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-indigenousness. 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 'naturality'/'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 breath-taking 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 indigenousness 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

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.