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 'problematising' 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 *Tuqhlaq* 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,

Vinsent 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 indigenousness, 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 manoeuvrings, 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 'bizarrisation' 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 ghettoes. 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 advice (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, befriending 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 misconstruction 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 indigenousness. 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.