Chapter II

Reflecting Inequalities and Socio-Political Conflicts

The Indian subcontinent is an arena of sharp identity clashes, class, caste, creed, religious, and political clashes. Multiple identities exist based on social, political, cultural, and economic factors and their mobilizations overlap. A lack of homogeneity paves the way to the rise of various political parties and conflicts. There are many pitfalls in the democratic functioning in India and as a result, good governance in India has become a casualty. On the one hand, there is an upsurge of sudden hi-tech growth; on the other, there are gloomy sides from political unrest to widespread developmental snags. There are various crises that haunt India like poverty, violence, rampant corruption, societal instability, inequality and so on. Four plays, Alipha and Samara’s Song by Poile Sengupta, A Pipe Dream in Delhi by Anuradha Marwah, and Night’s End by Gowri Ramnarayan are chosen for a critical study in this chapter against the backdrop of contemporary social and political circumstances. They become exceptionally simulating because they reveal the complexities of modern day life and examine the issues like social inequality, political conspiracies, sufferings of the marginalized like tribals, deep-rooted corruption and so on in contemporary India.

Poile Sengupta’s Alipha

Alipha, anthologized in Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play, is a play with only two characters just named MAN and WOMAN, a politician and a social activist respectively. Their lives are indirectly connected and they are gradually exposed to the audience in the course of the dramatic action. MAN and WOMAN do not meet each other on stage. Their domains are demarcated and they meet the audience alternately. During the course of the action, the two narratives dovetail, yet each storyline is independently carried forward. The play touches on small town politics, on the selfless
efforts of social activists and on social and economic inequality. But these issues are really the backdrop to human emotions – love, lust, greed, anger, hate, and revenge. Ultimately, it is the personal tragedy of the characters, the waste of human endeavour, which is paramount (*Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play*, hereinafter referred to as *WCS 215*). The playwright in her introduction to the play says, “*Alipha* carries echoes of the other one-hour play in the same anthology, *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*. They were written as companion pieces, but are not related except by the deliberate repetition of a few lines and by the leitmotif of revenge. The difference between the two lies in that, while revenge is explicitly the theme of *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*, it is depicted, in *Alipha*, as the promise of justice” (*WCS 215*).

As the play begins, WOMAN as a young girl is seen talking to her unseen friend Asma and her dialogues appear as a dramatic monologue. It is like Sanskrit *janantika* and *apavarita*, in which two characters exchange ideas or reactions which are not intended for others, or to say something which is heard by all the other characters except the one who is being spoken to. WOMAN talks to a friend in her girlish language and shares her daily experiences with her. She starts her conversation by revealing their misunderstandings. WOMAN’s friend Asma hails from an affluent family whereas WOMAN hails from humbler circumstances. WOMAN lost her parents and was brought up by her aunt, an unnamed woman. WOMAN’s father was a social activist who fought for the people’s rights and she does the same now. He married a poor widow against his family members’ wish. “The family promptly disowned him. So he went to another town looking for a job” (*WCS 229*). He had died a few weeks before WOMAN was born and his wife died soon after giving birth to WOMAN. When WOMAN’s mother died, her aunt took her to her father’s town. Only WOMAN’s “uncle was alive and he has a very very suspicious wife and three daughters. But he took pity on my aunty and somehow got her a job in the
municipality school and allowed her to stay in this broken down two room house” (WCS 230).

WOMAN’s aunt, who lives in poverty, struggles to bring up her sister’s child. She wishes to send her to good school; so she accepts the way suggested by the postman, WOMAN’s uncle and satisfies MAN’s sexual desire by getting money from him now and then which has become a “hard unending pleasure” to MAN (WCS 221). But WOMAN does not know this and wonders why her aunt leaves her inside the room and locks the door every night. She also expresses her willingness to join an English medium school to learn the English alphabet. As she wishes, her aunt buys shoes, dress, white socks and puts her niece in the English medium school where she gets a double promotion and studies with her friend Asma. MAN has become “a benefactor . . . a blackmailed philanthropist . . .” (WCS 222).

From her adolescent phase into womanhood, many things have happened in WOMAN’s life. Her aunt passed away and her friend Asma has moved to another school as her father got a transfer. Now her communication with her friend is in the form of a steady correspondence by post: “you are only in my mind now” (WCS 226). It is like “the rest of the world had disappeared” when Asma left her (WCS 226). WOMAN’s life and her relationship with the other characters in the play are shrouded in mystery and everything is inter-related: “why is there all this mystery?” (WCS 227) The postman is WOMAN’s father’s brother and her aunt is WOMAN’s mother’s sister. “The old postman is my uncle! My dead father’s older brother! My own uncle!” (WCS 229) The postman has performed all the funeral rites to WOMAN’s aunt. All these relationships are gradually exposed to the audience.

WOMAN joins in an anganwadi meant to teach the alphabet for the children of the factory workers. She is service-minded and does her work sincerely. “We have no books. So I draw the letters on the floor with chalk and I explain the drawings” (WCS
231). Thereafter she has been promoted to teach adults, especially women, and handles “literacy classes for adult women” (WCS 232). From this change, WOMAN’s growth is traced gradually. She confesses to her friend that she could not teach them “alipha” (alphabet) because they are intelligent women who run households and not just five-year-old kids. She uses Indian epic stories and myths to teach adults and prepares her own textbooks. Myths can be used to teach human behaviour and life in general and WOMAN not only teaches but also consoles suffering women and gives them hope to live their lives. They undergo domestic violence and “alipha” words remind them of their sufferings: “oo is when he pushes her out of the house . . . ooo . . . is . . . . It’s a tale of unending horror . . . unrelieved darkness . . . blinding darkness” (WCS 234). The play highlights women’s empowerment through learning. The teaching of the Indian alphabet through corresponding sounds that are distilled human emotions like pain, fear, surprise, pleasure and so on is fascinating. Domestic violence in India is a serious threat to many women, and it is endemic and widespread. Kalpana Sharma in her article “In the Line of Fire” says “we have to tackle the system of patriarchy, where men believe they are entitled to control the lives and actions of women, where men believe they ‘own’ the women related to them, and where men see nothing wrong in punishing the women who dare question or try and upset the established systems that guarantee their superior status in our society” (3).

MAN addresses the audience directly in the first person throughout the play and he remains the same age since much of his narration relates to his past and his narration covers about twenty years. On an evening, he revisits his life in retrospection and the audience are gradually informed about the circumstances that have led to the present state of affairs. In a confessional tone, he unveils his mind to the audience: “Things have not
been fine since I was twenty” (WCS 218). He was rusticated and expelled from college for his misbehavior with one of his lecturers. He is the son of a power-wielding political personage and self-serving one too. To MAN’s father, “his post was more bloody important than his own son” (WCS 219). He is just a status-seeker and in his opinion, “Everything in his life was either politically useful or not useful . . . including paternal love. Love for his only son . . . his only child, dammit” (WCS 225). When MAN misbehaved with one of his lecturers, the news was brought to the knowledge of the higher authorities. Stung by his pride, MAN’s father didn’t allow his son to go to college. He “sent me to the stinking family house in his constituency and stopped me from showing as much as my nose in the city” (WCS 219). In his confinement, MAN started living a wayward life wallowing in riches. He does not have any aim in life. “I only wanted to enjoy life . . . not to give anyone any trouble . . . drink a bit . . . have a woman now and then . . . that’s all” (WCS 231). He is a storehouse of lust and even many a woman could not satisfy his. According to him “if rape is inevitable lie back and . . . enjoy it . . . . So that’s what I did . . . I decided I would enjoy myself in exile . . . .” (WCS 219). “Drank myself blind . . . that night I was taken through winding lanes to a small cottage . . .” (WCS 220) where he experienced his first sexual pleasure with WOMAN’S aunt.

MAN gets the maximum pleasure from her and he did not bother about the woman’s name or her house or her position. “What use had I for her name . . . her house number . . . . How did all that matter to me?” (WCS 223); “I called her a different name each night . . . the names of my girlfriends . . . of the women I had lusted after . . . the ones I had fantasized about . . . .” (WCS 224). Simone de Beauvoir is right in her view that the male gaze treats women as objects. For man, woman “is sex absolute sex, no less” (16). Here MAN does not consider her a woman but, “she was the body of a woman who knew its job” (WCS 223). He has “an obsession . . . a straightforward sexual obsession”
(WCS 223) and many a woman couldn’t satisfy his lust for nine years. When the postman said about the woman’s death, MAN could not believe it and expressed his fury: “dammit, a woman can’t die just like that” (WCS 226). He could not tolerate his being left alone by that woman and so he decided to take revenge on her: “I wanted to hit out at her . . . hurt her . . . make her cry in pain. I wanted revenge. Revenge. So I . . . I decided to stop paying the school fees” (WCS 227).

MAN confesses that “apart from the sensations of the night I didn’t have much of a life those days” (WCS 225). He accompanied his father to all official functions like blood donation camps, the inauguration of water supply schemes, sports day celebration at the English medium school and so on. His father loves him for political reasons as he is his political heir. MAN’s father represents the pan-Indian politician who needs to “charm and confound the masses” during their political visits. MAN follows the path of his father and all the tricks of the political trade: “I get that from my father . . . the being distinguished” (WCS 218). Before entering into politics, MAN started involving in all contemptible activities. He invites DSP to his home and gives him drinks (scotch) and bribes him to arrest the postman but the policeman insisted on the correct reason and proof and this filled him with fury.

In the gap of nine years, two elections have gone by. By the time campaigning started for the second election, MAN’s father was terrified. “He begged me to join him. Join his party. . . . But I was the leader of a major trade union . . . I had power . . . I had money . . . I had men who would do anything for me” (WCS 233). He stood against his own father and won the elections and using his power, he had conquered all his enemies. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. As this saying goes, MAN has changed into a power-monger. Too much power has corrupted him and he has the feeling that he can do anything with his power and money. With his control and authority over others, he becomes evil-incarnate and takes revenge on all his enemies. He enjoys his
political power, “Power! Sweet power. Better than alcohol” (WCS 234). “The world was at my command . . . the men in the palm of my hand. They were like human dice . . . I could set them up . . . I could throw them down . . . I could do what I bloody liked with them” (WCS 235). But even this political dominance has not satiated the lust in him. He says “Power! Sweet power. Better than alcohol. Better than . . . no. I still wanted her” (WCS 234). MAN’s manoeuvres to gain political ascendancy induce him to indulge in the game of eliminating opposition through nefarious activities. He is “the modern Shakuni . . . the successful Shakuni” (WCS 234).

The lives of WOMAN and MAN are separately carried out throughout the play but they are inter-related in some way. When MAN sees WOMAN, his mind harks back to the woman with whom he had his first sexual exploit. WOMAN too smells jasmine odour and recollects her enjoyment with Asma. She says, “I can’t live without you . . . your thoughts outline mine . . . the world is alive because you’ve touched it . . . I am you . . . I am me . . . I am us together. Was there ever such a love?” (WCS 239) which shows the affinity between them. Jasmine stands as a symbol which connects both WOMAN and MAN.

Through WOMAN’s eyes, other issues like poverty, corruption, and the harsh treatment of women in every rung of social hierarchy are highlighted. All the other characters are also introduced through WOMAN. Women, whom WOMAN teaches, lead a very miserable life. “It’s not just the poverty. That’s bad enough. It’s also the rules that they have to follow . . . because they are women” (WCS 233). In this macho society, everything revolves around patriarchy. The odds are stacked up against women despite their taking radical and pro-freedom choices. In an inaugural function at the National Conference on “Education and Women Empowerment” Kalpana Sharma opines, “The mindset of the men should be changed. They think that if they beat their wives, they can make them listen and obey them. Yet, the literacy level is high but still there is domestic
violence. Until and unless we are not changing the mindset of the men there will be domestic violence, rape and abuse” (Web).

Corruption is ubiquitous and it affects the day-to-day life of the people. It has assumed such enormity that none can remain untouched by it. The dramatist does not hesitate to highlight and pinpoint the corruption in high positions and in politics. As a teacher in an anganwadi, WOMAN stands up against corruption there. Teachers working there steal milk and food, and it is mainly done by the girlfriend of Babu, a friend of the politician MAN. With Babu’s support, she does everything boldly. Babu is the faithful worker of MAN and his right hand. He is “strong as an ox and nearly as intelligent. He has a busty girlfriend who works at the child care centre and who apparently has been accused of stealing” (WCS 236). She was caught by Devi when she was carrying two bags full of food stealthily to her house and handed over to WOMAN. MAN pretended to be honest when Babu’s girl friend was caught red-handed. He promised them to make an enquiry and if the teacher was found guilty, she would be dismissed but he was a hypocrite.

Devi was gang-raped by the politically-affiliated trade union workers, Babu and his friends all “stinking drunk.” “Devi is dying . . . they raped her . . . two of them . . . and then whipped her with a bicycle chain” (WCS 239). To save his image, MAN, who is nicknamed the red gooseberry eyes by WOMAN, pays money “and told them to get the hell out of town” (WCS 239). Knowing this, WOMAN promises to take revenge on Devi’s assaulters. The nexus between politicians and trade union groups is exposed here. The increasing number of criminal gangs under political patronage has become a potential threat to public space in India and again. Politicians also thrive today supported by the muscle power from anti-social elements and historysheeters.

WOMAN as a social activist fights out her friend Devi’s assault by garnering the support of women’s groups. “All the women’s groups in the district have come together
. . . they are demonstrating outside the police station . . . in front of the district magistrate’s office . . . the trade union office . . .” (WCS 240). But common people won’t come forward to go against the politician as they are aware that it will put an end to their lives. “But nobody here will go against the trade union . . . the police are refusing to look for Babu” (WCS 240). Finally MAN decides to eliminate WOMAN and goes to her home. She finds herself a victim of unscrupulous politicians and rampant corruption. He reads the diary lying on the table and comes to know the truth that WOMAN was the one for whom he paid the school fees. After knowing the truth, he is not at peace. “You see me sitting here in this old armchair . . . sitting back . . . smoking . . . apparently at peace. But you are right. I am not at peace” (WCS 241). He eliminates her and in the public eye, pretends to be innocent. He says, “I will go to the factory and get them to open it . . . I will attend her funeral and make a heart-rending speech . . . I will praise her work and pray for her soul” (WCS 241). Like most of the politicians do, he gives false promises to people and tries to turn everything to his advantage. MAN tries to erase all proofs and evidences in WOMAN’s murder and continues to live a hypocritical life. “The matter will all die down in a few days” (WCS 241). The play reflects the other face of India and opens its underbelly for the people to realize, satirizing contemporary politics.

Allusions to Indian Epics are a reminder of the past, and point that Man hasn’t changed much from the days of yore. Epics are viewed from a child’s perception. The incident of Ravana’s eyes going red is given an innocent reason as, “I think soap must have went into his eyes” (WCS 219). Child’s imagination runs riot here with a pinch of humour with its lack of proficiency in English. WOMAN compares MAN with Ravana as the latter’s eyes are red: “He looks as if he drinks liquor instead of water” (WCS 224). “Did you see his eyes? Like red gooseberries. Like Ravana’s eyes” (WCS 225). “Babu is part of red gooseberry eyes’ gang . . . . He looks more and more like a Ravana” (WCS 236). One of her students, Devi, questions WOMAN, “why did Gandhari wear a bandage
round her eyes?” (WCS 235) These illiterate women are compared to Gandhari, who blindfolded herself when she came to know she was to marry a blind man. But these women in this play are blindfolded intellectually. They suffer from intellectual blindness and “Blindfolding is just a way of escape” (WCS 235).

MAN plans very skillfully to take revenge and eliminate his enemies from this world. He is compared to Shakuni in the *Mahabharatha*, the embodiment of cunningness. MAN says, “I would be like . . . Shakuni . . . that schemer from the *Mahabharatha*” (WCS 232). Babu’s girl friend is compared to the rakshasi Shoorpanakha. “She looked like a rakshashi . . . like Ravana’s sister Shoorpanakha” (WCS 237). MAN pretended to be honest and upright when Devi caught Babu’s girl friend red handed. Women and men adored him: “he was like Lord Rama . . . kingly and handsome . . . such a fine face” (WCS 237). WOMAN confesses to her friend Asma about her habit of frequent referring to the Hindu mythology. She says, “I suppose it’s because all these stories are a part of me. My religion gives me a god for every occasion . . . every mood . . . every life stage” (WCS 238). WOMAN also talks about the idol worship and those who worship without idols. Her friend Asma is a Muslim girl and they worship the formless Allah that defies description. “But I think we do it because we feel everything is god . . . there’s nowhere where he is not. All the abundance of life is him . . . all the essence of life is also him. My religion shows me the abundance . . . yours the essence” (WCS 238). Gradually WOMAN’s speech moves up to the philosophical plane stating the truth that all gods are one and basically they preach one philosophy. Placing two unnamed characters in the centre stage, the play highlights the present socio-political scenario in India.

*Alipha* looks at women as a victim of patriarchy at one end of the scale and at the other, as one gaining empowerment in the wake of new awareness among women in the contemporary world. Devi falls victim to the heartless masculine predators and the character WOMAN comes up with a defence mechanism to survive such sexual assaults
either in the public space or in the domestic space. Efforts taken to encounter injustices fall through sometimes as illustrated by the death of the protagonist WOMAN. The guilty go unpunished for the law-makers work hand-in-glove with the law-breakers. These social manifestations reappear again and again as archetypes across the pages of Indian history, emphasizing the truth that man can never be free from his basic instincts.

Poile Sengupta’s Samara’s Song

Samara’s Song, taken from the same anthology, Women Centre Stage: The Dramatist and the Play, is explicitly political and it grew out of author’s growing concern with issues of politics and governance. Sengupta in her Introduction to the play says, “Over the years, I became increasingly concerned with issues of politics and good governance” (WCS 283). Democracy is a form of government in which people are governed by their own elected representatives and it is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people. The principle behind all this is that any citizen can aspire to political leadership who is directly or indirectly elected by people. Sengupta puts forth some questions in her Introduction to the play: “Is this really possible? Do democracies, especially fledging nations, actually uphold democratic principles? Or is equality only a slogan, a remote ideal? Was Plato right when he said, ‘democracy passes into despotism?’” (WCS 284) It is in this context the play is set and Sengupta tries to find answers to these questions in an imaginary kingdom Eos where monarchy exists. In an interview with Anita Singh, Sengupta replies, “The play is about flawed and corrupt political leadership of a dictatorial “democracy” against which people rise in rebellion” (88). This multi-layered play deals with political power and people’s efforts to gain power. Like the Big Brother in George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty Four, a woman with her harsh voice is invisibly omnipresent to wield power among the masses in the democracy, Eos.
The play shows the gap between the voice and the voiceless and many other issues have been brought to centre stage. Set in an imagined land, the play works both on literal and metaphorical level. Eos was ruled by a king who has recently died and his death remains a mystery to the people of the country. The King has a son named Ashti by his first wife who is to ascend the throne. Thandwai, King’s second wife, takes over the reins of administration, literally from behind the screen. Thandwai has a son, Deyeth who “is about eighteen and has the pale, languid look of an invalid but with the bright eyes of extraordinary intelligence” (WCS 299) and a daughter, Sabah who is about thirty, an unmarried woman. The iron-fisted lady Thandwai very skillfully expelled the king from the world by poisoning him and managed to exile Prince Ashti for many years. A parallel can be drawn from Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* where a wife, Gertrude colludes with her paramour to do away with her husband. Similarly, it echoes a scene in the Indian epic, the *Ramayana* where Kaikeyi under the misguidance of Kooni forces her husband, King Dasaratha to exile Rama, the legitimate heir to the throne and put her son Bharata on the throne.

The play is a political allegory roughly reflecting the contemporary Indian political atmosphere and addresses a gamut of contemporary issues. Sengupta structures the dramatic action in the play along society’s broadly triadic hierarchy of political leadership, bureaucracy, and plebeians. Wrapped within the narrative of an epic, the play explores the distinctions among democracy, governance, and dictatorship. Sravasti Datta in her article entitled “Politics at Play” observes, “the plot unfolds along a well-crafted narrative that tells a story at all the three levels slipping between street, office, and palace while making disparate and restrained disclosures that eventually limn a much larger web of chicanery and death” (Web). *Samara’s Song* is a play of political conflict for power and consequent clash of various power centres and their intrigues, espionage, and counter-espionage. It exposes clearly Thandwai’s political machinations and stratagems.
to capture political power and the kingdom. Thandwai was actually a woman who looked after the minions of the then queen mother and it is revealed through the annals of history of Eos chronicled by the impaired men in the play, one blind, one mute, and one deaf: “. . . a pretender to which the then queen mother strenuously and enthusiastically allowed her minions to . . .” (WCS 317).

The opposition was unaware of the suspicious death of the President. People are helpless and they don’t do anything against it, “so the masses never something something trade nevertheless carried on as before” (WCS 317). Though “the international press smelt something fishy” about the death, “there was no anxiety among the stewards of the world” (WCS 317). There is a nexus between the administration, judiciary, and the media. It is not real democracy and Thandwai’s rule has failed to provide stability and overall growth for its citizens. The so-called democratic country Eos is a land rife with hardships, including scarcity of water and rumours of violence, conspiracy, and repression. The plebeians live in the underprivileged section with a fierce survival instinct. As the play opens, lights are focused on the street where the plebeians live and it showcases the living condition of the poor people who struggle for drinking water. They did not get drinking water for the past three days. When the water comes, they rush to the tap and place their pots. They also start fighting for water, “this water gorment is giving. That is why it is coming in small small miser drops. When heaven gives, it is coming big, with so much force, like king’s pee” (WCS 286). The street people satirize the poor functioning of government and its apathy towards its subjects. As they get water after three days, they want Samara, Arrah’s daughter to sing a song of celebration: “See today is good day. Water has come. After three days, water has come. Sing. Because we have water, sing” (WCS 288).

Samara, a tongueless girl, “sings a song without words, high wailing notes that speak of dry desert winds, of famine and thirst, of despair in the human heart. And then
the notes soften and the song is now a lullaby, tender, hushed, welling with a mother’s love and hope” (WCS 288). Through the poverty prevailing among the lower strata, the playwright also highlights the necessity of water: “Even if somebody dies, water we want, no?” (WCS 298) Even after sixty seven years of Independence, one fourth of the population in India lives below the poverty line. They go to bed on empty stomachs and live without access to drinking water and many people still struggle for existence. The imaginary place Eos is nothing but the hidden face of India.

The plebeians represent an uninformed public, mostly they are ignorant and indulge in scandal-mongering. In the real world, people like them remain as impotent critics who just stay behind only by commenting and without initiating any useful action. They remain universalized and believe what is said as unwritten rule. When Thandwai took over the administration, “emergency had been clamped in the guise of mourning” (WCS 317). The subjects of Eos gather at a place where the “light of the screen flickers on them” in which “sad, elegiac music is heard, and accompanying it, a harsh female voice” (WCS 290). Thandwai’s harsh female voice, from behind the screen, expresses her false depressed state of mind for king’s demise and tries to earn sympathy from the people addressing them as “Beloved people of Eos.” She says, “My heart now lies broken and I dare not appear before you till I have overcome my deep sorrow . . . . Time is a great healer, they say, so let time be my partner in grief till I once more be amongst you” (WCS 291).

The play is a satire on the contemporary politics and politicians. Thandwai is the representative of today’s politicians who go to any extent to gain political power. Thandwai addresses them very cleverly from behind the screen and avoids her physical presence that may betray her dark intention. Her presence behind the screen symbolizes the universal presence of evil. She is very manipulative. After the death of President, she remained off stage without facing others including her children and finally makes her
appearance after Prince Ashti’s death to take over the throne. Though Thandwai is a widow, she “has whole country in her fist. Even his father’s dead face he did not see” (WCS 291). If a woman wills, she can make or mar a man or a system. Thandawi has a negative shade and lurks even in her absence on the stage like the ubiquitous evil. Bureaucrats, who dance to the tunes of the authorities, terrorize the plebeians and treat them as “dogs”. The plebeians are mistreated in an inhuman manner and are forced to behave as they are dictated. Amidst all the treacherous court politics and various manipulations of the bureaucrats, the people of the country silently tolerate her and desperately wait for the return of the long exiled prince Ashti, whom they consider their redeemer to save them from their despair and yearn for the real democratic government. Thandwai is so powerful that the bureaucrats, historians and all administrators obey her commands.

The bureaucrats Hamun Krabi and Uri are “older” and “clearly of the elite class, dressed quietly, in well-cut business suits” (WCS 292). Hamun is the close friend of Prince Ashti and eagerly expects his arrival whereas Uri is the supporter of Thandwai and executes her orders along with Hamun. Uri pretends to support Ashti with Hamun but he has a grudge against him from his college days. Both fervently express that they too, like people, expect the return of Ashti and believe that “he is the only chap who can get us out of this mess” (WCS 293). They sometimes play the same tricks on Thandwai that they learn from her. They were entrusted with a commission by Thandwai some six months ago to find a suitable groom for her arrogant daughter Sabah. So they zero in on a street ruffian named Gandava as groom for Sabah just to get rid of her before Ashti comes.

Gandava, one among the plebeians, often seen with Wokha’s henchmen, is a man about thirty and a ruffian, “quick to seize an opportunity, resentful that he has not had opportunity enough to seize” (WCS 292). He is dressed in “rather shabby clothes but has a flashy finger ring and wears a brightly coloured scarf across his shoulders” (WCS 292).
Before he got the opportunity to work at the palace, he loved Samara, but later he has changed his mind: “First it was for Samara I was happy . . . I will make her wife . . . I will for her bring clothes, anklets, gold eardrops . . . all for Samara. I will make her queen, my Samara . . . But now . . .” (WCS 298). He is ambivalent because he could not escape the clutches of the executives of Thandwai. They treat him in a callous manner and Gandava tells Samara about his being trapped by the ministers: “I’ve lost everything . . . Samara . . . my eyes . . . my ears . . . my tongue . . . What do I do?” (WCS 331)

The two ministers, Uri and Hamun, plan all the arrangements to make Thandwai and Sabah believe Gandava to be a perfect groom. They have “located a suitable person” who is “completely trustworthy” (WCS 320). They use inauspicious signs in Sabah’s horoscope in favour of them and create a story of royal birth for Gandava that “he came wandering here when he was about six or seven . . . totally traumatized . . . couldn’t recall parents’ names . . . had no papers . . .” (WCS 310). Uri tells Hamun, “He doesn’t need a birth chart. He has a royal birth mark. And in any case, his recorded life history started today, with us . . .” (WCS 311). This stands as proof for how their recording of history would be. From an uncouth rogue, they change Gandava into a “fine specimen” (WCS 312) by giving him a bath, dressing him with silk costumes and changing his name as Royal Highness Prince Rauk. They correct his diction and prohibit him from speaking his native Kurubiri language. Hamun certifies that he is “a fine specimen of maleness” (WCS 320). On hearing this, Thandwai blindly announces the engagement. By changing an ordinary man into a royal man, they rewrite history as they wish.

Gandava is a tailor-made weapon used against Thandwai and what she does boomerangs. Violence breeds violence and the poisoned sword that she stretches out is turned towards her when she tries to be over smart. She is overwhelmed by the dazzle and becomes blind to play herself into the hands of her enemies. She is thus outsmarted and at last the good triumphs over the evil. However, there is no perfect poetic justice as in
"Hamlet," but the evil is obliterated at the cost of certain good elements. Now the country is free from further exploitation and the nation will definitely emerge from the dark to see the dawn of a new era under a new dispensation.

Sabah is very careful in choosing her bridegroom but Thandwai regards her daughter as her rival and fixes marriage to get rid of her soon. It is only through the historians, their relationship is exposed that they “can only speculate on the intense but uneven relationship between the First Lady and her daughter. It seems to have been a bond, made up as much of a feeling of betrayed love, as of blackmail” (WCS 322). One of the ministers, Hamun, reads the gossip column in a newspaper about Sabah and her groom Royal Highness Prince Rauk. After that Thandwai starts to hate Gandava for being closer with Sabah who calls him her “pet” and fear that it would be dangerous for her political status. She is so blinded by megalomania that she renders herself paranoid, suspecting her own daughter.

Politics is a very complicated business. The ruler is the puppeteer and the subjects of the country are mere puppets. While the play explores the politics of governance in a democracy, it also reflects the politics inherent in all human relationships. The ultimate tragedy is of those who cannot articulate, those who remain exploited (WCS 283). Through the blind man, the inherent theme of the play is revealed. “You think conspiracies are all political, don’t you? Let me tell you the deepest conspiracies start in the family. Father against son, brother against brother . . . wife against husband . . .” (WCS 310). Save Thandwai’s son Deyeth, all have the urge to seize political power. Prince Deyeth is an impaired man and limps using his cane. He never bothers about anything and is lost in his musical world and in reading books. He is indifferent to everything happening around him. He is not happy nor sad for Prince Ashti’s return; nor does he support or oppose his mother for her crooked behaviour and machinations to gain power. Whereas Sabah is power-hungry like her mother and “she has the arrogance of a
person who combines low self esteem with overriding feelings of entitlement” (WCS 299).

Thandwai is a female Machiavelli who slyly manipulates even small chances by means of shrewd political insight. She fits into a kind of image conceived by the proverbial Machiavelli: “one must know how to colour one’s actions and be a great liar and deceiver.” She pretends as if she is affectionate to Ashti and orders her ministers to arrange for his homecoming ceremony:

He is to be welcomed with full ceremony. I myself am still in mourning but Princess Sabah and Prince Deyeth and the core of Council of Ministers shall receive him at the airport and escort him to the palace . . . . You will ensure that the streets are lined with people. (WCS 303)

In preparing the mourning ceremony, she is very careful in making the ceremonies appear as touching and dignified to create the picture of a genuine bereavement and her hypocrisy hits high.

Prince Ashti is given a hero’s welcome by the people of the country and the Council of Ministers. When Ashti was in exile, he was not allowed to pay homage to his dead father but now, as Thandwai instructed, “he shall visit his father’s memorial” (WCS 303). Thandwai is an easy metaphor for most of the politicians in India and elsewhere, and all of them display a certain stage-managing that defies easy encapsulation. Politicians today love to be always in the limelight and yields generously to the art of propaganda even when they do very little. Thandwai orders her executives to “notify the press and television immediately. I want full coverage. International coverage” (WCS 303) for the homecoming ceremony.

Thandwai meets Sabah and expresses her pseudo affection for her to win the latter’s favour. Sabah does not like Ashti’s homecoming as the king loved him more than anybody else and she is afraid that he will occupy the throne. Sabah questions her mother
“you sent him away. Why is he coming back?” (WCS 307) But Thandwai assures Sabah of a ministerial berth by way of placating her. Samara, the servant, is aware of the malpractices carried out by Thandwai and so her tongue was cut off by the latter. Unlike her, Princess Sabah is very bold to stand firm against her mother and the mysteries in the play are gradually unveiled. Sabah is conscious of all the secrets of her mother including her father’s unnatural death. So she starts blackmailing her mother for political power, “I know what you did to Daddy. I saw you. Well Mummy, what are you going to do to me now? You can’t cut my tongue out, can you? Like you did to that little servant girl?” (WCS 305)

Thandwai doesn’t spare even her own daughter from her political intrigues and inveigles Sabah into believing that Thandwai is Ashti’s well-wisher. Thandwai’s deception is very obvious in her dealings with Sabah: “Ours is a democratically elected government. Your father held elections regularly every seven years” (WCS 304). Sabah is too smart to be fooled and rebuffs her mother’s argument. Sabah ridicules the farcical elections conducted by her mother keeping the king under her thumb: “Elections? Elections, you call them? What a joke!” (WCS 305) She is mindful of her mother’s complete control over the king and how she ruled the country. She made the king, a mere puppet in her hand and dance to her tunes. Thandwai declares elections after the Prince’s arrival to play safe in the process of eliminating the Prince. Thandwai pretends as if she is accepting prince Ashti in a friendly manner and announces elections as it takes place in a real democratic country.

The Thandwai’s offer of friendship to her stepson when he returned home last month and her announcement of elections have both been widely welcomed by the countries of the world where democracy is rightly the only way of governance. (WCS 323)
She pretends to create an impression among the people that she is earnest in her efforts. Her actions remain puzzling to everyone. The international press is also equally fooled to portray Thandwai as, “a grieving widow and a staunch upholder of democratic principles” (WCS 323).

Thandwai uses the election rally, like today’s politicians, to brainwash people. They also take this as a right opportunity to settle old scores. Thandwai believes in publicity stunt: “It is a curious fact but true that all political plots carry with them some amount of publicity consciousness” (WCS 333). Everything is meticulously planned much in advance and arrangements are made for paid campaigns like paid news and also posters for elections. One among the crowd brings people from neighbouring villages and he earns money from this. There is a common view among the have-nots that “election time is good time for money” (WCS 335). Politicians capitalize on people’s poverty to buy votes. It pictures how election rallies are organized by all political parties in India today. Once the election rally has started, “a huge commotion is heard, people screaming, shouting, a police siren, police whistles. A crowd of men and women rush, the women wailing, the men agitated, shouting. A few of them collapse while the rest still shouting” (WCS 333). In this milieu, Prince Ashti is shot dead. On hearing Ashti’s death, Sabah wails: “My brother! They have shot my brother! Oh my good people of Eos, say it is not true . . . . She kneels and whirls her head about in an agony of grief” (WCS 334). She sheds crocodile tears as she “is getting power hungry” (WCS 339). Some common men feel that they miss their chance of earning money instead of mourning the loss of their saviour.

On the sad demise of Prince Ashti, again the voice-over of Thandwai makes a rhetoric display of grief, her voice “choking in grief” (WCS 335): “Dear people of Eos! Misfortune upon misfortune has come over us” (WCS 336). She further announces the death of Prince Ashti, and his “greatest friend” and “advisor” Hamun Krabi. As if she
does not know the culprit, she declares, “The perpetrators of this cruel deed shall be found and persecuted . . .” (WCS 336). The masses smell the rot and turn against Thandwai and her caucus. They all rush to the palace and murder Sabah and Thandwai. The whole palace is full of bloodshed and littered with dead bodies: “There is a sound of gunfire. There is pandemonium. The crowd goes berserk and runs this way and that” (WCS 345). Finally, Sabah poisons her mother as the latter did to her husband. There are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies in politics. Thus the action has come a full cycle.

In a so-called democratic country, all non-democratic activities are going on. The blind man passes a caustic remark on democracy, “Democracy is not a whore . . . she’s a lady . . . are you satisfied? She’s a genteel, bloodless lady who sleeps with the king and flirts with the factory worker and the tradesman and the . . .” (WCS 340). Friendship is also a casualty in such an air thick with betrayals and treacheries. True friendship is a far cry and steadfastness is replaced with treason. Simultaneously it is contrasted with real friendship marked by the relationship between Hamun and Prince Ashti. On the day of the election rally, Uri takes his revenge on Ashti. Brutus remained a friend of Julius Caesar but betrayed him at last. Uri does the same to Ashti. “In the dark and mire of politics, one often grabs the wrong hand, mistaking it for an offer of help, of friendship” (WCS 325).

The play is also a satire on the prejudiced way writing of history and also on historians. The three impaired men who chronicle the history of Eos enter the stage as the blind man led by the other two. They are not visible to anybody on stage and come from an indeterminate space and time “dressed in travel-stained clothes” (WCS 288) and question “Is democracy born yet?” (WCS 289) Their question is actually a satire on Thandwai’s administration. The play explores the other face of the authorities that favour a biased and prejudiced recording of history as a damage-control exercise. They offer a
kind of running commentary on the socio-political happenings and chronicle the events of
the country haphazardly in their own fashion. The blind man sits with the ledger to
account the incidents happening around him and the deaf man writes. When he could not
find his writing implement, he ultimately settles for writing with his finger “dipping into
an ancient ink bottle every now and then, and sometimes absentmindedly moistening it on
his tongue” (WCS 309). This also proves that history is not always absolute truth. The
blind man says “the historian can record only actions, not intentions. Not even the spoken
word has sanctity or absolute meaning . . .” (WCS 328). What is dictated to them is just
recorded blindly by the three. They are not only physically impaired but also
intellectually stymied.

The blind man talks to himself about their job as historians: “we are actually very
well qualified for the historian’s job . . . an idiot with a dead tongue . . . a moron who has
his ears snuffed out and . . . I . . . who sees more than anyone else . . .” (WCS 344). The
irony is evidenced in the song of the deaf man about the trio including himself. He laughs
uproariously and ridicules himself and his partners for having taken up the job of the
historians. The three men purposely ignore the street people and are prejudiced in
chronicling the history: “I am telling you, these are not historically important people . . .
their words and actions don’t have to be recorded. COME ON. LET’S GO” (WCS 313).
This shows that only the royal happenings enter history books. Unless it is related to the
royal families or the ruling party, the other issues are hidden from history texts. Lower
strata people, their lives, sufferings, and joys, all are marginalized from history books.

The three disabled people are authorized to write history implies that history is
partial and it is true that no historian can write anything accurately but records what he
sees and hears. Especially in the game of politics, “it is not easy for the historian to name
the central characters in a play of political intrigue. What is apparent may not be true,
what is hidden may not be secret . . .” (WCS 337). There is something fishy in the
administration. While filing the events happened during the election, the blind man praises the advantages in technology and mentions the shortcomings of manual way of recording history: “A silent corpse . . . a swooning sister . . . a bewildered country . . . . What does the historian record when the images are so strong? So compelling?” (WCS 334) Through electronic media, these recurring images are conveyed to people in a fraction of second and it is flashed all over the world instantaneously.

The three impaired men act like the absurd play characters. The deaf man dances, sings, goes around the people, invisible to them and speaks meaningless words. The blind man keeps commenting on something or somebody and the dumb man always gadgets the deaf man when he dances and shouts. They poke the other with their writing implements. The blind man verbalizes the feelings in the readers’ mind whether such protest and sudden reactions will stop power gambling and change the people completely:

It is difficult to say what such bloodletting achieves . . . . Does it stop power gambling? Does it help raise the masses? When the masses are raised are they the masses at all? Do they have the same disabilities as earlier? The taste of power is salty like tears. The smell of power is ferrous, like . . . blood. (WCS 345)

These questions are relevant today and it exactly mirrors the contemporary world. At the end of the play, the three impaired men stand together and voice Gandhian philosophy of “don’t see evil, don’t hear evil and don’t speak evil” and tie scarf around eyes, ears and mouth. They also feel jealous of one another and so they suffer from mental and emotional infirmities too like an average man besides their physical deformities.

Samara’s song has important significance in the play. The melancholy song of Samara reverberates throughout the play even after her tongue is cut off and it personifies the eluding justice in Eos. The name ‘Samara’ meaning war-torn city predicts an ironic truth about the future of Eos. As she is helpless without the tongue, the future of Eos will
also remain dark without Prince Ashti. The playwright also highlights the problem of language. Kurubiri is the language of the downtrodden in Eos. When Gandava was asked to “leave off Kurubiri,” he hesitated to do so. Arrah rightly questions him “How your language he can take? It is not land or money” (WCS 314). She suggests to him to leave the job and vacate the palace. But Gandava assures him, “I will keep eyes and ears full open. Don’t have worry for me, Arrah” (WCS 315). The play highlights the violation of individual right to one’s mother tongue.

Today’s politicians are very conscious in making their children their successor in the power-wielding business. Though we have freedom, independence and democracy, the real democracy does not prevail in a country like India. In the name of democracy, all those who wish to attain power, contest in elections. The family problem spills over as a social problem and then becomes a political one. Politics is a business which is devoid of sympathy and humanitarianism. The game of power is very dangerous. “It was a dangerous game of power being played, the consequences of which will, as always, tell on the country’s stability . . . ” (WCS 322). Sustainable political structure which is conducive to long term human flourishing is very difficult to build. Sravasti Datta in her article entitled “Politics at Play” says, “Samara’s Song draws you into its many twists and turns and stays with you long after the curtain comes down” (Web). The play subtly teases out many themes to surface in a layered exploration of the tensions within political life: between language and voicelessness, trust and trickery, open secrets and hidden ones. Bhaskar Ghose in his book review observes, “Samara’s Song is an allegory of sorts on freedom, on political manoeuvring, of ambition and human needs, a play that borders on the epic in its conception and sweep” (Web).

The whole play is a satire on democracy, weighing all possible human relationships in the game of power, even between husband and wife, brother and sister, mother and daughter, and so on. Thus the play deftly unveils the essential nature of
politics as well as the utter craving for power in human beings. Through this political satire, Sengupta throws ample light on intricate political intrigues employed dexterously to capture positions of power and authority. The play chronicles how various political concepts have undergone radical changes due to deepening chasm between the politics of development and despair. The director of the play Ashish Sen says, “It is a fascinating political script that works on many levels and cuts across the sweep of human history. We see how history’s current and past landscape is consistently bloodied with rebellion, revolution and the promise of change” (Web).

Anuradha Marwah’s A Pipe Dream in Delhi

A Pipe Dream in Delhi is written by Delhi-based Anuradha Marwah and the shorter version of the play was first performed by Pandies’ theatre in New Delhi in 2008 and subsequently in Bangalore. In 2012, the full-length play was presented in Women Playwrights International Conference (WPIC) in Stockholm. The play is based on the serial killing that happened in Nithari at Noida near New Delhi, in 2006 and brings under the scanner the issues like poverty, social inequality, kidnapping, rape, cannibalism, organ-selling and so on.

In December 2006, thirty-eight human skeletons were unearthed from clogged drains behind a rich industrialist’s palatial house in Noida. They were the remains of some of the poor children who had gone missing from Nithari, the adjoining urban village in Noida. They are mostly migrated people from small towns or villages in search of employment. The parents and relatives, who are mainly migrant workers and daily wage earners, had made several complaints to the police about the thirty eight missing children, mainly girls, from their locality and been callously turned away on one pretext or another by India’s law enforcers. This bizarre and gory tale of kidnapping, rape, murder, cannibalism, and organ sale monopolized the media attention for several months that followed (A Pipe Dream in Delhi, hereinafter referred to as PDD 1). The facilitators from
Pandies’ theatre, who were working with children of the urban village Nithari, narrated this story of shocking incident to the playwright. Actually, the playwright was inspired by Robert Browning’s well-known poem, “The Pied Piper of Hamelin.” Taking the story of Pied Piper from the poem, Anuradha Marwah has merged the real incident with the folk-tale of the Pied Piper and presented a thought-provoking play. This play invokes and interrogates representations of a real-life incident.

The playwright presents the aptly-fitting stanzas of the poem at regular intervals with the dialogues of the characters. The Pied Piper in the poem was invited to Hamelin to help the people end rats’ menace. He was promised to pay 20,000 cents and the Pied Piper started playing a mellifluous tune that attracted all the rats to follow him and made them finally drown in the nearby river. But they failed to pay him the money they promised and paid only 50 cents. In revenge, the Pied Piper started playing another tune which lured all the children in the town. All the children followed him and disappeared with him near the mountain top for ever.

The Pied Piper in the play is ‘a modern Pied Piper’ who enters the stage as a formidable fantasy figure. The play pictures two divisions of people: the urban/village slum and their activities at the night school there and the urban middle class people represented by two couples, Meenakshi and Ratish as hosts, and Nonita and her husband as guests. Meenakshi’s daughter Shveta, the young teacher who belongs to the urban middle class family, bridges the gap between the two divisions of the society. She appears to be the playwright’s mouthpiece and also a representative of the dynamic younger generation, growing impatient with the injustices happening all around. Shveta volunteers to teach English to the slum children at a night school in the play-way method by acting out Browning’s poem, “The Pied Piper of Hamelin.” Though she represents the middle class in her all external bearings, in her heart of hearts, she identifies herself with the
poor. She is service-minded and plans to get a project from foreign funding agency for the betterment of children. In this way, she is an eye-opener for the youth in India.

Even after sixty seven years of Independence, India has not attained satisfactory progress on all fronts. India wears a mask of the ‘shining India’ hiding the ‘shunned India’. Still no city is free from slums and the rich-poor divide prevailing in India widens more and more. Migrant workers move from place to place in search of employment for survival and settle in clusters for short terms as floating population. They live in the squalid surroundings where huts are erected in a haphazard manner without proper access and minimum basic amenities. They resort to anti-social activities like drug addiction, alcoholism, smuggling, rape, murder, and so on for their survival. Most mothers of these families have many children and the fathers are mostly incapable of taking care of their family and mostly alcoholics. So it is the duty of the matriarch to look after their families. When they struggle for their mere existence, these marginalized children’s education remains a dream. Unplanned family and poverty-stricken condition ultimately lead to child labour. Girl children like Rajini and Gita in the play work as servant maids in middle class homes and boys like Suresh and Anthony work in some factories and industries. Even worse is the condition of the urchins like Raju who are left parentless on the streets. Most of the jobs done by these children are rag-picking, collecting firewood, tending animals, street vending, dyeing, domestic labour, begging, stealing, and so on. For instance, when Shveta’s father Manish stopped his car, Raju rushes up to clean the car, engages him in a conversation to distract his attention and then steals Manish’s mobile.

Good education is neither affordable nor accessible to the downtrodden children like Rajini, Gita, Anthony, Suresh and Raju. So they spend their whole day playing about in the streets in dirt and filth. Though education is provided free to slum children, the dropouts’ number remains high and many students could not pursue higher education. To
aid these children, Shveta spends her spare time in teaching them English at the night school in their slum. English language has become indispensable today and it is vital in this competitive world. Children who lack even the basic school education consider the play-way method as the easy way of learning. Shveta has understood the child psychology and cleverly inspires them to learn English. When the play opens, it is understood that the teacher has already started her classes and given some assignments to children, so they are required to rehearse a drama that forms the part of that day’s class. But their practice is getting gravitated toward Bollywood style.

Indian cinema permeates every layer of social hierarchy and the slum children are not an exception. They are preoccupied with the cinematic dare-devil adventures and larger-than-life portrayals of human beings. The children tease each other as Vivek Oberai, Aishwarya Rai, Abhishek Bachchan, and Johnny Lever, and so on. Without anyone’s guidance, they are updated in their cinema knowledge. They are even aware of the actors’ personal lives and the latest movie releases. The media air is thick with cinema titbits. Gita questions her teacher: “Miss, who come to watch play about children?” (PDD 4) The children are also mindful of the qualities that a hero and heroine should possess. Boys like Suresh and Raju focus on their hero-centric roles as hero worship is practised in India. Girls like Gita and Rajini are more beauty conscious. In order to make true their beauty dreams, they also use some creams and other cosmetics by stealing them from their mistress where they work. Having this cinema-centric mindset, they enact their roles based on Bollywood and rehearse before their teacher’s arrival. Shveta first appreciates their histrionic talent and then reveals that they are going to rehearse a play titled The Pied Piper.

The children’s line of thinking is influenced by Bollywood commercials. When she narrates the outline of the play and says that the children disappear in the end, they guess it is kidnapping and a street child Raju feels that a hero is necessary to save the
children and expresses his wish to play the role of a hero. Anthony chips in to create the right mood by singing sad songs like in old films which make the audience cry. Gita says that people don’t like a sad ending. Shveta knows that children are less interested in staging the English play, so she tries to woo them by promising them for a movie “Shootout at Lokhandwala” only if they co-operate to rehearse the play. The lame child Anthony has a pre-conceived notion in his mind that a physically challenged boy cannot play a lead role. But Shveta encourages him: “Of course you can be hero! It depends on the script. We can never predict what will work on stage” (PDD 6). The stereotypes portrayed in the movies cultivate negative thoughts in the minds of the children. The dramatist here voices her comments on the pathetic condition of the poor children in Shveta’s soliloquy: “Uff! Bollywood-Bollywood-Bollywood. It’s taken over their lives. Poor children. They can’t think beyond Bollywood! Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachchan! Their dreams begin and end there” (PDD 6). These children are talented and their aims are high. Their skills are untapped and they lack opportunities to achieve things. Given a chance, their talent will surface. Here the night school is a chance given by the teacher to show their talents and help them lead a better life getting funds from abroad.

Shveta hopes to get a three-year project from England if the children successfully stage the play *The Pied Piper* during the visit of the Eduaid team who have volunteered to sanction the project for the NGO. She hopes that they will grant funds generously for the noble cause. This young spirited teacher envisions the successful result of the project as one that will hit the newspaper headlines: “Slum children – completely uneducated – who didn’t even have ABCD – after six months of English-coaching by us, play Robert Browning’s poem “The Pied Piper of Hamelin”!” (PDD 7)

The dramatist voices her comments and ideas through the young teacher Shveta. These slum children, despite their ill-luck to have good education, have latent talents in
them and the theatre gives them a glimpse into limitless possibilities of bettering their lives. The author is of the view that the theatre can be a propaganda tool: “Theatre helps children improve their self-esteem. The kids in Nithari village have no means of education and entertainment. They have low self-esteem. Through theatre, we involve them better” (Web). This is what Marwah does in her play. Deepika Nath quotes Anuradha Marwah’s words in her article entitled “Searching for Definitions,” “Our theatre group wants to highlight the plight of this village and voice their concerns” (Web).

Slum children are also like other children who have aspirations in life; they too have aims in life; they too yearn to go to school. People should not have prejudices and pre-conceived notions about them. Keeping aloof the pre-conceptions and misconceptions, if they are approached, people can make this India without socio-economic instability for sure. Professor Higgins in Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* takes up a challenge that he can train a cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, to elevate her to the status of duchess speaking impeccable English. He trains her, makes her sing, and finally brings her to a party as a princess who speaks flawless English. Shveta, like Professor Higgins, trains the slum children with her best to teach English. She believes that her play *The Pied Piper* will be truly magical at the end of the rehearsal. She never bothers about what people say about her for teaching English to slum children. She strongly believes the Pied Piper will kindle their imagination and make them dream outside Bollywood.

The urban middle class discussing the events happening in the host’s sitting room forms part of the common mass. They discuss the lives of slum children thereby exposing their problems and other social issues prevailing in the society. Their conversation starts with the mobile theft which appears a routine for Meenakshi. She warns Manish to be very careful whereas Manish is kind-hearted and often “keeps a packet of sweets to distribute among them” (*PDD* 8). He doesn’t blame the kid for the robbery but his parents and their poverty-stricken situation. He feels sorry for the child’s pathetic condition and at
the same time appreciates his wish to be an Abishek Bachchan. He is of the view that, “They shouldn’t become criminals to support their families. That affects everybody!” (PDD 9) If Nonita’s ten-year-old maid steals today, she might do something else when she is fifteen or twenty; if Raju steals a mobile today, the same child might murder somebody tomorrow. The play is censorious of the rigid India’s socio-economic divide.

Common people form their own opinions about others in their collective memory. The two couples in the play do not think alike. The conversation between the two couples reveals their differing mindsets and varying attitudes. While the host couple sympathizes with the poor children for their pitiable condition and tries to help them, the guest couple has no good opinion about the slum children. Nonita says, “These aren’t normal kids” (PDD 8). Nonita and her husband do not feel any sympathy for them and they regard the children as criminals. Ratish talks in favour of the children, “They would be I suppose if they had a regular upbringing. God knows who the parents are, whether they have parents at all —” (PDD 8).

Shveta’s parents too, like other parents, are not well disposed to her wish as she is young girl who has to settle in life. She needs to take risks to teach at the night school in the slum area which is considered as “breeding place of violence”. Though she sounds impractical to her parents, they appreciate and encourage her good Samaritan efforts. Meenakshi agrees with Shveta that the slum kids are very bright and intelligent but Nonita speaks ill of the slum children and brands them as immoral. She cites her ten-year-old servant maid as an example who, according to her, is over mature in her thinking and that “it’s like having the parody of a whore in the home” (PDD 9). Though she blames the little girl, she is not ready to turn her out as Nonita herself cannot manage her household works. She can’t look after her bedridden father; her mother can’t be left alone even for ten minutes. So Nonita cannot afford to lose the girl, knowing well that she is underage and it amounts to child labour. If any problem arises, the girl’s mother will swear that she
is fifteen years. But Meenakshi feels sorry for their condition, “These kids work to support their families. And they grow up too soon as a result! It is a vicious cycle . . .” (PDD 9). Through their discussion, the playwright highlights many contemporary social issues like child labour, poverty, lack of basic amenities, the poor upbringing of the slum children, and so on. These issues are discussed on stage to create awareness among the audience.

The couples suggest that “drastic measures are called for to clean up the city. On the one hand, we talk of making Delhi an international city; on the other hand, we have all this – like pock marks all over” (PDD 9). The characters also take proof from other countries who took immediate action for the betterment of their nation. In Beijing, China government has taken measures for the clearance of slums and now no slums exist. They say, “We too need a government that has the balls to bring about sweeping changes. Remove the slums, put all these budding criminals to work in factories – have a police force that’s tough!” (PDD 9) Change cannot be made over night. “Change has to be gradual. I think we’re slowly moving towards a more egalitarian system. The transitional phase is difficult . . . for everybody . . . us and for them . . .” (PDD 9). The slum children hope and expect that somebody will lend their helping hands to make their dreams come true. The dramatist expresses her suggestion that the “haves” should come forward to help the “have-nots”. Like Bernard Shaw, Marwah takes contemporary social issues that haunt India, discusses them on stage, voices her opinions from the audience point of view and makes her own suggestions.

Society plays a major role in the holistic growth of children and all-round growth of the nation. The playwright reveals the impact of the mass media on the children. They learn many things from films like how to kidnap, torture, kill and they imitate such things in real life. Anthony, a lame boy says, “Kidnappers don’t give, they take. They take lots of money; they torture” (PDD 18). While rehearsing, the teacher asks the children to
conceive the image of the Pied Piper. The teacher kindles their imagination and makes them dream beyond their capacity and think original. She wants them to actively imagine fairies and goblins. The lame boy dreams of becoming an athlete to win applaudes, medals and garlands. Other children also catalogue their dreams one by one and the teacher ensures that the Pied Piper will take them to a wonderland where everything is possible. The children believe that they can enjoy rich life if the Pied Piper takes them away. When the rehearsal comes to an end, it becomes real and the modern Pied Piper abducts the children. The Pied Piper is visible only to the children and the teacher is frozen in a corner without noticing the Pied Piper. Here the real and the unreal coexist.

The middle class, who represent the majority of the population, discuss the Nithari incident, that is, the abduction and serial killing of the slum children, helplessly as impotent critics and soon return to their normal life as if nothing had happened. Through them, the playwright brings up other issues like poverty, the deteriorating law and order, the role of media who wait for sensational news and scoops and remain indifferent to the social injustices, misuse of NGO’s funds and so on. The abduction of the slum children is revealed through the middle class couples. The playwright has used the same locale and same data that happened in the real incident. Forty children were kidnapped, raped, killed, dissected, packed up in a cover and thrown in the drainage nearby. Organ-selling has become a large-scale racket and it has led to mushrooming of cyber forums for illegal sales. For survival, poor people sell their body organs. But cannibals like the Pied Piper in the play sell organs to foreign countries, especially the first world countries and earn huge profit. In an article “Want a Kidney? Just go Online. Price Negotiable” dated 17 June 2013, Serena Josephine observes that “On social networking forums and private sites with message boards, there are hundreds of people interested in selling and buying kidneys” (Web). The play is a satire on Indian society and it satirizes Indian police and judiciary. Nearly “forty children disappeared and the police kept sitting on their fat asses. Does the
police ever act in time in this country?” (PDD 24) When the first child had gone missing, they must have taken serious action but everything is out of hand now and forty children had disappeared. Those children who had disappeared were the children of the poor migrant workers and so the police blame the parents for their negligence. The servant who has done these serial killings single-handed is a scapegoat. Only the servant has been caught by police but the truth behind this will remain unravelled.

The kidnapper has abducted children five to twenty five years old. It is said that a twenty-year old girl, perhaps a prostitute, was one among the killed. The police can turn any girl into a prostitute. When her parents complain to the police, they just blindly say that their daughter might have run away with her boy friend. This shows the irresponsible behaviour and callousness of the police. At the same time, in this over-populated nation, police cannot be blamed for every mishap. Instead of blaming the police, they could have advised their children to be wary of strangers. Accountability is for both government and parents. Their carelessness led to the loss of their children. The slum parents are not just irresponsible but also unaccountable for their children’s offences. They have readymade answers to the police enquiries.

Shveta is aware that the children are disappearing one by one from the nearby place. She has discussed this with her parents earlier and now the children, her night school students, have disappeared and it traumatized her completely. She also knew that the children’s parents were complaining to the police that the children were disappearing from near the water tank adjacent to the big house D5. Members of Nithari and its surroundings have tried some ways to forbid the children from entering that area through public announcements but still they could not control them. The middle class couples say that these deprived children long for clothes, cosmetics and mobile phones which they can’t afford them. So they are easily tempted to go astray.
Finally the couples wind up their discussion saying that the case is handled by the CBI and the guilty will be punished and in the end they go back to their routine life. The majority of the people expose their intellectual helplessness and stop with verbal criticisms. The modern Pied Piper as a fantasy figure in the play is the Pied Piper of Delhi. Surreptitiously, he had been following her daily and finally he appeared on the stage and abducted the children. The fact and the fiction seamlessly merge when this unidentified Pied Piper of today abducts the slum children when the rehearsal is almost over. The teacher is taken aback and could not believe her own eyes. The audiences are at their wits’ end and in a state of utter disbelief like Shveta when the rehearsal evolves into a reprisal of the real Noida tragedy. She still believes that the children haven’t arrived at night school and waits for them. She feels guilty for she has also become a reason for the death of the children. She is psychologically affected and caught in a mental turbulence. Seeing Anthony, the lame boy singing the part of the poem with correct diction, she encourages him for his perfect pronunciation and diction.

Under the very eyes of Shveta, the children are hypnotized and kidnapped by the Pied Piper. This symbolically states that however the society is vigilant, criminals outsmart. She wonders whether it is a dream or reality: “It’s the Pied Piper. He’s come . . . He’s come out of the poem” (PDD 29). These lines testify her mental instability and chaotic mind. Journalists pester with their questions but she sticks to the same reply that the piper exists only in Browning’s poem and is not real. The Pied Piper handcuffed tries to lure the policemen by blowing the pipe. Journalists attribute various terms to his abnormality:

Journalist 1: . . . He must’ve lured them away.
Journalist 2: Raped them
Journalist 3: Eaten their flesh
Journalist 1: He’s got necrophilia
Journalist 2: Pedophilia

Journalist 3: Schizophrenia. \((PDD 30)\)

Journalists also raise another contemporary issue to the teacher whether Shveta agrees with the human rights lobby in pardoning the Pied Piper and whether capital punishment should be done away with. So this is a raging controversy in today’s India, engaging both the Executive and the Judiciary. But the teacher, who has not recovered her normalcy, sticks to her view that the real Pied Piper does not exist. She even starts to cry and pleads with the police to look for the children. She thinks that all of them have betrayed the children and their wishes are not fulfilled. Their dreams have not come true and it remains a pipe dream. Shveta is hoping against the hope for the resurrection of the children. In her confused state of affairs, she refuses to believe the truth.

Journalists continue to pose questions as to whether CIA’s and NGO’s are involved in this incident; whether NGO’s fund does more good; and if NGO’s funds should become transparent under Right to Information. Journalists often overreact to sensational news and are waiting for scooping. Their worry about the children’s death is much less than their interest in covering the incident as a selling proposition. The Pied Piper is dragged to the gallows, where he dances on the stool before the noose falls down on his neck. The hanged Pied Piper is being taken away on a stretcher by the police but he jumps and begins to dance again. Again he is arrested, dragged to the gallows and the noose is being prepared again. His revival symbolically warns that such incidents will continue to happen and criminals like him will continue to involve in such activities. The lame boy Anthony symbolically represents the lame India which is limping towards progress very slowly. The playwright has ended the play cautioning the people to be aware of such hidden anti-social elements.

Anuradha Marwah has written this play with a social commitment. It brings to light the deliberately hidden tears of the Indian social fabric shunned behind the mask of
shining India. She uses Browning’s poem as a metaphor to expose the social maladies of contemporary India afflicted by apathy and indifference on the part of majority Indians. Like, Adiga’s *White Tiger*, it also serves as an exposé of the evils lurking in the Indian soil.

**Gowri Ramnarayan’s *Night’s End***

*Night’s End*, set in an eco-friendly atmosphere, is a play about loss, betrayal and abandonment and the imbalance of the very eco-system that sustains our life. The play focuses on the contemporary issues of endangered wildlife and of the displacement of the marginalized tribes because of the corporate aggrandizement. These social issues are interwoven into the personal tragedies of the two main characters: Krishnan Nair, a forest ranger and Chandni Mogiya, a tribal girl. Krishnan Nair was born in a family of Kathakali exponents in Kerala. After his father’s death, his mother was terrorized and sexually exploited by his tyrannical grandfather, Ashaan Achyutan Nair and as a result she gave birth to a girl child, Prema. Ashaan was “the greatest Kathakali artiste of his time” (*Night’s End* hereinafter referred to as *NE* 4). He gave orders and Nair’s mother silently obeyed. “He never spoke. He roared” (*NE* 4).

Ashaan was called “Vyaaghroththama” meaning “Great Tiger”. Once he danced like a tiger in a mountain village, a real tiger came to the rock above the open air theatre and sat watching his performance. Nair’s was a very traditional family and a patriarchy-controlled household. Women were not allowed to take up performing arts like dance and they were confined to the kitchen. Krishnan Nair’s mother was not even allowed to see her dead husband. “Grandfather wouldn’t let her” (*NE* 5). With his mother’s request, Nair was sent to school and dance class “with a master who is none other than the devil himself . . . [grandfather]” (*NE* 5). Until Prema was born, no one cared for him. “No one ever smiled at me,” he says and so he became close with Prema. He started playing with her and carried her wherever he went. But whenever he carried Prema proudly down the
street, boys laughed at him. They made jokes that he didn’t understand. Even when Prema was four years old, he carried her because “I liked carrying my sister” (NE 6). One of the village boys, Unni, the toddy seller’s son said, “That Premai of yours is a bastard. Don’t have anything to do with her” (NE 6). He further continued, “Premai is not your father’s child, you know she was born long after your father died” (NE 6). When a few other boys rounded Nair, he started running. Suddenly, he tripped and hit his head on a piece of stone. By the time they reached home, both were muddy and blood-stained. His mother gave him a thrashing and his grandfather picked up a stick and began to rain blows on him and kicked him with his dancing feet.

Bereft of love and affection and to escape the cruelty of his grandfather, Krishnan Nair ran away to the nearby town and jumped into the first train he saw. As he did not have ticket, he hid in toilets, underseats, jumped down in stations, and jumped back as the train began to move. Finally a kind-hearted man gave him food and “took me to the guest house where he was staying, fed me. I told him I was an orphan and had run away from my village in Kerala” (NE 9). He is Salman Husain, a wonderful wildlife photographer who represents a humanitarian. As Husain’s assistant, Nair roamed all over the country from the Himalayas to the Rann of Kutch to Kaziranga. Before leaving for the Antartica, Husain found a job for Krishnan Nair as a forest guard in Rajasthan. The Mogiya tribe, native to Rajasthan, takes care of him and gives him food. Though he belongs to a crowded city, when he has settled in this forest, he adapted to that environment. He finds a little difficulty to eat rice and roots which tribals give him. Sometimes he also longs to eat his native food, still he adjusts and enjoys his life. “No books, no TV, no cinema . . . . But everyday I find new stories in the forest” (NE 9). But Nair feels at home with Billu Mogiya and Chandni Mogiya, the sibling tribals living in the forest. The play revolves on the trio. The plot moves through Krishnan Nair’s attempts to enlist the help of the tiger-
hunting Mogiya tribes to save the tiger, his friendship with Billu, his romance with Chandni and his encounters with the poaching mafia.

Only through the words of Chandni Mogiya, the readers come to know about the agonies of the Mogiya tribals in Rajasthan with the corporates making inroads into the tribal habitat for investment and profit. She establishes contact with her family deity through monologues and catalogues the sufferings of her family members at the hands of the police, media and wealthy tourists. She tells the truth that the Mogiya tribals are inveigled into poaching tigers. Tiger, the national animal of India, is increasingly becoming extinct and it is the contemporary issue confronting India. Their dwindling number has triggered serious steps to protect the tiger. The tiger is deprived of its natural space because of man’s encroachment. Mafias and smugglers encourage the Mogiya tribals to poach wildlife and make easy money. Chandni Mogiya’s brother Billu Mogiya poached many tigers in a well-planned manner: “He hid the trap under dry leaves, scattering small stones around it. Tigers are so fussy, like Maharajas, they don’t like to step on stones na? That night, the big tiger came, lifted his paw over the stones, leashed his claws, and put his leg gently down on the leaves. The trap snaps shut” (NE 2). The poachers won’t shoot tigers because it would spoil the skin. “They must have flawless skin to sell” (NE 2). So Billu rams a spear into the tiger’s mouth and his team members beat upon its head carefully without making any marks or scratches or cuts.

Tigers are being hunted for their skins, bones, teeth and claws which are highly valued in various medicines and various products. The tribals are forced to indulge in such activities. They are paid a meagre amount and their hunting talents and knowledge are exploited by greedy traders. “Men come from big cities, give us money to catch tigers. How can we refuse? What else can we do?” There is a nexus between forest officers, politicians and policemen who are all self-serving and money-minded. “Poachers have all the support they want from officers, politicians, dadas, villagers . . . And the tribals.
Mogia, Meena, Pardhi . . . Those tribals help them to destroy the forest” (NE 2). Billu Bhaiya told Chandni that “At full moon, tigers come . . . dance on the rocks . . . three . . . five . . . seven tigers . . . Our grandfather . . . he saw a hundred tigers. More tigers than rocks” (NE 14). It is true that a hundred years ago there were 100,000 tigers in the wild but today there are as few as 3000. According to security experts, “Illegal wildlife trade is the third largest illicit commerce after drugs and arms” (Web). Consequently, preventive measures are taken by government and law-enforcers announce penalty for the wildlife offence. Slogans like “Save the Tiger” are spread everywhere and awareness has been created. July 29, 2013 has been observed as Global Tiger Day, touching upon the issues of poaching tigers and a new campaign called “Leave Me Alone” is being launched by Sanctuary Asia Magazine with support from NGOs and governmental organizations (Web).

Mogiya tribals live their life with their indigenous culture which appears barbaric to the mainstream people. They are prohibited to enter the forest by the officials for poaching threat. Chandni questions her Goddess “But who will save us? You can’t go into the forest they say. So where do we go? The forest is our home” (NE 3). Like tigers, tribals are also the inhabitants of the forest. They live an eco-friendly life in the forest. This play starts and ends with slokas from the Mahabharata which illustrates the mutual dependency of tribals and tigers. If the king Dhirudhrastara and his sons Kauravas constitute a forest, Pandavas are tigers wandering in that. If tigers leave the forest, the forest will be cut. If the forest is cut, tigers cannot live. Therefore Kauravas and Pandavas should live amicably. Similarly, tribals are the native inhabitants of forest. Both the tribals and the tiger are equally dispossessed by the shrinking wild space and they are being edged out from their natural environment and habitat. The reunion of Prema and Nair is paralleled with the union of Krishna with Krishnnaa emphasizing their interdependence.
The corporate onslaught and deforestation lead to the sufferings of the tribals as well as the wild animals. The words of Chandni portray their agony:

They drive down in a big car from some stinking city, and tell us, you tribals are crooks, bandits, thieves. You are not human beings. You are worse than animals. They grab our lands, cut our trees, dam our streams, burn our forests! Then they put us into some tiny plot of useless land where even weeds won’t grow. They say they are “re-settling” the criminals. Yes. Mogiya, Bagaria, Sahariya, Garasiya, Meena, Paardhi . . . they call us criminal tribes. (NE 3)

Chandni is against deforestation. She is worried about the posterity and ecological imbalance. The play makes the reader connect it with Green Studies which inspires the global citizens to take responsibility for the sustainability of the world. From the 1970s, the Chipko movement or Chipko Andolan movements are though practised by people through the act of hugging trees to protect them from being felled, deforestation has increased alarmingly. Today’s world faces many climatic threats like global warming, climatic imbalance, melting of glaciers, acid rain and so on.

Man started invading forest and Nature for his survival and created social imbalance in the ecosystem. Tribals are primary protectors of the harmony of nature. They live in the forefront of nature and strive to protect nature. But modern technology and globalization want them to be displaced from their homelands. They create a rupture between tribals and nature and trying to uproot tribals from their roots. Forest has been nurturing them for ages. When the tribals are forcibly displaced from the forests, they are deprived of their only source of livelihood. “Hundred Mogiyas, men and women, old and young, squeezed into ten-twelve huts, and some woman in a starched sari comes to lecture us about hygiene, birth control, women’s rights, AIDS!” (NE 3) People come there
uninvited, try to “civilize” them but take away the cultural identity from the tribals in the name of civilizing them.

Present human interference with the natural resources is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening. “All these people think the forest belongs to them. Why don’t you tell them we, the Mogiyas, belong to the forest?” (NE 4) There exists a natural bond between Nature and the Mogiya tribal community and they think very deeply in their hearts that the two are inseparable. In the name of “civilizing” the “uncivilized”, they introduce novel things, new laws which result in their migration. Sophisticated women in tea shirts and jeans enter the forest to “rehabilitate” women tribals. They are just keyed up dolls sent by some mafia to relocate the Mogiya tribes. They are unaware about the sufferings of the tribal women: “What does she know about firang tourists who come to see what it’s like to do it with tribal women? Does she know we are ‘timepass’ for policemen?” (NE 3) She gives vent to her pent-up feelings in front of her Goddess: “where are you when city people hunt us down? When we are dragged to brothels? When our men are thrashed to pulp? When poachers make us risk our lives? Where are you when they cheat us? Where are you when they beat us?” (NE 3) It appears that women all over the world irrespective of the class, creed, community, religion and culture suffer in the male-dominated society and are viewed as sex objects.

In the name of resettlements, the tribals are herded into a small place. Since the tribals are nomadic by nature, they feel crushed up: “Our souls shrivel up and die if we stay in the same place. Our gods forget us if we live in the same place” (NE 3). Chandni is not prepared to share her roots because tribals are always on the move in search of livelihood. If they are shifted to cities, they find difficult to adopt the new culture and they struggle for their existence. Tribals are the scapegoats for all crimes happening in the society: “We can’t live in the forest, we can’t live in the village. Who will give us work in the village? Where ever we go, Mogiya, Bagaria, Kalvelia, Sasi, Ghadia Iohar, the
moment there’s a crime, from chicken stealing to killing a man, one of us is caught and punished. Easy for the police. No need for witness or evidence. We are there, na?” (NE 3)

People have misconceptions about the tribals and they are not allowed to live in peace, often tormented by such misconceptions. They have become “timepass” for police. The police being unable to trace the real culprits try to close up the cases for statistical purposes by falsely implicating the innocent tribals. Chandni says, “My people were happy when we were free. Hundreds, thousands of us . . . No one saw us roaming in the forest. No one told us what to do. No warden, no ranger, no tourist, no poacher, no police, no farmer. Now we do what you want, not what we want” (NE 14).

Chandni’s ancestors were honest and the goddess took care of them. She further tells about the legend of tribals and their origins: “We hear those old stories all the time. We are special people, born to apsaras who came to the forest and fell in love with the great tiger hunters” (NE 3). Chandni’s mother told her that they helped many kings like Rana Pratap when they were in peril: “When kings lost their kingdoms, they came to us for help” (NE 3). Chandni then narrates her personal sufferings that she lost her parents and now lives with her only brother Billu Mogiya: “Ma came to beg and pray and cry to you to find her husband who vanished one day . . . without a trace . . . we never saw him again. May be someone killed him and flung him into the lake” (NE 3). “He’s all I have. If something happens to him I will . . .” (NE 4). Tribals are far behind modern luxuries and lack the emergency needs as they live far from the madding crowd. Chandni’s mother died as she could not get treatment in time. “You saw Ma bleed to death. I came and banged my head on the ground before you till I bled, begging you to save her. She died. No doctor, no medicine . . .” (NE 3). Chandni stands as a representative for her community and voices their sufferings and is proud of their heritage though immensely surrounded by myths and rituals. However, the absence of hygienic conditions and modern communication facilities, the rate of mortality is high among the tribals. Chandni
is a very reasonable girl and stands as a dynamic representative of her tribal community as well as of all people who try to save earth. The dramatist uses a tribal woman Chandni to highlight contemporary issues and pictures that part of India. Chandni appears to be the playwright’s mouthpiece and gives a picture of the ravages of modern life.

The playwright pictures two people, Warden Sahib and Krishnan Nair, who try to transform the tribals pushed into poaching wild life. Chandni’s brother Billu Mogiya was imprisoned for a month for poaching tigers. Warden Sahib got him out of jail and gave him a job in the forest lodge. Billu is very good at heart but for his survival, he involves in such illegal activities. He has an excellent knowledge about all birds and animals in the forest. He can imitate the cry of any animals like deer, nilgai, leopard and that is why tourists always sight tigers with Billu. So Warden Sahib reforms Billu Mogiya, “why do you help poachers? Don’t you know this is a Tiger Reserve? You know everything about the forest. No one can guide tourists as you can. Come help us save tigers” (NE 8).

Krishnan Nair is shocked to read in the newspaper that “21 tiger skins were found in a flat in Delhi. The tigers were from our own forest. The flat belongs to Jaswantlal – you all know him. He comes here often, pretending to be a tourist” (NE 15). In the whole country, newspapers and television channels are shouting Tiger Crisis! In the last ten years, many tigers have been killed and now we have only around 1000 tigers left in the whole country. “Soon all tigers will be wiped out they say. Out forest is worst they say” (NE 15). Krishnan Nair takes this as a right opportunity to reform the tribals inveigled into poaching. He advises them to keep watch on the tigers and stop corruption, stop poaching and make tigers breed. “. . . the police came here last week. Instead of trying to catch the big city poachers, they raided your huts. They will come again. They won’t stop unless we stop the tiger killings” (NE 15). Nair helps the Mogiya tribals, poaching the tiger for money, to see reason, stop their illegal activity and nurture nature.
One night Krishnan Nair gets a call about that day’s plan of poachers and Nair with the help of tribals and Billu Mogiya goes to the forest. The next day he reads in newspaper that “Last night an international poaching gang was nabbed in the biodiversity zone of the forest, along with 6 Mogiya tribals who had helped them. One of them, Billu Mogiya, had been employed as a forest guard. Billu was killed in the police firing, with two other tribals, Hakum and Gujju. Forest ranger Krishnan Nair discovered the poachers’ plan, and informed the police, who took prompt action to stop the crime” (NE 17). Seeing the award photo and articles in the newspaper, his sister Prema comes from Kerala and gets reunited with him.

The play actually traces the journey of Nair’s life in which he faces loss, betrayal and abandonment. First, he could not get his mother’s affection, so he ran away from his home and was given shelter by Salman Husain. Second, he brought up a tiger cub Ammini as his own sister but then when it was of age, he left Ammini in the wild. Third, his friendship with Billu Mogiya and his sister Chandni Mogiya is very emotional. On the sidelines, the playwright also brings a line of romance between Chandni and Nair. Chandni’s love for Krishnan Nair is something that crosses cultures, regions and linguistic barriers. Nair reciprocates her love by embracing her but he is reluctant to betray his friend Billu and exercises restraint. As a result, Chandni being over-passionate, finds an outlet for her love in her elopement with a lorry driver. Billu Mogiya dies when he helps Nair in catching the poachers. Krishnan Nair is depressed at the loss of his companion and his drumming partner Billu Mogiya and feels desolate: “No, I don’t dance anymore . . . No drummer . . . My drummer is gone” (NE 17). Thus Nair is orphaned out every time and feels again and again orphaned. In the event of the death of her grandfather and mother, Prema comes into his life as a ray of hope to survive all these tragedies. Nair’s life is like a cycle in which he experiences union and separation alternately.
Nair is the link in the play which connects all others. He is a pathetic figure who is happier with animal companions than with human beings and occupies centre stage in the play. The cruelty of the carefully orchestrated murder of the tiger hunted for its skin is matched or exceeded by the dark secrets of the Kathakali family and sufferings of its youngest member, Krishnan Nair. The horror and anxiety of the human tragedy that is no less than the skinning of the tiger. Seetha Ravi in her article “Night’s End: a World Class Play” comments: “What will emerge at the end of the long night remote-controlled by political, economic and social power groups? A new dawn? Or the beginning of yet another night?” (Web)

The play also highlights man-nature relationship. The two main characters in the play unlock their heart to the silent observers like bird, ant and tiger in the form of dramatic monologue. Chandni talks to a bird and an ant Chintu. In a dense jungle far away from home, Nair’s story starts when he chances upon an abandoned tiger cub, Ammini and decides to raise it by himself. He brings up the cub like a child, like his own daughter and addresses it as “mole”. In researcher’s interview with the author, Ramnarayan says, “He has loved his sister. The only person who loved him back is Prema. He longs for that love and love of the mother, love of the sister and love of a woman, a wife, a romantic love. He longs for that feminine love. When Ammini appears, it becomes everything for him. First he treats her as a child, then as she is of age, it is like sister, he falls in love with her and becomes jealous when a male tiger comes and she goes with him”.

The tiger cub is very close to him and she turns his life upside down. Nair says, “You know I am your slave. Ammini! My whole world spins around you . . . feeding you, playing with you, racing with you, swimming with you! Even when I sleep I can’t forget you! You jump into my bed! You want to share my blanket!” (NE 11) Tribals practise nature worship and they worship wild animals as God. Superstitious beliefs are
deep-rooted in Indian culture that tribals too follow that. Chandni says, “I promised to sacrifice a goat if you come back” (NE 8). The tribal people respect and embody their culture in a high pedestal. The tiger is also worshipped and out of this worship emerges cure for many illnesses. It can be a superstition unfounded without logic and reason but however it reveals the community's trust in wild life. Love, affection and sentiment can work wonders with animals too.

Ammini proves to be a good companion to Nair and a wild cat is inexplicably transformed into a pet cat. She has forgotten how to hunt, an instinctive characteristic of a tiger. Nair wonders, “How can I teach you to hunt? How can I make you forget me? How can I forget you?” (NE 11) In his attempt to train Ammini to hunt, Nair brings a skinny goat first day but Ammini runs away. One day on seeing a tiger walking out, Ammini buried her head in Nair’s lap as he crouched behind a bush. With the help of Billu, Nair teaches her to hunt and finally leaves her in the woods where she has found a suitable mate. Nair feels jealous that “she loves him, not me” (NE 12). But he can’t mourn anymore because she has gone to her place. Nair’s relationship with the tiger cub Ammini shows that Man and animals can co-habit. If we love them, they will forget their ferociousness and co-exist with us. They don’t harm unless it needs to harm for its prey. Though Ammini is a silent observer, it reciprocates Nair’s feelings. It is understood that they both understand each other’s language and have a very good rapport between them. Tiger represents Nature and Nair’s relationship with the tiger stresses that Man and Nature are mutually interdependent.

The play also highlights the importance of art and culture in man’s life. There is a mixture of tribal musical instruments for their religious festivals and celebrations. Krishnan Nair comes from the tradition of Kathakali family. Every time his friend beats dholak, Nair dances to the tune of the dholak-beating unconsiously. “When Billu Mogiya brought the dholak and started playing, I jumped up. Without knowing what I was doing I
began to dance. The whole village came to watch” (NE 10). He evokes the epic stories and gives a contemporary tone through his dancing. Ramnarayan’s play “connects to the past, dating back to the epics and reveal how situations and issues have not changed but have merely take a modern tone” (qtd. in “On a stage” n. pag).

Once when he was dancing to the tune of the dholak, the innocent tribals thought that he was possessed by some spirits or he might be their deity and they started revering him. “They treated me with awe, also fear” (NE 10). Thereafter, seeing Nair’s dance, the tribals are afraid to help poachers and start revealing all truths to him. Since then the tribals have looked upon Nair as someone omniscient and confessed their guilts. Only through one of such confessions does Nair come to know that Ammini is one of the three cubs left behind after their mother, Nurjehan’s death.

In conclusion, Ramnarayan seems to raise certain contemporary issues through the play: Is the tiger safe in the forest? Can tribal and other marginalized people balance their way of life against the intrusions of the modern world? How can the oppressed assert their rights? How can they resist the threats and blandishments of commercial gain? Can loneliness ever be overcome? The play throws up such questions to ponder over. Ramnarayan comes in the line of D. H. Lawrence who advocates that the good writers should be socially committed and their works must serve the society. In her Directorial Note, Gowri Ramnayaran says, “I’ve always been worried about the role and the responsibility of the artist and of art, a worry that has made me write seven plays. With Night’s End, I am trying to get through the tangles of these questions as they haunt me today. Night’s End could mean dawn, but both “night” and “end” are not comfortable words. I seek to make us uncomfortable and perhaps see the tiniest silver ray of hope at the same time” (Web).

Manglesh in his article “A Tale of Betrayal, Tiger and Forest” is of the view that “the play is basically about the emotional turbulence of human beings and their
relationship with nature” (Web). The playwright weaves the challenges faced by the forest department and life’s sorrows seamlessly into unique storyline. The play creates awareness about the growing exploitation of our natural sources and falls under the category of ecocriticism. The world trends of the development and domination of great cultures have given rise to the extinction of a lot of indigenous cultures. The play emphasizes the resistance towards the anti-ecological perspectives and shares the vision for the better and healthy environment. Night’s End sparks as a sincere contribution to environmental studies.

The four plays taken up for discussion in this chapter have dealt with human relationships, and inter-personal relationships between human beings and animals. While doing so, the plays have also offered slices of human life in general, and contemporary India in particular. The playwrights keep their eyes open to the existing realities and other issues, social, cultural and ecological. They don’t fantasize life but portray things through the prism of realism with, of course, a slight dose of faith and myth that form an indispensible aspect of human existence on earth.