other is the new-age, fast and smart, chic-English style, practised by Jaisingh. This new style wants to redefine journalism altogether by changing its areas of emphasis and technique of handling news-items. Adventurism and risk become the catch-words here, where the journalist acts like maverick explorer, hounding down issues and adopting, sometimes, inconceivable ways to bring them in print. Going to a remote flesh-trade centre, purchasing a woman there, and keeping her in one's own house are such tasks daring enough to make the reporter larger than the report itself. During the process, he becomes a star reporter, whose name shines above the reports he makes. He is self-obsessed – so much so that he wants to write everything under his name. For once, he had almost resigned over an error, when the newspaper forgot to print his name (7)! The style of presentation also takes a new turn. The old method of calm restraint while reporting sensational incidents gives way to a style that “smacks its lips as it writes blood-thirsty descriptions . . .” (6). As explained by Jaisingh himself, the point lies in the technique of presenting (or, packaging) the case – not in the case itself (15). The presentation has to be dramatic and sensational just because it sells.

The play has a fine illustration of the consumerist encroachment on the concept of value-based, welfare journalism, which professes honest reporting of incidents. The press conference arranged by Jaisingh, supposedly to uncover the plight of women and poor people in India, has become ironically a revelation of the corrupt nature of journalism and the media-houses. Kamala, the tribal woman, is reduced to an object of ‘tamasha’ in front of a class of elite, educated and urbane audience. First, she becomes an item of curiosity for being a woman purchased in an auction – an issue sensational enough to fire the imagination of the city-bred male minds. They have heard of the stories of human-auction or, at best, read about them, but this tribal woman gives them the chance to physically enjoy the thrill of eye-witnessing some part of it. They flock to the conference not to feel the pain of the victim but enjoy something new and sensational. Secondly, Kamala's sex

is vital here as it adds an extra edge to the press conference. She would have definitely drawn a smaller audience than this, if she were a male. The over-enthusiasm of the photographers and the sex-starved male audience over her half-covered body, deliberately kept so by Jaisingh, shows her as a well-thought out pawn in the hand of a very calculative journalist, who simply rides on her for his career-gain. 'Sex sells' is the mantra of this new-age reporter, who never hesitates to cash in on it even at the expense of a poor woman. For circulation, advertisement and profit, this mercenary journalism can become shamelessly masculine and project woman in a derogatory manner, but all under the pretext of social activism. For growth and sustenance, it can also sacrifice its role of a watchdog and work as a compliant force with the establishment, a seasoned player in the political game of power, changing its guard according to the need of time. Tendulkar's another play, *Encounter in Umbugland*, (discussed in Chapter One), also explicates such nature of media. Jaisingh's pathetic end is very much inevitable in this system. He is finally fired by his own newspaper as his press conference rouses brows of all the big-shots involved in the flesh-racket. The media-house, which once found business in his heroics and stood behind him, readily clears its hand off when pressures start mounting from above. Nothing is unusual in this reaction. It is all in the game! And Jaisingh is a conscious and willing player in it. The only thing that goes wrong with him is that he has crossed the given limit and come in the way of the big and mighty. In this world of commercial journalism, he wanted to become bigger than the institution itself, which he is a part of, and as a result he is cut to size. The rise and fall of this man clearly shows how media operates in a consumerist society and the standard pattern of journalism. Here the journalists and the media-houses function on mutual benefits, and any middle class claim to heroic journalism on moral grounds often tends to be nothing but sheer commercial exercises for individual gain.

Through Jaisingh Jāday, Tendulkar thus exposes the untenability of a social image at two different levels. First, the image of a sensitive, moral and courageous journalist, who claims to be a champion of the poor, is vigorously contested. The commercial motive of the big media houses is also uncovered, but more importantly, the high-profile, new-generation journalist stands naked. His fall reveals that underside of the middle class which is conveniently wrapped up by a moral and progressive image. Secondly, the character also comes out as a crude representation of masculine excesses in the domestic sphere. The master-slave relation, which he maintains with his wife through the

institutional licence called marriage, strips him further of all his progressive attributes. His sense of sexual superiority is thus combined with his mercenary ambition, and both permit him to carry out his moral agenda at the expense of, in fact, two women – the illegally purchased one and his legal wife. The success of the play, *Kamala* largely depends on these two levels of engagement. It reveals Jaisingh as a typical middle class man, who is proud of a notional superiority and whose commercial orientation supports his preset sexual outlook.

Tendulkar reveals the crises within the middle class regarding its character, position and role in the society. His probe is characteristically carried out within the domestic plane of personal relations, mediated by the prevailing social condition. The characters as individuals or a family unit seem to be prone to the growing impact of the consumerist-commercial culture. As a result, they uncover their oddities and bust out different notional realities associated with this category. A similar investigation is carried out in Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album*, originally written in English. For its content, the play holds enormous importance in his dramatic oeuvre. It directly penetrates the middle class home in an urban setting, negotiating different hidden cultural spots in a close-to-reality manner. He has written *Broken Images* (2004) before with an obvious urban setting, but that is chiefly a psychological exploration of a modern female writer which does not extend to a critical survey of any social group or category. But here the focus is on a thread-bare presentation of the domestic domain of a social group and using its cultural manifestations as prismatic tools to probe into its safe world of hidden realities. He zooms in on a wedding in a particular South Indian middle class family and uses it as an occasion to clinically dissect this social body. This probe results in an uncovering of multiple shades of existence, raising some serious questions about this body vis-à-vis its social context. Some pre-acknowledged notions about this familiar middle class locale come under challenge. One significant aspect to notice in Karnad's reading of this class is that he, unlike Tendulkar, does not show any particular character or a group of characters vigorously pursuing some commercial dream and rendering themselves as well as their family open to calamitous consequences. What we find is that a varied group of people, whose homogeneity depends largely on some religious and cultural affinity, is living against a social backdrop which is fast being submerged in a consumerist pit as well as religiosity. And the people cannot, inevitably, live unaffected and un-intervened against it. It is a slow but persistent understanding of the middle class condition, which is

mediated by more than one factor of contemporary society. Karnad appears absolutely relevant to considering some of these factors like religiosity, casteisation, along with consumerism, while assessing this class.

The play presents a traditional South Indian Brahmin household – the Nadkarnis, a Saraswat Brahmin family, well known for their orthodox views of life and strict association with cultural norms, especially, marriage. Karnad takes up this highly valued institution of marriage as the central incident and explores the shady nooks and corners of this family through it. Since marriage holds the highest importance in the Saraswat cultural life, it offers Karnad a perfect scope for close probe. The family prepares for the prospective marriage of its younger daughter, Vidula Nadkarni, who has just finished her graduation, with an NRI, Ashwin Panje. Marriage seems to provide a homely occasion to its members to sit and interact with each other, a scope that becomes hard to come by in today's busy life. Its preparation compels them to assemble, as the elder daughter Hema flies in from her 'home' in Australia, and talk regularly with each other. This scope for conversation allows the playwright to delve deep into the internal layers of life and uncover several issues. As the play progresses, we find that Vidula agrees to the marriage without ever meeting the man, simply on the basis of some telephonic conversation, SMS, video-tape exchange, and, more importantly, caste-affinity. During the preparation, a whole series of other revelations crops up. Some of them are the subtle politics over inviting relatives and 'saree' allocation, the inner world of the family members, the unhappiness of the elder daughter, the shaded psychology of the mother, the caste and communal fervours, and the commercial, businesslike attitude to marriage. After a sustained and skilful examination of several members, the play ends with Vidula's surprising decision to marry the man, who appears utmost self-centric and callous to her needs.

The middle class household of *Wedding Album* becomes an important space for understanding the anxiety within this class, a product of its proximity to social changes. The changing circumstances seem to leave a lasting impact on the family at multiple functional levels. The members try to develop adaptabilities to the new condition of globalisation-liberalisation and thus come under its influence. It further augments a sense of insecurity, a sense of loss in terms of their tradition and custom. As part of their adaptability strategy, they are urban, educated and largely employed, but they also feel

like distanced from their 'authentic' identity and culture, owing to their eagerness to adapt. As a sort of compensation for this loss, they exhibit a pro-active allegiance to some religiosity. This is why marriage becomes such an important preoccupation in the Nadkarni family. It offers them a scope to come close to their root. Other visible customs and norms in the family are also exercises in the same direction. But this pro-tradition stance does not fully ensure the end to anxiety. Problem arises from different corners, and the play tries to look into each of them to understand the class at this crucial juncture of social history.

Among the sixteen characters in this play, the following five can be taken up for a closer reading – Hema, Rohit, the mother, Ashwin, and Vidula. They seem to hold the main thread of the narrative that negotiates the middle class household. Through their functions they represent different avenues of domesticity and also hint at further subterrains for a wide-ranging probe. The eldest daughter of the Nadkarni family, Hema, has flown all the way from Sydney, leaving behind her husband and two kids, to join the marriage of her sister, Vidula. Fifteen years ago she was married to a successful NRI (Non-Resident Indian) and settled in Australia – a lucrative career for many Indian women like her. But now her presence at home opens up different critical junctures of her life, safely hidden behind the gloss of her NRI tag. Hema seems to be always unhappy over the hurried arrangement of her marriage, which now appears more ordinary and lacklustre than before when she witnesses the thorough arrangement of Vidula's marriage. The same parents, who eagerly believed in her husband's anti-dowry words and married her off without even some token jewellery, now jump upon this marriage with all vigour and resources. She becomes extremely upset over this disparity and maintains an aloofness from the material arrangement of the programme. Apart from this, there is a more serious aspect of her grief. Hema shows signs of a disturbed wifehood. Her spatial shift from India to Australia hardly ensures a qualitative change in her life as dreamt about by many. From the supposedly traditional, outdated and oppressive Indian domesticity she is thought to have landed on the free world of a chief commercial officer of a multinational bank located in a highly developed country. But this relocation betrays some of her heart-breaks as she exclaims at the misery of being the wife of a successful Indian expatriate. The traditional "Sati Savitri" (17) role of the Indian wives does not change at all but works on through different expressions in a different context. As wife,

she stands parallel to her kitchen-sink mother – “. . . I am in no better position than Ma” (17).

Hema also discloses some issues related to sexuality, which are non-discussable and even unthinkable in a traditional middle class family like the Nadkarnis. She, along with her younger sister Vidula, has undergone a traumatic phase in childhood. They both were helpless victims of the sexual fantasies of their paedophilic servant, Nagappa. Nagappa, who was known for never raising his voice, did never miss any chance to raise the skirts of these two girls (23). No wonder the girls have never done the blasphemy of revealing it to all and, instead, borne the scar deep in their mind. Hema shows the sign of it as she feels horrified by her father-in-law's look at her body during her wedding ceremony. Most probably, this childhood scar might have affected Hema's normal relation with her husband as well. Her mental distance from her husband is indicated by her occasional outbursts against the mythic glow around marrying abroad and total lack of reference to him during her regular telephone conversation with her son in Australia. But it can be inferred that this distance from her husband has left Hema with lot of desires unaddressed and unresolved. This frustration finds expression in her entertaining, with mild rebuke, the outrageous approaches of the young boy Vivan, who is of her son's age. Far away from Australia, she seems to be elated at Vivan's sensual admiration of her body and more so at the sense of being still powerful enough to draw the attention of such a young male. This partly compensates for her domestic loss in Australia. Hema, in this play, has a unique position of being both an insider and outsider to the family. She is still a Nadkarni by blood and also an outsider by marriage. And this gives some of her exposures an extra edge. Among all the Nadkarnies, she seems to be the only one who can think over the emerging criticalities with unmatched detachment.

The other character, working as a point of reference to the inner complexities of the family, is Rohit Nadkarni, Hema's younger brother. He writes stories and scripts for teleplays. Beside his thematic relevance, Rohit has a technical standing in the theatrical pattern of the play, unlike any other member of his family. Karnad has divided the play into nine scenes, out of which Scenes One and Five take place about three years after the rest of the scenes. The entire incident of Vidula's wedding, including all that happened in connection with it, is presented in the scenes other than these two. And in these two scenes, after three years' gap, the past is being remembered through a televised mode of

reproduction. Rohit, under the tele-serial producer Pratibha Khan, is seen as reviewing the past materials of his family in order to make a super-hit serial. He is keen to work on the life of his sister Vidula. But his ideas are dismissed by Pratibha Khan as unattractive and non-saleable to the T.V. audience. The drab and dull story of Vidula, agreeing to marry a man whom she never met except through SMS, telephone, or video-tape exchange and leading an ordinary life of a child-bearing house-wife, lacks in the necessary spice and is commercially unfeasible. Nobody would buy the idea that such a thing could ever happen to an educated middle class woman of today. More profitable seems to be the 'Radhabai item', the life of the family-cook, which after some melodramatic patch-up can make a clean sweep of the market. Rohit agrees to this point and modifies his non-commercial attitude to life. Pratibha Khan's attitude represents the traditionalist approach of a pragmatic producer, who does not want to lose her buck on any enterprise of reality-probe. This marketing strategy, on the other hand, ironically emphasises the validity of the main plot (i.e. the scenes except One and Five), which centres on the so-called non-saleable story of Vidula. Through its elaboration of Vidula's story, the main plot justifies the need to explore reality, instead of melodrama, and also the presence of a multi-shaded existence, beneath the middle class stereotypes, that remains hidden to the common viewers. Rohit, thus, assumes significance as somebody who facilitates this validity of the main plot by arranging for a different mode of look-back on his family.

As part of the main event of Vidula's wedding, Rohit has a very significant role – not only as a brother who helps in the video-tape correspondence between the prospective couple, but also as an individual whose life exposes further the institution of marriage. The presence of casteism and religious untouchability comes to the fore when the issue of Rohit's marriage suddenly crops up amidst the preparations for Vidula's. Rohit has an affair with a Christian girl, Isabel – a sacrilege that has no taker in his family. The middle class pride over modernity is hardly able to dispense with casteist preoccupation. The most shocking is Hema's objection. Her relocation in a different country perhaps fails to bring any substantive change in her outlook. She still seems to belong to the rigid and circumscribed world which is unwilling to accommodate any aberration on caste-religion line. One psychological explanation could be that she wanted others to follow the norms she herself was subjected to. Otherwise, her opposition denotes an unusual obsession with religion or religious manifestations on the part of an urbane, educated middle class. It is as if she tries to overcome her 'distance' from her 'home' by associating herself with a set

of symbols, derived from a pristine cultural code. This may be the motive of the other opposing members of the family as well.

Coming back to Rohit, the unsurmountable pressure on him from both inside and outside the family to marry a girl within the same caste serves to expose a variety of aspects of the highly valued institution of marriage. Like many other communities in India, marriage holds immense significance among the Saraswat Brahmins. It is a social obligation to be honoured by all in conformity to their rich ancestry and tradition. The Nadkarni family inherits this tradition of the Saraswat Brahmins, along with other acquired qualifications of modern life, i.e. education, affluence and urban lifestyle. Marriage is sanctimonious to them, a custom not to be devalued on any gross fundamental and commercial considerations. Their education is supposed to make them considerate to the humanistic aspect of all these traditions. They are to be conscious of their tradition, and at the same time not to confuse blind faith with rational belief. But this seems to be missing in their opposition to marrying a caste-outsider. They would even choose a lesser-merited girl for Rohit only if she had the caste qualification. A similar approach is shown by the other middle class families, who come up with alternative proposals of suitable match. Gopal Sirur, who is the nephew of Rohit's father from his mother's side because she was originally a Nadkarni, comes to propose his daughter Tapasya for Rohit. The match is said to be perfect because it will ensure the caste-purity. Tapasya is related to the Nadkarni blood through a wide and complex network of caste-kinship – a virtuous precondition among the majority South Indian Brahmins, who espouse cross-cousin marriage to keep their blood 'clean'. What comes out from the melodrama is a set of awkward implications. First, the hysteric pro-activeness of the bride's parents undermines all sorts of modern attributes of a middle class family. Gopal Sirur does not even hesitate to kneel down before the unwilling Rohit and pray for his consent. His histrionics brings forth the misery of a bride's parents, which exists even among the educated people. Secondly, the technique of persuasion is bizarre as it involves all possible types of allurements and promise. From the girl's reported love, prospect of property, astrological assurance to emotional blackmail – everything is employed as part of the collective strategy to extract a promise from the boy. Thirdly, it also shows an absence of individuality within a family, an unusual feature for a standard middle class household. Beside these points, Rohit, on the other hand, does appear to be clever to handle the situation. He remains always silent, enjoys the "grandstand" (42) and finally,

as we find three years later, has been leading a married life with Tapasya, whose father financed his Germany-trip. He seems to be the most pragmatic guy in the family to be able to see what to grasp and what to dump. For all these reasons, Rohit's character proves a useful tool for exposure.

The character of Mrs. Nadkarni is always shown as the traditional mother. In his attempt to, first, build up a conventional image of a middle class family and, then, dismantle it by a slow and sustained process of unwrapping and digging into its secret alleys, Karnad shows the mother in most commonplace manner. She is deeply sunk into her kitchen, the only space she thinks her own. Removed from everywhere, she retreats into this small space and feels empowered over her daily squabble with the cook, Radhabai. But behind this stereotyped middle class motherhood, peeps "endless complications" (51) that disallow the situation to be as normal as it looks. The preparation for Vidula's passport and visa unearths an ominous goof-up in her birth certificate. At the place of her father's name, appears her uncle's name, Ramdas. That it was her uncle who went to the Registrar's office to record the birth complicates it more. The unutterable question looms large – did uncle Ramdas have an eye on his sister-in-law? The ordinariness of life comes to be dishevelled by such wicked insinuation, and Karnad deliberately leaves it there only to let speculation run. The mother with her middle class configuration – desire for a better life, sense of personal failure, grievances against family, wish-fulfilment through her daughter – is suddenly made to stand before an unpleasant reality. Although the revelation of 'mistake' does not derail the normal course of life altogether, it temporarily unveils a hidden avenue to a possible zone of 'danger'.

Ashwin Panje, the proposed groom for Vidula, is the other important character to peep at different shaded zones. He is an extremely successful Indian in the United States of America and proud to have done justice with the enterprising image of the Saraswat Brahmins. The man is shown as a high-flying corporate executive with hardly any time for the useless "tamasha" (25) involved in a traditional Indian wedding. Due to the family pressure, he manages somehow to extract time from his busy schedule to physically meet Vidula before the marriage. In his long-stretched monologue during the meeting, he seems to be self-deluding in his approach to life. He discovers a 'holy mission' (82) in the marriage to save Western materialism by Eastern spirituality and thus reveals a mind

which is orthodox in the matters of sexuality and caste and also submerged in a diasporic crisis of identity.

Ashwin seems to be the hyphenated Indian-American who leads an insular existence in his adopted land. A highly sought after executive in the US, he feels proud to be a part of the great Indian success story over there. He wants to be successful in America and also become an integral part of its life through the ways he thinks appropriate for it. Beside his professional success, he thinks that girl friends, affairs, mistresses, one-night stands along with glamour, social connections are the other ways of becoming an 'American'. But the man, who comes off a traditional Saraswat Brahmin family, seems to be clueless as to the ways of overcoming his hyphenated existence. All his efforts of merger fail, and he continues to be an insular immigrant. This failure seems to create a sense of discontent – dissatisfaction with the very life keenly sought after but unattained. He therefore looks back to his original land and culture as a repository to provide him with a linkage to his lost root. To cover up the refusal of his dream-land and his discontent, he seems to philosophise his retreat in order to give it a dignified look. He resorts to the clichéd binary of the material West and the spiritual East. Fed up with materialism, he adopts a look-East policy and discovers his native land as an epicentre of spirituality that can bail him out from his identity-crisis. For this purpose, marriage comes to him as the only way of self-retrieval that can connect him with his root and assure him with an incorrupt space of his own in America. The holy image of Indian womanhood, as he espouses, will be his rescuer. Woman as mother, wife, or daughter is the pivot of a family. A traditional Indian wife is, therefore, a perfect choice for this jet-set corporate man as she will embody all the pure essence of culture and remain complicit in his effort of creating 'Indianness' in the US. A holy mission indeed!

Ashwin's approach to marriage as a mission can be called self-satisfying in a cultural and racial insularity. What seems important is that it heavily relies on gender stereotypes as the only way out for this man in crisis. Despite his exposure to the vast world outside, a crude obsession with gender and caste seems to be unavoidable. The look-out for an orthodox Indian wife, visibly to have a docile embodiment of culture, is the easy way of having the authentic private world, a home-away, without self-sacrificing much. This world, most importantly, can be kept, without much resistance, on the indigenous guidelines of sexual norms. It services the male ego and, simultaneously, is

thought to make the insular existence meaningful. The Nadkarnis already have an NRI husband for their eldest daughter, and the text implies that Hema's life bears signs of conjugal disturbances owing to such 'purposeful marriage'. Ashwin, on the other hand, makes clear the purpose behind such marriage even before it happens. Another exposure is about the unusual obsession with caste. In tandem with their elders, these expatriate young men meticulously follow its callings in the matter of wedding. The purpose remains to get something Indian, as 'authentic' as possible. These uncomfortable findings about the immensely successful middle class like Ashwin make them look awkward.

Vidula is the final character in this discussion. This commonplace, ready-to-giggle girl stands unprofitable and less-sensational to the commercial gaze of the TV producer. She looks like the girl-next-door incapable of critical thinking or even drawing any serious attention at all. Her visible ordinariness, however, seems to be a deliberate construct in the play. The easy-to-ignore girlish look has lot to reveal that eludes the easy and profit-making gaze of a Tele-serial maker but not a probing playwright. Behind her ordinariness lies some shocking or uncomfortable side that unsettles her apparent image. Her marriage is the central event which provides entry into the inner landscape of the other people, and she also self-betrays a lot through her special position in it.

Karnad has made the play look like a placid tale of the joyous moment of a family assembling around a wedding. But the simplicity is deceptive because there is implicit sexuality at many unexpected nooks of the tale. The insidious mention of uncle Ramdas' name on Vidula's birth certificate, Hema's glee at her son-like Vivan's infatuation for her are some of the disturbing factors that never become loudly visible but remain strongly felt beneath the smooth plane. Vidula is also shown as a part of this world that conceals more than reveals. The innocent giggler, once as a child, had to live with their paedophilic servant Nallapa. But the most important disclosure of Vidula's inner world comes in Scene Six. In the dark cubicle of an internet café Vidula, under the secret name of Kuchla the Jezebel, sex-chats with her digital lover, Ananga the Bodyless. This becomes a world of virtual reality, a digital interface of several real-life events to give suppressed desires a free run. The most ordinary and stereotyped girl becomes shockingly unusual in this privacy of darkness and unfurls her heart in a way unimaginable in her social space. In her chat, she impersonates Radhabai's daughter, who was a kept woman of an aged trader

and lost in the crowd after his death. She seems to equate her circumscribed life in the family with the daughter of the cook. But when her present master (here, her parental family) wants to throw her out, she sounds resourceful enough to find a new master (read: Ashwin Panje) with a good fortune. Realities overlap in Vidula's digital impersonation to create an identity of the virtual reality, which is free from the social constraints. This virtual freedom reveals Vidula. First, it exposes her secret life. The girl, who appears unappealing to most, makes regular escapade to a world of forbidden fantasy and converses in the most raw-sensual idiom possible. Her verbal self-stripping during the sex-chat violates all middle class standards and puts forth a suppressed subjectivity ready to unpack itself under favourable circumstances. Karnad's language also draws attention here for its unprecedented frankness. Secondly, the scene uncovers another unusual side of her character. She has to be intimidated by the two self-styled religious commissars for desecrating the Hindu cultures in the internet café. But she proves ingenious enough at counter-alleging sexual harassment against them and getting out of the mess. This is a totally unknown Vidula who dares not only to venture into the forbidden world of sex but also use it for self-interest. Finally, this scene seems to explain her decision to marry the chosen groom, despite her personal dislike. She looks at herself as a kept woman inside her norm-bound family and, therefore, considers the marriage-option with a rich NRI a better deal, which would, at least, take her out from the present situation. Although she continues to be a kept woman with the new master, it promises her something new – a young master, life in the US, and money. Like her elder sister Hema, she also looks to the prospect of this relocation, which may bring, as she aspires, some positive change to her condition. As it happened in Hema's case, the chances of this wish-fulfilment are very minimal in her case as well, and she knows it quite well. But she thinks it better to give luck a try and dispassionately marry a man, instead of staying in the present condition, playing the 'normal' Vidula in public and the 'abnormal' Kuchla the Jezebel in the privacy of the darkened café.

In Karnad's dramatic canon, *Wedding Album* stands out for its bold analysis of the contemporary urban middle class. It examines the hidden intricacies in this class, and as a result the popular notion of a standard middle class household, along with its individual members, comes to be contested with many unnerving revelations. The dark-and-deep desires and suppressed sexuality find expressions and destabilise the placid set-up. Specially, the women, young and aged alike, suffer from suppression as their space is

visibly limited. The social callings weigh heavy even on the males that curtail their individual space. The younger generation can be found as trying to break off this collective social pressure in manners suitable to their situation. Hema's excitement over a young boy's infatuation, Rohit's inter-caste affair and Vidula's internet café adventures seem to denote the suppressed existence and the desires for escape. They, however, come to settle with the socially accepted ways, such as marrying the NRI grooms or a propertied bride selected by their family. They seem to justify their choices as the most suitable means for escaping their present condition. What becomes clear is that the younger people have a higher degree of discomfort with rigid norms than their elders and are more eager to lead a free life. But none of them looks bold enough to visibly challenge what is given and bring a change. All stick to normal ways to avoid public discomfort.

Another important aspect is the members' attitude to religious traditions. Among the elders, a rigid caste-obsession is visible that harps on maintaining the purity of blood through proper articulation of the institution of marriage. A sense of cultural insecurity in a time of change seems to augment such obsession among them. They want to inculcate their inherited view of caste in the younger generation through collective pressure and create a situation where the younger people come to conform to it. They seem to be successful as the caste-codes are strictly maintained in all the three marriages. Here one notable point is that the elders' strict caste-allegiance is always informed by a pragmatic choice of bride or groom. The essential qualification of a Saraswat Brahmin comes to be compulsorily accompanied by the need for a propertied, high-salaried, and, preferably, NRI groom; in the selection of a bride, her docility is prime concern along with her parental property. All these pre-conditions have a strong presence beside the meta-criterion of caste. The elders can, therefore, be called practical-traditionalist. The younger people, on the other hand, represent the upcoming discomfort with any religious-cultural allegiance. This educated, new-generation people can even think of the un-thinkable, such as marrying outside the caste and community, or woman enjoying on-line sex-chatting. They draw flak for their disobedience. Rohit's affair with a Christian girl faces collective opposition, and Vidula is threatened by some cultural zealots. But they cannot fully defy the enforced norms and prefer to compromise, which they find appropriate to their context. This 'appropriateness' might often spring from pragmatic concern as it is the case with Rohit. Their falling in line never means any adherence to the norms. They

remain less committed to any tradition at all, though they never totally sever link with them for their own interest. They detest blind faith in astrology and horoscope but accord with convenient caste-association. They dare to have an affair with a caste-outsider but marry within the caste. Although the global Sydney is within their reach, a local caste prejudice always persists. The US green card holder Ashwin Panje also falls within this category. He might look like a rigid traditionalist, but his association with religion or caste is as political as, say, Rohit's. He looks back to his religious root only to make his life in the US easier, an act that also satisfies the caste sentiments of the elders. As a result, none of the crises come out in the open, and the familiar image of the class is maintained. In the final assessment, none of the characters can be seen as a rebel or a nonconformist. Nor could they be called religious or traditionalist in the proper sense of the term. The visible fixation with caste, particularly in marriage, is an exercise that springs more from a practical awareness of social/personal necessity than from any religious commitment or ideology.

Both Tendulkar and Karnad successfully make the contemporary middle class wide open to critical gaze. They basically take on the middle class households and then extend their focus to critiquing the individuals in terms of their relation with the society. The probe shows a striking gap between the 'reality' and the 'ideality' of the middle class individuals. Their acknowledged image stands at odds with their hidden side. Their traditional class character with attributes such as progressive, moral, secular, casteless and culturally refined is vigorously reviewed. In their critique, Tendulkar and Karnad never try to produce any messianic character from this class to overcome the crises of this reality-ideality gap. They attempt to show the options available before the individuals located in the contemporary society and how they deal with them. The question of the middle class dream comes up – for example, that of Ramakant, Rama, Jaisingh, or the members of the Nadkarni family. The subjective interests in the dreams and their execution by the respective characters are all that explain the individuals' dealing with the varied situation. During this process, the narrative uncovers different cracks and fragile joints in the standard notion of the middle class condition, leading to a fresh outlook on it. As the middle class individuals' vulnerability to a rapidly growing commercial culture becomes visible as a major concern, so also gender, caste, too much of individualism or total lack of it come up as crucial issues that unsettle the comfortable stereotypes.

While critically assessing the class, Tendulkar appears to be as outspoken as ever. His desire to dump the so-called middle class inhibitions in order to reach out to the lowest pit of the shaded zones is phenomenal, and this is exemplified in his characters such as Sakharam and Ramakant. Through a character like Sakharam with his violence and abnormal ways, Tendulkar breaks his own “middle class barrier” (*An Interview* 10) and delves into life to interrogate the ‘narrative of normality’ on different levels. He does not hesitate to show a respectable man bringing home an auctioned woman, brothers aborting sister, extra-marital relation within a family, hardly leaving anything to speculation. This explicit manner proves effective to bring out the most dreadful realities. The end is achieved as the individuals stand naked to the demystifying gaze of the probing playwright. Karnad, on the other hand, relies on a slow-but-subtle-and-persistent narrative to expose the grey areas in his so-far-sole middle class play. A large spectrum of characters and situations is examined in a highly restrained yet penetrative manner. He is not always as outspoken as Tendulkar, though he can be so when required. A technique, which artfully presents the events, implies their significances and purposefully speculates on different probabilities, seems to suit his design. And all this is done through a narrative which gets persistently close to the heart of the household and becomes familiar with several untold stories by virtue of its easily-grown intimacy. Another thing to note, in both the writers, is the theatricality of these plays that greatly compliment the thematic purposes. The image of an elaborate middle class living room prevails over the stage as the entire dramaturgy focuses on creating an ambience of tension and volatility. The urban angst of the middle class is effectively communicated by this realist, proscenium, and modern theatre-idiom. This is not altogether new in Tendulkar, for he follows his favourite realist style. For Karnad, it is a departure from his premodern, anti-realist, folk style. The outcome is, however, worth the shift as his penetration of one of contemporary India’s most talked about social categories proves really productive.

Conclusion

Ramchandra Guha observes that there are roughly four axes the conflicts in the Indian society run along – caste, language, religion and class (xix). To these four, gender could also be added as another axis “that cuts right across them” (Guha xx). Against Guha’s wider formulation, the four axes of the present study – power politics, gender, caste and middle class – seem to imply the significance of Tendulkar’s and Karnad’s access to the social core. Undoubtedly, they are the two most keen readers of the Indian society after Independence through the medium of drama. They substantially contribute to the questioning of the state-sponsored version of national progress at various levels. Their work, however, never betrays any dogmatic approach or rigid ideological commitment in this regard. Tendulkar has sided with the political left in numerous social activisms, but his writing never shows any sign of constraint due to such affiliation in real life. Even he claims that he is “a pain in the neck as a writer” (*A Testament* 58) to his leftist mates. Karnad, on the other hand, remains a secular liberal all through his career, without clinging to any particular political brand either in real or in literary life. Their freedom from dogmatic constraints has surely added an extra edge to their critical observation underlying the plays. They unhesitatingly expose different notional realities of our socio-political life and boldly present our society as oppressive, corrupt, and unaccommodating from certain angles.

Post-Independence Indian society witnesses a postcolonial condition that espouses nationalistic consolidation on the one hand and, on the other, looks into the alternative discourses, marginalised by such consolidation. The build-up of an independent nation-state with a powerful centre is the chief goal of postcolonial nationalism or, what Partha Chatterjee has called, “mature nationalism” (*Nationalist Thought* 144). With the exit of the colonial power and the arrival of Independence, nationalism reconfigures itself to the needs of the new situation. Leaving behind the anti-colonial struggle, it now forms the nation-state. For this, the socio-cultural history of the nation demands an immediate rediscovery. Along with the politico-administrative reconstitutions, culture also needs to be reunderstood from the “post-independence theoretical and polemical positions”

(Dharwadker, *Theatres* 37). Neo-nationalism therefore revives an 'authentic' cultural past to build the nation-state with a rich and indigenous cultural heritage. It finds theatre as the most vital medium to legislate a national culture. Obviously, the 1956 drama seminar, organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi is the first theoretical exercise to this end. The revivalistic theatre, which wants to restore the classical glory of Indian theatre to the present, is an outcome of this postcolonial nationalism.

Postcoloniality vis-à-vis the post-Independence Indian society is also marked by the counter discourses to nationalistic consolidation. If nation-state is the most powerful goal, there is also the critique of it. Postcolonial nationalism vigorously pursues a decolonised nation-state but gradually questions the process of its build-up. It makes possible a self-assessment to review the functioning of the new state. As a result, multiple discourses come forth alongside the dominant discourse of nationalism. Several marginal voices become audible. The backwards in terms of gender, caste, class, ethnicity and so on are recognised. The recovery of their lost voices is an important feature of the post-Independence postcoloniality. The nationalist narrative of the nation-state is no longer the sole guiding spirit that undermines all other oppressed interests for the sake of the nation. Women, Dalits, tribals, all seem to get their recognition, rendering the post-Independence development story a 'plural' one. Indian theatre significantly contributes to this plural narrative of national progress. As a part of the post-Independence postcolonial interrogation, they question the "nationalistic postcolonial imagination" (Bhatia xxi) that calls for a powerful nation-state and its singular story of development. They question its authenticity from different parameters and foreground many an issue, which is kept away from general recognition.

Tendulkar and Karnad stand supreme among those playwrights who refuse to accept the post-Independence society uncritically. As a socio-political critique, their plays foreground several important issues. Chief among them is the development of the political culture of a newly independent state. They look at the dream project of nation-building and investigate the consequent political and administrative mobilisations. The investigation brings forth many disjunctive aspects of the hallowed project. The reign of the twelfth-century sultan, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, acts as a theatrical vehicle to analyse the hidden fissures and irrationalities of the present. One important thing to note is that the critical reading of contemporary political history here does not bear a pre-decidedly

dystopic and negative attitude. Evidently, there are attempts to re-understand the defamed sultan of history and rescue him from the stereotypes. But simultaneously, his failures and their causes are ruthlessly examined, leading to a fresh insight into the dubious reign. This attempt to understand the criticalities of the situation, the daunting task ahead before the ruler, and also the unmistakable acts of irrationality, often rationalised, problematise the discourse of "Creating a just state by just means" (Nehru qtd. in Guha 226). Sultan Tughlaq's manipulative politics to set up his ideal state raises multiple questions on the formative enterprises after India's independence. Centralisation of power, politicised development and pseudo-secularism are unmasked to interrogate the claims about national progress. The critique goes deep into the core of political corruption where we find the regimes of Ghashiram and Queen Vijaya. The danger of a democratic structure getting submerged in a totalitarian and autocratic regime always looms large. The loss of individual rights due to the rise of a draconian state, aided by the politicised state machinery and criminalised political forces, comes out as a major concern in these plays. Another aspect of the post-Independence and postcolonial state, which comes to further disturb its progressive image, is the ominous signs of replication of some of the colonial antics. The autocracy and statist rule of Ghashiram and Vijaya, with their allegorical correspondence with the post-Independence crises in democracy, challenges the claimed decolonisation. Their repressive mechanism and divide-and-rule strategy attempts to stifle the democratic rights in favour of their regime, very much in the same style of colonial masters. An almost similar reproduction seems to have occurred time and again in Indian society and politics, be it the spell of Emergency or the presence of several draconian laws/acts. On an ideological level, this concern is voiced by *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, where colonial (or neo-colonial) exigencies transcend geo-political boundaries, seriously undermining the notion of post-Independence 'difference' from the "alien rulers" (Nehru qtd. in Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 132).

Neither playwright wants to offer any ready-made, easy solution to the problems they have addressed, most reasonably because there exists none to offer. Nor is it a playwright's obligation as well! But it is true that their protagonists arrive at the sites of power relations with a seemingly disruptive or challenging posture. They seem to represent a 'difference' from the status quo, a "counter-power" (Foucault qtd. in Pickett 459) to the dominant power. But mostly, their 'resistance' seems to have become problematic. Their encounter with what they oppose greatly dilutes their claimed

'difference', and they only replace the 'old order' with another one. Neither Tughlaq, nor Queen Vijaya, nor Ghashiram was able to provide a qualitatively different condition. They all end up as clever replications of their predecessors. The unceremonious endings of Tughlaq and Ghashiram and the fabricated eulogy of Queen Vijaya by a sold-out media at the end point to this aspect. Among them, the only exception is Tipu whose claim to 'difference' from his British antagonists remains genuine to a great extent. Although he mimed the British in their military and business strategies in order to resist them, his resistance was always against the colonial system of thought in favour of an indigenous one. He never intended to bring a colonial style of governance upon his people. However, despite the above problems in some of the challenges, they still hold importance due to their opposing voices. That they come to challenge a status quo, whatever be the result, is crucial enough to expose several loopholes in the existing systems. In the plays discussed, the past, pre-colonial or colonial, is thus used to comment on the postcolonial present.

The woman question remains a major axis in the plays. The presence of gender prejudice cutting across the social strata is an undeniable reality. The patriarchal discourse is exposed as it creates 'regime(s) of silence' within or outside the home. More important is perhaps the playwrights' attention to women's counteraction. They acknowledge the endless possibilities of insubordination even in the most repressive domain. The women display a sign of dissent, however little that may be in the practical sense. Truly, Karnad's women prove more resourceful than Tendulkar's in voicing their protest. A more compromising attitude can be seen in Tendulkar's women, provoking allegation that his plays end "not with a bang, but with a whimper" (Nabar 19). But if we look at the women both in Tendulkar and Karnad as a whole, we find that none of them in fact try, so to say, to destroy or annihilate the existing structures. Their foremost intent remains to redesign the power-imbalances inside the traditional institutions and co-exist peacefully. In their final stand, they are obviously pro-marriage, pro-family and pro-husband, but unmistakably aware of the gender irrationalities in each of these social relationships. Most of them try to safeguard their interest against the formidable 'code of silence' in ways suitable to their respective situations. In the Indian context with its multiple local specificities, such as caste, class, religion, ritual, this urgency to ensure their immediate well-being in a situation-specific way seems feasible. Any ideological prescription for an outright rejection of norms would have landed these women nowhere.

Caste(ism) is another thematic axis in the plays. The age-old piety and purity of the Brahmins has, socially and historically, lost much of its sway over the people. But it still wields significant power not only over the Brahmins but also over the other non-Brahmin upper castes to form a caste prejudice against the Dalits. In this context, the ruthless de-glamorisation of the Brahmin caste upholds the absurdity of caste prejudices against the downtrodden. A character like Sakharam subverts many a Brahminic notion of our society. In the field of caste after Independence, the most important event is the rise of the Dalit movement in art, literature, social activism and politics. Both Tendulkar and Karnad have attempted a bold and critical assessment of caste activism and the rise of caste, in particular the Dalits, in politics. The upper caste approach to the whole problem remains as messianic and supercilious as ever. But importantly, the counteractive Dalit assertions come to reveal some unnerving realities. In *Kanyadaan*, it becomes equally, or even more, oppressive and biased discourse of opportunism. The character of Arun Athavale puts behind staunch idealistic Dalits such as Kaka Godghate or the radical youth like Arjun Jadhav in Datta Bhagat's *Routes and Escape Routes* and undermines the very concept of 'Dalit victim'. Tendulkar had to receive severe flak from the Dalits for being "unscientific" (Samant qtd. in Chari & Renuka 27) in his treatment of Dalit psyche. He has allegedly mistreated the Dalit character by showing him as much an oppressor as the upper castes and undermined Dalit aspirations. But it is equally 'unscientific' on the part of his critics to take Tendulkar's portrayal of Arun as his attempt to draw a monolithic image of the oppressive Dalit community. On the contrary, his portrayal tends to focus on one of the nuances of a social reality, which is relatively unacknowledged for the sake of 'political correctness'. Karnad's reading of caste politics, too, uncovers serious shortcomings in the caste ex-centric, who try to regain their lost voices. He welcomes challenges against caste hierarchy in *Tale'-danda*. But he tries to go beneath the surface realities and exposes how the predominance of communal hysteria, fanaticism and internal rivalry can rout an anti-caste movement.

The Indian middle class, which has assumed a growing significance since Independence, occupies a central position in Tendulkar. Most of his realistic social plays have an urban middle class setting. The educated, affluent, refined middle class families with their supposedly high morals and ethics dominate the stage. But their encounter with each other and the society at large renders their moral image problematic. There appears a

huge gap between their 'ideality' and reality. In Karnad's world of myth and history, a direct encounter with the middle class is rare. But his *Wedding Album* skilfully penetrates into this social segment and foregrounds realities enough to destabilise its long-held image. However, neither playwright seems to address duly one important development in the middle class. The arrival of 'new economy' since the 1980s, and more since the 1990s, signals the rapid expansion of this segment. Modern education and government jobs were made available right after Independence, thanks largely to the affirmative actions of the state (Seth 2506). This facilitated the entry of several backward castes, other than the upper caste, into the middle class segment (Seth 2506). But this expansion accelerates notably in the new liberalised economy (Varma xviii). The opening up of multiple corridors of income and license to consume brings upward social mobility to a number of socio-economically deprived people. This identity of 'consumers' has its inevitable repercussion on the general character of the middle class. This is duly exposed by both Tendulkar and Karnad. But this changing formation of the middle class, due to the new entries from the non-upper caste segments, and its possible impact on the character of the class itself lie outside their focus. This, however, does not undermine their assessment of the class as a volatile segment against a fast changing time.

The overall mood, emerging from the entire critique, surely borders on a hopeless condition. Is there any possibility of change? First, there is no ready-made, comfortable answer. Secondly, the plays consciously avoid such answer, perhaps, because that could undermine their critical thrust, which is to problematise the social 'normalities' and not to handle them therapeutically. The urgency for an easy answer to all the social issues could divert the critical focus and turn the critique into a dogmatic or propagandist understanding of reality. Therefore, the importance lies more in exposing the problematic than in prescribing any remedy for it. And such uncovering shatters popular notions about the present and hope for the future. The chaotic end in Karnad's *Tughlaq* or Tendulkar's *The Vultures* for example shocks our sensibilities and blurs our hope for an immediate way out. But such bold assessment of the situations, where some characters struggle disregarding the outcome, is perhaps necessary because this can make the society think and produce some change. Amidst despair, this ability to make the society think about itself by unveiling it seems to be the most positive sign in the plays. The crooked world of politics inside and outside the home unsettles our hypocrisies, and the efforts of some people to dissent disturb our inertia.

The mood of despair, with its intended shock-therapy for and jibe at the society, is perhaps best summed up in Tendulkar's *The Cyclist* through its absurd quest for meaning in life. The play seems to be an epilogue to Tendulkar's whole corpus, questioning the 'naturalness' of social reality, and could be a symbolic addition to the concluding chapter for the same purpose. It upholds the meaninglessness and absurdity of any effort of finding meaning and thus ridicules the human apathy towards this end. It targets no particular domain, class, section or society, but never lets any of these go unquestioned. The mood of confusion is simultaneously contextual and eternal. This balance is achieved through the co-ordination between content and form. It is the journey of a nameless cyclist, in a may-be-known/unknown setting, through a series of allegorical episodes in life. The metaphor of travel brings forth several situations. They all represent deceit, corruption, confusion which the man fails to understand. The best way to move on is, therefore, to do nothing! The best solution is "eyes closed, mountain gone" (36). As if a banter on the general misreading of the proverbial monkeys – 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil' – a maxim so favourite to Gandhi, Tendulkar ridicules the mass inertia of the society and sarcastically prescribes, 'Do nothing'. The absurdity of the travel is underscored when it is found that the cycle has no wheel at all. So, the man ends where he began. Interestingly, he looks younger after the illusive journey, but at the same time a bald patch is also visible on the back of his head. Balwant Bhaneja asserts that the play is ultimately positive in spirit because the man has unwavering faith in the journey, despite the obstacles (xi). The positive note can also be discerned in the young look of the man at the end. But it is also juxtaposed with the bald patch on his head that betrays age. He may be young because he has the self-confidence or because he has not really travelled any geographical space. But he has travelled in time. This travel has cost him his energy, without giving any result, except for a meaningless stasis. Comparing this to the general situation in India, Tendulkar has this to say, "Life here is as in *The Cyclist*. It will never change. Each day we ride our old, dilapidated wheelless cycle and go places. Breathtaking static activity" (qtd. in Bhaneja xii). After such a long theatrical journey through heavily contemporaneous characters and situations, Tendulkar seemingly makes a caustic remark on human stupidity and callousness. He avoids taking up any specific social segment to critique. On the contrary, he builds up a surrealist narrative which is contextually evocative of the human situation in general and the post-Independence Indian condition in particular. The 'absurd journey' and the 'do nothing' approach to life

can refer to the material and psychological spheres of the static situation, where our society seems to have become fully inert to find solutions. The portrayal of the painful stasis aims to whip the society up from its stupor and make it think about the problems at hand.

Although equally sceptical, Karnad never goes to such an extent of locating absurdity in life as Tendulkar does in *The Cyclist*. His *Hayavadana* could be taken for his 'epillogical' view on the critical observations underlying his plays. The play seems to capture the key to Karnad's take on the socio-political problematics – that is, the impossibility of an 'ideality'. In many of his plays, the situation is, to an extent, absurd and all challenges and counteractions can never fully yield the ideal or desired result. They, at best, can be partially successful. His women characters are very resourceful indeed in their counteractions, but even they have to content themselves with what they get under certain circumstances. Padmini (*Hayavadana*) alone can be found to blatantly claim an 'ideality' of existence, but her fate shows the impossibility of such a claim. Absurdity of life is also underscored by the horse-man in the outer-frame of the narrative. The cursed life of the horse-man with a horse's head and a human body seems to be a metaphor of the post-Independence nation. He is condemned with the horse's head, which he cannot shake off to become a "complete man" (81). Contrary to his wish, he finally becomes a complete horse – a completion that he must be content with. Karnad does not leave the horse-man in his absurd state as the 'hayavadana'. He lets him develop into a complete being, i.e. a complete horse, though it is exactly what the horse-man opposed. Unlike Tendulkar's *The Cyclist*, Karnad seems to refuse to end on a stasis. He, rather, stresses a continuity, though it might lead to somewhere least desired and expected. So a mood of disillusionment is always there in the continuity or development. And Karnad seems to emphasise this disillusionment in the 'development story' of the nation and make the inert society aware of its own disillusionment. This refusal to end on a stasis is otherwise an important feature in Karnad, though he is fully aware that this continuity can never realise the ideal. A common point can be drawn here between the two playwrights. Tendulkar's cyclist always desires to travel, despite the sheer absurdity of the situation, and so does Karnad's horse-man who self-develops, though the opposite way. Their desire to move ahead even in the most hostile situations bears a positive note. The critique seems to serve its goal. On the one hand, the hostile situation stands exposed; on the other, the individual struggles of some people counterbalance it.

A reading of Tendulkar and Karnad draws attention not only to their role as a social critic but also to the difference in their dramaturgies. They two are the most pre-eminent dramatic voices in the culture of social critiquing, and equally important is the fact that they adopt two dissimilar styles for the purpose. Karnad exploits the folk performance conventions to communicate with a modern, urban audience. History and mythology offer materials for his dramatic narratives. Karnad is, of course, not alone in doing this. But what sets him apart is his deft handling of these materials in order to suit the requirements of a contemporary reception. *Hayavadana* quite justly becomes an iconic play where modernity meets tradition in the finest way possible. In the political-cultural context after Independence, such dramaturgical formulation involves some risk. The state is desperate to create an 'indigenous', 'national' theatre by invoking the Sanskrit and folk performance conventions. Chiefly, the revival of Sanskrit theatre, projected as the mother of all folk traditions such as Kutiyattam, Yaksagāna, Chau, Nautanki, Tamasha (Dalmia 72-73), is heavily endorsed by the state. Under such circumstances, any playwright using the "roots" to critique the prevailing order has the danger of being co-opted by what he opposes (Zook 174). He/she can be branded as a conformist, toeing the state-narrative of culture. Karnad's credit lies in the fact that he has extensively borrowed materials from myth and folk and participated in the "theatre of roots", but visibly avoided any effort to revive a 'pristine', past tradition. His borrowing can better be called calculative adaptation of some conventions and devices of the past to critique the present. Moreover, the adapted mythological materials, which seemingly invoke the pristine past, are often twisted and subverted through the folklorist frame to suit the playwright's modern purposes. The whimsical Goddess Kali (*Hayavadana*), the manipulation of the snake-ordeal (*Naga-Mandala*) and Vishakha's counteraction (*The Fire and the Rain*) exemplify it.

Karnad, along with many of his contemporaries, draws inspiration from Bertolt Brecht. The concept of 'epic theatre' and 'alienation effect' (Bentley 85-96) opens up the immense possibilities of communication that a play can achieve by utilising the traditional techniques of dramaturgy. The narrator-cum-actor, chorus, costumes, fable and history in the regularly interrupted plot, all aimed at 'complex seeing' of the social reality, unveil the potentialities of folk, mythology and history for modern urban theatre. The appeal of 'alienation effect' is there to a certain extent, but Brecht seems to have provided

to Karnad, along with many others, a theoretical license to exploit the traditional, “nonnaturalistic” (Karnad, *Three Plays* 15) techniques of their own theatre of the past. The vast theatrical scope of folk conventions and the unlimited source of referable situations in mythologies as well as in history offer a fresh mode of critiquing society and also create a national theatre canon. Brecht’s influence is vital here, along with IPTA that calls for taking theatre to the common people by looking back to “our rich cultural heritage” (qtd. in Dalmia 161). Karnad is certainly motivated by all these factors and able to create his own distinguishable style within the premise of an Indian theatre. He displays an enormous command over his traditional materials. He utilises the figures of Tughlaq, Tipu, Basavanna to address crucial issues of the present. Similarly, the flexibility of folk performance is readjusted to his thematic needs. Nowhere he seems to have lost direction in the labyrinth of folk, myth or history. Nor does he end up as a political propagandist exploiting “nonnaturalistic” techniques. As his *Tughlaq* tells of the endless “incoherence and discontinuity” (Sengupta, *Being* 166) of the human subject, it also talks visibly about post-Independence political condition. This becomes possible because he most skilfully arranges for the arrival of tradition on the modern stage.

Tendulkar’s dramaturgy, on the other hand, is realistic, though his most commercially and technically successful play remains *Ghashiram Kotwal*. It gains its iconic status as an urban folk drama, along with *Hayavadana*. Tendulkar claims to have “a feeling of liberation” (qtd. in Dalmia 176), using this form. The reason seems to be the same that Karnad felt about folk conventions. The form allows the “de-glamorization” (Tendulkar, *Ghashiram Kotwal* viii) of familiar historical figures, such as Nana and Ghashiram, and offers a scope of critique that his realistic and naturalistic mode could never provide. However, Tendulkar believes, surely not solitarily, that his play’s content determines its form (qtd. in Bhaneja ix), and hence his realistic style. There may be another reason for this preference for realism over folk. After the production of his *Sari Ga Sari* (1964), a play which utilised the Tamasha form, Tendulkar discovers the problem of staging the folk form with urban actors (Hansen 79). He finds the “informality and improvisational skills of traditional actors” (qtd. in Hansen 79) missing in the urban performance. This problem points to the much debated gap between the folk (rural) style and content and the urban experiences (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 323). Habib Tanvir tries to overcome the problem through his Naya Theatre that enacts folk plays, using rural and tribal players from the Chhattisgarh region. But not to forget, Tendulkar has written

Ghashiram Kotwal (1972) even after knowing this shortcoming, and a reappearance of the urban folk style afterwards would have enriched his canon and generally the tradition as well.

Of Tendulkar's stage devices, light and sound are very important. He has used fade-ins/fade-outs of the light and its focus regularly to build the ambience. And sound works conjunctively to heighten the mood. A very notable use of light is in the ending of *Silence! The Court is in Session*. The symbolic violence of the mock-trial ends with Benare, self-assertive yet exhausted, sitting alone on the centre-stage. The light focuses on her, while the rest of the stage is dark. The spectacle seems to imply the endless persecution of Benare's brave-heart. *Kamala* also ends on a nearly dark stage where Sarita turns off all the lights leaving only one. Tendulkar is keen to make the ending positive, and Sarita's act indicates her determination to overcome her lower status. A more deft use of light can be found in *Sakharam Binder*. A major part of the play takes place in dim light or semi-darkness. Light perfectly co-ordinates with sound to create a world of sensuality and thrill. The night's calm is often disturbed by the sound of the 'mridanga', whose varying beats indicate Sakharam's changing moods. The more sensually aroused he is, the more furious its tempo becomes. The howling of dogs and the crickets chirping are also common at nights that are often disturbed by the knockings at the door by visitors. The ending attains a macabre dimension. In the darkness of night, Laxmi is digging the soil, while Champa's corpse is on the ground and Sakharam stands petrified and frozen. The rapid blows of the shovel makes uncanny sound combined with Laxmi's "muffled grunts" (198). The secrecy of the crime is shattered by Champa's husband, who is knocking at the outer door and howling for her. The sound is eerie and gradually becomes a "monotonous whimper" (198). A similar effect is achieved in *The Vultures* as well. Whenever the Pitale offspring are at their crooked game, the screeching sound of the vultures can be heard off-stage. In contrast, Rama's presence is accompanied by birds' twittering. In the gruesome, off-stage abortion of Manik, the sound of ravings, kicks on the door and violent scream in pain, accompanied by the spectacle of blood, create horror on the stage. This time the crime happens under broad light, perhaps, to suggest the blatant degeneration of the household.

One important thing to note in Tendulkar's modern urban setting is the predominance of the drawing-room and the relative absence of the bedroom. Even when

he deals with man-woman relationships in the domestic domain, the bedroom does not occupy much of the stage. In *The Vultures* alone, an entire scene (Scene Four) is enacted inside the bedroom. This absence of the bedroom does not matter much in plays such as *Sakharam Binder* where we do not have a middle class, sophisticated, drawing-room-bedroom house. There sex can take place even in the kitchen. But its relative absence in plays such as *Kamala*, *The Vultures* is an important feature to note, particularly considering the traditional place of a bedroom in a common middle class home in India. In comparison, Karnad also shows no difference when he works in an urban middle class setting in *Wedding Album*. Even an intimate conversation between an aged couple takes place in the living-room (72-77), which is visibly not much different from Tendulkar's drawing room. There is of course not much scope of the drawing-room-bedroom setting in Karnad. His stage is predominantly premodern.

In Karnad, the stage abounds in folk devices and techniques. What Tendulkar performs in his realistic style, Karnad does that through folklorist and mythological framework. *Hayavadana*, for example, explores the conventions of Yaksagāna. The use of Bhagavata, invocation to the elephant-headed god Ganesha, comic episodes, half-curtain and improvised dialogues perfectly suits the play's complex theme. The use of mask within the premise of Yaksagāna tradition is innovative in itself. Karnad decides to use mask to explore the theme of ideal identity in "greater depth" (Karnad, *Three Plays* 13). Another device is the "androgynous dolls" (Crow and Banfield 149) in the second act of the play. Along with the chorus, music and Bhagavata, the dolls continually interrupt the story and thus help "bring out the disintegrated state of the three people's lives" (Karnad qtd. in Crow and Banfield 149). The anti-realist devices also distance the action from mundane reality and place it "in the realm of the mythical and the elemental" (Karnad, *Three Plays* 13), keeping with the play's universal theme. No less rich is *Naga-Mandala* in stage devices. The story in both of the plays has a dual framework, which is skilfully executed through the folk devices. *Naga-Mandala* presents the main story through the outer frame of oral tradition. The Story narrates herself to the Man (a damned playwright) and a group of Flames (female gossipmongers of village) and thus creates the situation for an orally transmitted tale. Importantly, the paradoxical nature of the oral tale, which is independent of its teller and simultaneously exists only at the time of oral transmission, refers metonymically to the story of gender. Woman's apparently free status in the society coincides with the fact that she exists only in terms of her relation to men.

The folk/oral style works at its best in the multiple endings of the play. The audience witness multiple versions of the conclusion and symbolically participate, along with the Flames and the Man, in the act of producing meaning. The style of deciding one out of multiple options also suggests the empowered status of Rani at the end of the play. The entire play is enacted through the contrast between light and darkness (day and night). Daylight shows Rani's life of misery which temporarily ends at every night with the arrival of Naga. Her triumph at the end also occurs at night. Thus, the whole stereotype of light and darkness is subverted as Rani's 'oppressive days' are compensated by her 'freedom at nights'.

If we look at Tendulkar and Karnad for dramaturgical experiments, there seems to be a mismatch. Tendulkar's plays do not display the type of experiment with form that we find in Karnad. *Hyavadana's* outer and inner frames of narrative, *Naga-Mandala's* multiple endings and the time-shift in *Wedding Album* do not have their match in Tendulkar. The folk style undoubtedly offers Karnad much scope for experimentation, but even in his 'non-folk' ventures such as *Wedding Album*, *Broken Images*, and *Flowers* he continues to experiment with form. Tendulkar's play-within-a-play in *Silence! The Court is in Session* is noteworthy. His forte unmistakably lies in the naturalistic depiction of situation, and there he always excels. There is no doubt that it suits his sometimes ruthless and some other times deceptively naïve and tongue-in-cheek jibe at society. The caricature of the media in *Encounter in Umbugland* finds him at his dramatic best. The nursery rhyme of the reporters, their dress and gesture make them look like opportunist buffoons. An almost similar serio-comic tone, though much improved, reappears in *His Fifth Woman*. However, lengthy speech, wordy dialogues sometimes seem to be an odd feature in Tendulkar's close-to-reality language. One prominent example is Leela Benare's long and 'never-to-end' self-defence in *Silence! The Court is in Session*. Tendulkar, perhaps, would have defended it as necessary for a free spirit like Benare, caged for such a long time. But from the theatrical point of view, its necessity is debatable. His use of poetry, particularly in *The Vultures*, may be another issue for debate. Its effectiveness in the narrative is doubtful. According to Vrinda Nabar, the climax of Act Two Scene Seven is "rather ruined by the last scene" (19), which downplays the fiery reaction of Ramakant to his wife's illegitimate pregnancy with serene poetry.

Both Tendulkar and Karnad show a considerable change in dramaturgy in their later plays. *His Fifth Woman* (2004) highlights the playwright's long journey from *Sakharam Binder* (1972) to the present. A fresh style is evident in the language and form of the play. Crisp dialogue filled with sharp wit and humour, slim and swift narrative and the marvellous addition of a paranormal situation add an extra edge to the usual satire on the state of affairs. He has already written a "dark comedy" (Bhaneja x) like *The Cyclist* (2004), whose Marathi original, *Safar*, was written in 1991. This interest in dark comedy and black humour persists with a new found concern for the magical world. He has indeed come a long way from *Silence! The Court is in Session* et al. A similar change is there in Karnad as well. His easy dip into the intricate world of a South Indian Brahmin middle class family in *Wedding Album* differs from his urban folk style. There is, however, no reason to take this departure from folk as an acknowledgement of any deficiency of the form. It is perhaps Karnad's will to experiment as he had done before within the premise of urban folk drama.

In the perspective of the present study, the position of the plays vis-à-vis the society they address is always an important consideration. Notwithstanding their insight into the universal recurring situations of life, the plays are evidently embedded in specific socio-political contexts. Their relation to the social realities can be called their historicity. They are the product of a specific historical condition, where the strong sentiment of nationalism/nation-building coincides with the growing scepticism over it and the downturn of the post-Independence jubilation that used to hide many a fissure. Growing uncertainty and failures at the national level multiply discontent at large, and the plays seem to arise from this contemporary mood to critique the dominant social order. By way of scrutiny, they expose the growing irrationalities in politics, gender, class, caste and so on. Tendulkar is unambiguously disgusted over the system both in his plays and essays (*The Confession*). Karnad is no less aware than him of the situation and always remains a playwright conscious of the socio-political injustice around. As a product of the growing feelings of doubt and disbelief over what is given, the plays diagnose the ills, without prescribing easy remedies. They arise from a sentiment, which serves as an alternative to the statist and nationalist perception of the society, and, on their part, represent and interrogate the social realities to initiate a rethink. Their purpose is to hold a critical mirror to the society to make it self-aware and help construct "a society's sense of itself"

(Brannigan 426). Although easy solution is not provided, the unmistakable awareness of the situation is often 'liberatory' in itself.

One important aspect of Tendulkar and Karnad is that while representing the mood of scepticism they never surrender to any particular ideological or dogmatic position. They never let themselves be co-opted by the dominant order, in whatever field it may be, which they critique. For Karnad, the danger of co-option was greater because his use of folk and mythological resources was in tune with the state-endorsed dramaturgy for theatre. But he consciously avoids the use of folk and myth for the politics of revivalism. He is surely eager to create a distinctive identity of theatre in India, but his plays utilise their indigenous characteristics more to critique than to glorify both the past and the present. Even while representing an alternative point of view, they both refuse to be narrowly confined by any dogma. To be precise, they are never the "loyal watchdog" (Brannigan 420) of any conservative, ideological order. Their interrogation seems to display loyalty only to their individual understanding of the social realities. This is an important aspect of the historicity of their plays. For this reason, Tendulkar can churn up the society with the stunning perspectives, either on Dalit identity (*Kanyadaan*) or on common Brahmin male character (*Sakharam Binder*). Though less shocking, Karnad's intellectual freedom offers equally (or even more) distinctive insight into the issues of power politics or sexuality. Tughlaq's soul-searching against a contemporary political background does not betray any propagandist agenda of the playwright, except for a close reading of the 'presentness' of the past. Similarly, Karnad's probe into the issues of gender and sexuality displays his free, individual assessment of the women's condition. Rani's (*Naga-Mandala*) or Padmini's (*Hayavadana*) stand vis-à-vis the society does not follow any rigid parameter of gender study. This is, on the contrary, the women's independent stand, technically aided by the flexibility of the folklorist framework. Both in contesting the existing order and representing the marginalised voices, Tendulkar and Karnad remain free from the influence of what is contested and any narrow theoretical parameter of the contestator either. They try to be politically unbiased and remain loyal, as much as possible, only to their art and independent insight.

To sum up, both Tendulkar's and Karnad's plays are rich with political overtones. From power politics to sexual or caste politics, the plays' political awareness is undeniable. But most importantly, they never become political propaganda. They do not

spread pessimism; nor do they glorify any utopian prospect with an easy way-out from problems. In their critique, they capture situations of crisis where most of the individuals stand in a transition from one condition to another. The individuals have problems with the prevailing order of things. Their relation with it creates crisis in their life, and they stand in a condition where the established order becomes contested and a move to a new condition seems probable. Existence under the given system is rendered totally problematic, which reveals its hitherto unrecognised aspects. The established norms and regulations become untenable. By their acts, the individuals show the need for a change, a different condition that could end the present problems. But this new condition is not clear either to them or to us. Sometimes they only have the hope that something better will come, though they do not know how (*Kamala*). They sometimes take steps towards a future, though the future is kept unknown by the playwright (*The Threshold*). The uncertainty of the future is stressed also by offering its multiple versions, any of which can be possible (*Naga-Mandala*). Or, the attainment of an ideal future may be impossible altogether. At best, one can have partly what one wishes. The hope of the horse-headed being to turn into a complete human is not fulfilled as he becomes a complete horse instead, but there lies the joy of fulfilment and motion towards a future (*Hayavadana*). So what we find in most of the plays is a liminal condition, where the present is contested and a future looked forward to. But the future is not clear and definite either. The individuals stand between the given, yet contested, order and the possibility of a new situation. They have a strong desire for a better condition and do their best to achieve it. But the condition is largely kept under speculation and not made clear and definitive. This is why the liminal condition of struggle sometimes might appear, to use Tendulkar's words, a "Breathtaking static activity" (qtd. in Bhanuja xii) of *The Cyclist*. However, what is ultimately important both in Tendulkar and Karnad is not the indefiniteness of future but the 'unusual' acts of certain characters that show their desire to live better and also make possible the overall critique of the situation. This is why the plays cannot be tagged as either dystopian or utopian. They seem to emphasise the period of crisis and transition in the life of the individuals where they destabilise norms and look beyond.

One pertinent question may arise about the viability of English as the language of the plays. Since all the plays under discussion talk, directly or indirectly, about the society at large which hardly interacts in English, the status of the language surely raises a concern. It is true that almost all the plays are originally written in either Marathi or

Kannada, but the present study is based on their English translations for convenience of accessibility. This foregrounds mainly two issues – one, the viability of the language of the primary works which is English, and the other, the ‘problems of translation’. A total indifference to these aspects might undermine a proper understanding of the plays, since the Marathi and Kannada originals are inaccessible to the present researcher. So, on the one hand, how much successfully can the plays interact with the society (or audience) in English, when the majority of it might feel alienated because of the plays’ language? Their critique of society may become futile in its impact, if they remain inaccessible to the larger society due to the English-language barrier. On the other, the ‘problems of translation’ can mar the connotative significances of the plays’ source language.

Regarding the first issue, we must begin with the fact that drama in English still remains “isolated events” (Dharwadker, *Diaspora* 78) in India. Common audience finds it hard to accept a rustic farmer in a remote Indian village delivering dialogues in correct English. But in spite of their marginal existence, a large number of regional language plays are being translated into English. Almost all the plays of Tendulkar and Karnad are available in English translation. Tendulkar’s plays are translated into English by others, whereas Karnad himself has done the job. Moreover, both Tendulkar and Karnad have written original English plays, though few in number. What could be the reasons behind such move towards English? There must have been a readership, reception and stage-prospect of these plays. Otherwise, the playwrights would not have bothered for the English translations. The success or failure of the plays in English translation should be seen together with their original or regional language productions. A major work in a regional language (say in Marathi or Bengali) or a major Indian language (such as Hindi) creates its readership and reception. Its success often leads to its English translation for further prospects. When it is translated into English, its fame is already established by then due to its popularity among the regional theatre audience. Thus the English translation becomes possible for the success in regional language theatre. Moreover, the pre-English fame of the composition helps draw an extra attention of the English-educated audience. The English readership remains informed about the major position of the work in regional language theatre and contributes to its further fame and circulation. As a link language, English is inarguably the language of “power and prestige” (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 441) in India, and when a major work is translated into English and forms a readership, it boosts its fame and circulation further. Although the work may

be circulated chiefly in regional languages, its success in English plays a major role behind its further circulation. The recognition from the English audience, however small in number, draws media attention. The play becomes accessible to the elite upper/middle classes and other influential linguistic communities such as the national academia which converse in English. Further, it gets the chance to travel abroad and receive more attention internationally. By virtue of being in English, the play thus receives a wide visibility, thanks to the endorsement of the academia, media, publisher etc. It may continue to be performed mostly in regional languages, but the English translation contributes greatly to its canonicity. This is true of many major Indian plays such as *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Tughlaq*.

The above rôle of the plays in English translation shows the importance of English in a multilingual dramatic tradition like India. The fear of alienation is largely overcome when we see the plays in English translation in a relation of mutual benefit vis-à-vis the regional language plays. The fame of a regional language work leads to its English translation for further readership and market, and thus the English translation is 'contributed' by it. After the translation, the work's pre-English fame is clearly multiplied, and the translation now plays a 'contributory' role to the further circulation of the work in English as well as in its original and other Indian languages. Though lesser in number than the regional productions, the English translations attain more visibility due to the 'high status' of the English language in India (Dharwadker, *Theatres* 441). This wide circulation and fame, through the original and the translation, enables the work to exert influence on society. As a work either in the original or in English, it stands firm within the canon.

The original English compositions, however, occupy a lesser space than the translations. Karnad himself acknowledges, "writing in English about characters who are presumably speaking in an Indian language for audiences for whom English is a second language is not a situation conducive to great drama" (qtd. in Dharwadker, *Diaspora* 80). They get the attention of the academia and media and establish a critical readership across the nation. But this seems insufficient as they do not have the advantageous situation enjoyed by the English translation plays. They seem to miss the mutual relation of benefit, existing between the English translation plays and their originals. Original English plays have to work without the mass circulation and fame of the regional

language theatre. They, however, draw the western attention, perhaps, more easily than the translations. This is because most of them are written, keeping in mind the demands and expectations of the western audience, along with the English-educated audience in India. This is true of plays such as *His Fifth Woman*, or *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*.

Apart from the appropriateness of English as a language in Indian theatre, there is another problem concerning the English translation plays – that of translation itself. Most of the plays under discussion in the present study are in English translation. Only one play of Tendulkar (*His Fifth Woman*) and three of Karnad (*The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Flowers*, *Wedding Album*) are original compositions in English. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* is special in the sense that it is first written in English and later translated into Kannada, which is a rare act in the field of translation in Indian drama because mostly the regional language or ‘Bhasha’ texts are translated into English and not the other way round. The quality of English translation always causes much debate. Mahesh Dattani puts it straight that the language is often stilted, either too academic or too literally translated, totally cut off from real speech (170), and hence his originally written English plays. Translation, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak observes, “is the most intimate act of reading” (96). The translator’s unfamiliarity with the context of the source language (for example, Kannada or Marathi) can destroy this intimacy, and “the rhetoricity of the original” (Spivak 97) can never be reproduced in the translation. Apart from this weakness of the translator, there may also be insufficiency in the target language required to correctly reproduce the cultural connotations of the source language (Karnad, *Gesture* 218). This is explained by Karnad in the appendix of his play, *The Fire and the Rain* (63). He despairingly shows the insufficiency of English in bringing forth the profound implication of the original title of the play *Agni Mattu Malé* and concludes that the translation that he himself has done is “only an approximation to the original” (63). This is perhaps true of all Indian plays in English translation. Given this problem, one must admit that any study solely based on them has some limitations in truly appreciating the cultural connotations and “rhetoricity” which are implicit in the original language and often lost in the English translation. A full investigation into the ‘gaps’ between Tendulkar’s and Karnad’s ‘bhasha’ plays and their English approximations is still awaited.

Problems about Indian drama in English are many, but on the other hand their vast potential in the country's entire theatre-landscape is undeniable (Ahuja 313). Their appearance in English provides them a national (as well as international) readership and further circulation through many other languages. With national recognition, they become a significant part of the multilingual Indian dramatic canon. They lag behind the regional language productions in terms of stage-visibility but attain a pan-Indian status, owing largely to English. This is true of Tendulkar's and Karnad's plays. Most of their plays are translated into English and have a large readership cutting across different linguistic groups in India. The cross-linguistic familiarity through English results in their reproductions in many other Indian languages and their national recognition. Therefore, the English language plays of Tendulkar and Karnad (translations and originals) are important occasions to canonise the plays in the multilingual dramatic tradition of the country.

English is, of course, never the sole/most important factor for the national fame of the plays under discussion. In fact, language cannot be, to quote Chaman Ahuja, "the quintessential core – more so in theatre which, as a composite art, involves numerous other arts, too" (299). The plays stand on the merit of what and how they talk to their audience – their thematic content and technique. In this respect, they are the creative aspirations of the post-Independence and postcolonial condition. They respond to the call for an Indian tradition of theatre by formulating distinctive dramaturgy and critiquing society in a way that reflects the contemporary mood of growing uncertainty and questioning. Their assessment is boldly insightful to problematise the perceived notion of social realities. Such a critique is matched by inimitable theatrical styles. Tendulkar's deceptive plain-speak and Karnad's technical exquisiteness seem to be perfectly in place to deal with the contents of their work. Karnad's use of folk, myth and history for urban audience is well suited to the new desire for indigenous theatre. Tendulkar also addresses a newly-emergent situation in a distinctive way. New subjects like nation-building, its crises and many other marginalised issues such as caste, gender feature in their plays. As a whole, the plays represent the mood of the new nation, which wants to self-examine in every respect, and help redefine the Indian theatre canon after Independence. For this, they had to excel in dealing with the newly emerging society at hand. Their re/appearance in English merely acts as a contributory factor for their further success in the multilingual Indian dramatic tradition.

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