Chapter – 3
Politics in Power

This play is essentially a political allegory but not bereft of human dimensions. It is easy to find reflections of the political situation in India of the late sixties and early seventies in the royalist regime of Umbugland. However, it would be simplistic to read the play as of one land or of one period because it unfolds the basic nature of politics and the essential nature of human beings who crave for power. It also unveils that this basic craving for power compels a human being to resort to violent means many a time. Essentially power and violence go hand in hand and the ugliest aspect of it becomes visible in politics. Tendulkar builds a powerful satire in this play to expose the intricate political intrigues designed to attain positions of authority and the corruption involved in holding on to them. Though he has created a fictitious milieu to bring home this idea still this milieu can be identified with any political system of the present day—the politician who spouts moral platitudes; his antitype a blatantly immoral character; the statesman whose face wears a constant smile and who gesticulates wildly but at the same time is taciturn to a fault; the one who change sides, pretends to be ill and sits on the fence till the eleventh hour and of course there is the indomitable Princess Vijaya herself, the daughter of an autocratic king, who turns the tables on her advisers and refuses to be their pawn. Tendulkar has penned her character very carefully and very tactfully. Her character exhibits principles which she does not sacrifice like the other power hungry ogres of politics who can even kill to remain in power. Her relationship with Prannarayan, the eunuch is complex but interesting; of the status of queen and attendant but very human and very loving. Prannarayan acts as a Sutradhar or as a chorus in the play. He introduces the play and acts as a neutral and patient commentator throughout the action. Yet he is not a mere observer or even commentator but a philosopher as well. Almost all his sayings have a flavour of maxims. In the light of his natural wisdom, the reader/audience becomes aware of the ugliness and futility of the power game. It is through his eyes that the dramatist uncovers the central concern of the play: The corruptive and corroding nature of power.
Encounter in Umbugland is one of the first political plays of Tendulkar. He would write others later, like Ghashiram Kotwal which would give rise to such furore. But Encounter in Umbugland has a unique freshness of treatment unlike other political satires, kind of objective yet human outlook that raises it above just another topical, political play. This play has a three dimensional plot and in order to analyze power/violence relationship in politics the reader must focus on the representatives of triangular power equations in the play namely - King Vichitravirya; The cabinet; Princess Vijaya. All three represent power. Vichitravirya is the king, all powerful, has no intention to leave the throne. It is altogether a different thing that the day his sixtieth coronation ceremony is held, he dies. Next in this equation is the cabinet. Each one of the ministers is above 50, each one of them has a secret desire to hold the highest office, thinking the natural heiress to the throne, a mere child being unfit for power. The third is the natural heiress to the throne, who though considered young soon, learns the way power operates and uses it to her advantage.

Vichitravirya, the king, is described by the writer as cunning and by his own daughter as cruel. He has a number of qualities of a successful ruler. Successful because he has been able to lead the country for sixty years. As the reader is acquainted with the cabinet consisting of Vratyasom, Karkshirsha, Pishtkeshi, Aranyaketu, Bhagdanta - all cunning, scheming politicians, it is convinced that the king’s reign has been successful because he has been able to control such persons for such a long period. As the play opens, the reader comes to know that the sixtieth anniversary of the king’s coronation is being celebrated, and as we come face to face with him, he appears to be a pompous, self consumed and boastful person. He is convinced that he is a very good orator and that people like to listen to him even though the subject of his speech might not be comprehensible to them many a times. He proclaims that his subjects love him and being engrossed in working for the welfare of Umbugland he does not even have the time to worry about his own daughter. He says, “The Island badly needs our leadership for at least another fifty years.” (Tendulkar 277). This proves to be dramatic irony because we see the king dead after a short while. The cabinet consisting of manipulating and scheming politicians is in awe of the king. It is a part of political strategy of the king that the cabinet is kept waiting for nearly an hour or so simply to make the ministers realize
that they are not that important. In his conversation with the ministers, the king always has the upper hand and he cuts them to size from time to time. They conspire behind his back but before him nearly all of them turn sycophants saying, “His majesty is Umbugland and Umbugland is his Majesty.” (277) In her heart of their hearts, these ministers cannot tolerate the king even for a single day but say on his face that may the king rule for two hundred, five hundred years. The king very cunningly answers that this was what he expected of his ministers knowing full well that they conspire behind his back. The king uses this trick time and again and puts the ministers off their balance more than once to check their allegiance to him. The ministers are thus not successful in their schemes of overthrowing the King and the king has been able to rule for such a long time. Moreover, the king, like a good diplomat and good politician has a very sound intelligence network and is able to collect information about his state and subjects through his resources. As a result, time and again, he is successful in foiling the attempts of his ministers to dethrone him and the ministers, mere puppets before him are not allowed freedom of thought and expression by the king. Though they seethe from within with hatred for the King, yet in his presence they are mere instruments, listening to his sermons on duty, power and selflessness:

> Power seems more important to you than duty! Selfish designs have replaced service! ...We have experienced it for the past sixty years. Power is crown of thorns. Power is sword hanging over you! Power is the bread you eat at the stake! Power means responsibility! Power means problems and painful decisions. There is no headache like power. There is no trouble like power. We are always saying that we would not wish even our enemies to be punished with power. (278)

The effect of this sermon is that ‘(Aranyaketu yawns into his handkerchief.)’ He further says: “We have not cherished a lust for power even for one second,” (279) longing for himself to rule endlessly.

The king has a kind of charisma that attracts his subjects toward him. The people listen to his lengthy speeches without getting bored and enjoy the childish games he plays with them. He makes the people play collective hopscotch, makes them rhyme tables or
recite hymns, in chorus. The mob likes it and cheers their king and this is his strongest point, his success and the ministers’ failure. However, as soon as he dies, a group of mourners clearly states the King was autocratic, pretentious and masochist. His death makes each minister happy and satisfied from deep within. None of them liked the King and each has nourished a secret desire to sit on the throne, their lust for power making them use the tender age of the heiress Vijaya as an excuse to usurp power from its rightful inheritor and are ready to go to any extent to achieve the goal:

Let us not open our mouths too wide about principles and honesty. To observe these virtues in politics is as inappropriate and stupid as celibacy after marriage. You and I are politicians and ministers; in blunt terms, what does that mean? Eh Pishtakeshi! It means we are partners in a most profitable game of skullduggery. (273)

At another place Pishtakeshi says, “In politics one should have the hide of a rhinoceros, like Bhagadanta here. Say what you will do what you will it’s impossible to guess his reaction.” (273) At yet another place Vratyasom says, “In short politics itself is treachery. Treachery to the king, the country, the people. And various other kinds of constant treachery. A true politician can be loyal only to himself.” (288)

We see them in their moment of vulnerability and indecision with each hoping against hope that his name would be unanimously accepted by the others. They time and again say that they don’t have any craving for power but we clearly see that it is power they are after. With no or scant respect for the dead King, the ministers openly begin trading charges and scheming for the throne. They take it for granted that Princess Vijaya, being a little child would tell them on her own that they should rule the country. When the cabinet meeting is going on in the palace room, Vijaya, by mistake enters the meeting room. It then dawns upon Vratyasom suddenly that they should seat Vijaya on the throne and rule themselves. He says, “She be the rule, we’ll be the rulers! An excellent plan till we agree on a firm decision!”(293) She stands in the circle made by them “like a startled hare.”(293) The ministers are satisfied that they will be ruling by proxy. In fact Vijaya hesitates in the beginning. But a surprise is in store for the ministers. Vijaya grows quite quickly and quite amazingly. The ministers that address
Vijaya as child, Viju etc are taken aback at her behaviour. They are kept waiting by Vijaya just the same way as her father had been doing. They are insulted by her from time to time. Ultimately they start feeling that power is slipping out of their hands just like sand and they are bent upon revolt. Their motto is ‘either power or revolt’. In seven months’ rule by Vijaya, they are almost cornered. The plan Vijaya chalks out for the welfare of Kadamba tribe, the cabinet refuses to sign. The cabinet thinks that this way they will teach a lesson to the Princess. The Princess does not budge. She declares the plan herself. Stung by the rebuff the ministers conspire to eliminate her if they have to, to get back the power in their own hands, “With one accord, and at the first opportunity, we give the Queen a strong, reminder of our existence, one that she’ll really understand.”(313) Karkashirsha adds, “We must extinguish her totally! Pishtakeshi joins in: When she’s understood that she can’t achieve a single thing by putting off the cabinet, our work is done.”(313)

The ministers probably cannot digest the fact that power is snatched out of their hands and moreover they are to follow a young girls commands. The actual confrontation begins when on Kadamba issue, the cabinet is not taken into confidence. The ministers ultimately plan to hire a mob, stone the castle through the mob and then getting that mob to ultimately kill the Princess. Vratyasom makes the political strategy very clear in the following words:

Like any other goods that are available wholesale, the people, too, have their agents. They will sell any stupid idea to the mob. In return, they ask for its anger. Of course when using this anger for political purposes statesmen have to give these agents some payment either money or concessions or protection because the mob is not a full time business with some of them. (334)

When Aranyaketu raises doubts about bloodshed, Vratyasom answers, “Ha! There will! What’s wrong with shedding a little blood? As long as it’s not your own!” (335) Later at one place Pishtakeshi says, “The arrangements are perfects. They will come. Instructions have been given to burn some vehicles if possible.”(348) Of course, it is a different matter altogether that future has a big surprise in store for them, as Princess
Vijaya proves to be an astute politician who is able to counter their moves and emerges stronger.

Though Vijaya is of tender age when the reign of the kingdom is handed to her yet she shows a maturity of mind that surprises everyone. Not afraid to express her views, even to her father the king, she can be forthright in her opinion and point of view. When the king asks Aranyaketu how he looks in the new dress, Vijaya angrily says, “Decrepit! Old!”(281) She is inquisitive by nature and asks many questions to Prannarayan, the eunuch in whom she finds a good friend, guide and mentor and her relationship with this eunuch is very tender and depicts the humane and tender side of Vijaya. Initially fearful and reluctant to take over the reign of kingdom, Vijaya soon assumes control, insisting on getting the legs of the throne cut because her feet didn’t touch the ground while she sat on it. Uncomfortable at Prannarayan calling her ‘Your Majesty’, Vijaya even tells her maid who calls her ‘Your Majesty’, “At dawn when I am asleep in bed, aren’t you going to stroke my hair lightly and gently and say ‘Princess Vijaya!’ to wake me up?” (296) Even after she has taken an oath as a Queen, she wants to play hopscotch with Prannarayan. Prannarayan is embarrassed and says, “Your Majesty, it won’t look fitting to play those games now.”(296) She asks why. Prannarayan says, “Power games are rather different.”(297) Vijaya is irritated and says, “Power! Power! Power! For the last eight days that’s all I’ve been hearing. This ‘power’ can go to hell!”(297) She further says, “What else! I don’t want to play power games! I want to play my own. What has power to do with the games I play?” (297) At another place she says, “What crime did I commit, that I’ve been imprisoned in the palace since childhood.”(303) This is the glimpse of tender and innocent Vijaya of the early days of her reign. Very soon she begins to ask all sorts of questions about politics and governance, to which Prannarayan answers very wisely and being a quick learner, she starts to keep the ministers waiting and confides to Prannarayan that they are used to waiting outside her dead father’s apartments for hours at a time and she does not bother about them. Prannarayan advises her, “One must insult them so lightly that their self importance won’t suffer.”(299) He further says, “Insult them, but don’t wound their egos. And diplomatic language!”(299) Vijaya says intelligently, “In other words lies. The opposite of what one feels.”(299) The ministers approach having the least idea what Vijaya has learnt during one day. They don’t pay
honours to her that are due to a Queen. They think her to be a child still. They address her as Viju. Vijaya hears all this silently. The cabinet becomes uneasy and then she speaks. “The cabinet has broken the protocol of court by omitting to bow to us. We are the Queen of this island.” (301) The cabinet still doesn’t understand but ultimately they are to follow the protocol though they name it as child’s stubbornness. Her behavior is childish and Karkshirsha is angry at her behavior. However, the cabinet leaves and Vijaya is happy that she has insulted the cabinet. Then the reader sees that she was doing all this intentionally because she wanted to show to the cabinet that she is not a puppet, no more a child, no more Viju, rather, she is a Queen and should be treated accordingly. Prannarayan advises her again, “To hiss when you’re stung is one kind of behaviour. To bluster when you’re stung is a politician’s behaviour”. (306) He further guides, “Politics means sweetly smiling enmity and all the experience of sacrifice. A show a sacrifice is always profitable in politics.” (306) Thus Vijaya proves her position of power to the cabinet ministers who, slighted by her behavior begin planning to kill her.

Vijaya’s decision to meet and do something for the tribes of Kadamba, meets with the minister’s disapproval, who reject her proposal, leading to a serious confrontation and the tussle for power. Vijaya announces the bill as passed and not to be left behind, the ministers start serious conspiracy against the princess. But the Princess in not the Princess of the early days. As she herself declares before Prannarayan, “Something in me is changing greatly. Prannarayan. I feel afraid of myself, very afraid.” But Prannarayan is always there by her side, “One should not look inward too much. One should always look outwards. That way one retains ambition.” (326)

Thus the real issue raised by Tendulkar in Encounter in Umbugland is of power. The cabinet wanted a puppet as a Queen which Vijaya refuses to become. In a patriarchal society it is against the dignity of the male ministers to bow to the commands of a girl. When the bill is announced as passed the cabinet feels insulted and calls it a dictatorial step on the part of the Queen. Now the Queen is a sworn enemy for them and they are to ‘engineer an uprising’ against the plan. The work plan of the cabinet from now onwards clearly shows that in politics, everything is engineered, guided, planned, manoeuvred. Vratyasom declares:
But if we use this very confusion skillfully, we can put a firm and decisive noose around our opponents’ neck, Karkshirsha. Let’s use that skill… It wouldn’t be in our interest to delay our move on the throne after this. We must gather a mob! (333)

The skill that they are going to use is to ignite the mob and raise it against the Queen. They don’t hesitate in shedding blood in destroying property. Vratyasom says, “Destruction brings change. Any one who cannot watch even the greatest destruction dispassionately is in my opinion no politician at all.” (335) They declare, “A battle with the Queen is inevitable.” (336) Vratyasom says, “At least fifty martyrs must sacrifice their lives. Property worth at least five or seven hundred thousand must be wrecked. May the people live forever!” (337) But when it comes to sacrificing their own lives, they are terrified and don’t have the nerve to face the public, knowing fully well that they will be torn to pieces. Sacrifices sound good but when the other makes it. They have made a plan to infuriate the mob against the Queen and they make it a point shed blood and ruin property. The plot that the ministers have hatched in order to get the Queen killed through the infuriated mob is reported to the Queen through her intelligence, who then she plans a counterattack. She wins over one of the ministers and he plans to fall ill at the last moment. She gets her spies planted in the house of each minister so that she comes to know of each of their moves. She outsmarts the ministers. She gets to know that certain government officials play a double game. When she comes to know that there is unrest in the common people against her, she changes her moves slightly. Here, at every single step, a true friend Prannarayan is always with her. But as she herself puts it, the day of the besiege will be her final test and she is to pass this test. Now she really wants to rule, “I want to rule a hundred years, a thousand years.” (345) She wants to out play the ministers. The ministers apparently show to the Queen that they have nothing to do with the crowd and they are devoted servants to the crown but the actual reports have already reached the Queen. So she is ready to take all this. The ministers hide themselves in one of the rooms in the palace and wait for the Queen to come. They want to relish the scene of stone throwing at the Queen and want to see her surrender before the angry mob. While they talk in this room the Queen listens to every single word. She wears slacks and holds her knitting. This is done by the playwright to portray the casualness of the Queen.
before the ministers and to establish the fact before them that she is not agitated at all. She talks to them in a satirical manner, says that the crowd gathered outside is a ‘show’. When Pishtakeshi says that the stone that was hurled at the window of the palace not only hit the window but hit the heart of every thinking man, of everyone who truly cares for Umbagland, she ironically remarks, “If it (the stone) was looking for such a person when it entered, it must soon have realized he wasn’t here.” Vratyasom in a very concerned manner says, “Why not? It might have hit Your Majesty’s own heart!”(349) To the amazement and dismay of the ministers, Vijaya replies:

You’ve guessed wrong again, Vratyasom. The shooting outside is going on at our command. And if necessary we will shoot the last survivor of that crowd - shoot him like a dog! We are just calculating whether or not there are enough bullets. That’s all. (349)

It is here, for the first time, that the ministers realize that tables have been turned upon them. Vijaya very sarcastically throws Vratyasom’s words on his face, “(reminding him) Death to the Queen! Victory to the people! Victory to the martyrs! Fight on!” (350) Vratyasom does not know what to make of it and fumbles, “I was only saying that sarcastically.”(350) The ministers now are entrapped as a rat and they don’t have any escape. Vijaya compels the ministers to go outside to calm the uncontrollable crowd and the ministers are terrified. Vratyasom says, “The cabinet does not consent to this!”(351) Vijaya very pungently says, “But the cabinet does consent to gathering this crowd, inciting it to come here, and to creating this spectacle, doesn’t it?” (351)

The ministers now know that they are ensnared. Vijaya declares that she herself would go out and the ministers are happy to the core. Shouts, shrieks, noise is heard and the ministers are definite that the Queen is dead and they ironically pay homage to her. Just then she returns:

(All stand stock-still).

ALL: your majesty!

VIJAYA: Why? Is the cabinet surprised? (They are horrified). (353)
Her manner is unconcerned. She even has the idea what the ministers had been thinking and wishing. To the dismay of the ministers, she relates her experience outside. Very proudly she says that the crowd subsided only when she promised an enquiry into the private property of the cabinet and shouted ‘down with the cabinet’. When the crowd showed dissatisfaction at the Kadamba plan, she responded quickly like an intelligent politician and shouted, ‘down with the Kadamba plan and down with the cabinet that made the plan’. In this way she put the whole blame on the cabinet. Now the crowd is after Vrattyasom, Karkshirsha, Pishtakeshi, and Aranyaketu. Bhagdanta has already been beaten by the crowd. The rest of the ministers petrified. They start blaming each other for what has been done. Vijaya makes the final move. First she makes all the ministers fall on their knees to beg for their life and secondly she makes women out of them, makes them wear the disguise of women and leave the scene. This way Vijaya has taken away the power of the ministers, their status, their desire to rule and most importantly, their manliness and thus the encounter is complete with the victory of Vijaya, her unquestioned power and status. The transition of Princess Vijaya, to Queen Vijaya makes the journey of growth of a young girl, who is naive, innocent and quite helpless to an adult, who in the process of evolving, has acquired a sharp mind, survivors instinct, astute wisdom and skill required to subsist in a milieu which is hostile and dangerous. This transition acquires great significance because the protagonist in this play (female) who is considered weak, susceptible, indecisive and not capable of scheming or being cruel-all attributes of feminine gender. It is this myth about women that Tendulkar shatters in Encounter in Umbugland by the manner in which Vijaya proves a social construct wrong.

Power which has been a gender monopoly is a social construct. Whereas in a given situation, when the human heart so desires, it can cross boundaries of gender. Women are generally supposed to be soft, gentle and men to be strong, aggressive and powerful. But it is not presented this way in Encounter in Umbugland. In this play the cunning ministers who had taken Vijaya for granted are unmanned towards the end of the play by the Princess. Tendulkar wants to convey through Vijaya, that even a woman, if she has a mind to, can accomplish such tasks as are not generally expected of her because strength is inherent in every individual, it is the social roles that empower or weaken individuals of a particular gender. N.Geetha opines: Feminist writers and critics have
keenly felt the complete negation of the female experience in literature. Even the projections of the image of women have been compressed into a few acceptable roles. Women are usually cast in a few popular stereotype of a narrow range of characterization. There are two basic type of positive roles which depict women as independent intelligent and even heroic; and a surplus of misogynic roles commonly identified as the bitch, the witch, the vamp and the ‘Virgin Goddess’. (171) It is a pleasure to watch Vijaya cast in a positive role of an intelligent politician who makes the ministers run in women’s clothes thus robbing them of their dignity and masculine attributes. Vijaya rises above the social construct of masculinity and femininity. The ministers, here the representatives of society were confident that a young girl would not be capable of opposing them after the death of her father and she would perforce have to succumb to their collective will. Vijaya, grows into an ambitious and intelligent girl who quickly rises above this ‘taken for granted’ role and behaves heroically in the real sense of the term thus rising above gender politics as well and everything else that would inhibit her.

In this play Tendulkar has depicted three representatives of power and has shown that this is the basic desire in the heart of every human being to attain, enjoy and command. Vichitravirya’s unquestioned authority has made him control the country for sixty years notwithstanding his cruelty to others. The ministers who could not fulfill their dream to be in power as long as the king was alive, suddenly see it happening with the death of the king, and, as far as the ministers are concerned, they find it impossible to accept that Vijaya who has in her genes the capacity to rule, proves them all wrong, within the short period of one year. The game of power and violence that the ministers started bounced back on them and Vijaya pays them in the same coin. The ministers resorted to violence in order to stay in power, so does Vijaya. Though uneasy with the thought to resort to violence, Vijaya has learned this fact as well that to remain afloat in the sea of politics, you are to eat smaller fish up otherwise they will swallow you.

Thus in Encounter in Umbugland Tendulkar tries out a fascinating form, departing totally from his other plays, employing folk theatre, music, verse and an interesting chorus that introduces and offers commentary on them. At another level this
play can be read as a pungent satire on the contemporary political scene. Fundamental questions are raised in this play with regard to the nature of power and what it can do to human beings? It depicts how power transforms an individual. Though rooted in local politics, the play breaks through temporal and spatial boundaries and becomes a universal allegory of power. It prepares the ground for Tendulkar's next magnificent play Ghashiram Kotwal.

In this play, Tendulkar’s satire and talent in parody appears quite impressive, at times, even prophetic. In Act 1, King Vichitravirya’s ‘popularity’ with the people- his making them do physical exercises in public, his giving advice on cough and other maladies parody a Maharashtrian Prince whose fondness for traditional physical exercises had already become a subject of satire. Later, Vijaya supporting the Kadamba Tribe plan and the council’s total rejection of it symbolize many events, both contemporary and later ones in the Indian political scenario. Tendulkar does not stop at allegories and parodies. He exposes the world inside out and depicts it as the world of hypocrites, the world of humbugs that Princess Vijaya would have to deal with.

Prannarayan is carved out as a unique character. A eunuch, he is a philosopher and guide of Princess Vijaya and teaches her one of the basics of politics that is not to give one’s mind to others and to be insincere in one’s words and actions. As we see, these guidelines go a long way to help Vijaya cope with the falsity and sycophancy of the ministers and to defeat them at their own turf. He teaches her the theory of retaliation or how to pay back in the same coin. We strongly feel that Vijaya acting on his advice is able to survive; otherwise the ministers were all set to subjugate her into submission. At one place Prannarayan very significantly comments that he would remain as he is- a man to the touch but a woman in appearance. He says that he is:

A bat hanging on tree of life...I see you upside down, a formless, characterless, lifeless, existence less gathering. The blind, deaf and dumb spectators of the whole encounter- who allow men to become politicians, politicians to become statesmen, statesmen to become cunning and cunning men to become robots, mechanical men. (Tendulkar 356)
It is a satiric comment but very true of the world of politics which should not be taken at its face value. The scene behind the veil is much darker than one can think of.

The plot of the play is well knit and characterization is also unique. It is in the line of poetic drama and makes an extensive use of chorus. The chorus provides important information, as we are informed of the death of the king by chorus, comments on the political chaos and conflict of ministers is provided by the chorus and vital question raised by it.

Vijay Tendulkar, best known for his emotionally charged protest plays and film scripts, chooses a different style for Ghashiram Kotwal - that of a musical historical. Set in Maharashtra in the late eighteenth century, it recounts a power game played out in terms of caste ascendancy in politics. The work draws on several Maharashtra folk styles, and has an obvious relevance in the content of individuals playing the game of politics, taking advantage of situations, rising to power and crushing to impotence at the whims of more powerful players in the same game- a typical phenomenon in almost any political situation. The story could fit into any era. Give it a different set of costumes, language and folk tunes; it could be the chronicle of any corrupt political regime where the focus is not people, but politics. Writing about the current political situation realistically would have been making the issue too specific, thus leaving no space for interpretation. Hence, Tendulkar turned to history to create his controversial Kotwal, and made ingenious use of folk art to launch an attack on negative societal elements. There were harsh reactions against the play. Hardcore feminists also managed to find fault with it. The play is not about Nana Phadnavis, the late 18th century Marathi Machiavelli who was the Peshwa’s chancellor in Pune, the royal deputy’s deputy. It is about a deputy who owed his position so much to solid popular or military backing as to the diplomatic address with which he could play one party off against another. Tendulkar has used a well known story involving historical figures to comment on the creation of monsters for temporary gain, leading to inequity, brutality, and ultimate destruction. Using Nana and Ghashiram, Tendulkar weaves a political allegory and critiques the current political scenario. Nana depicts all those who are in power and thus can exploit. The Abhanga becomes a metaphor for the oppressor, who uses piety as a facade. The play thus is not an expose of
corruption in Brahmin class, but a depiction of the supposedly innocuous practices by politicians to consolidate power. In an author’s note Tendulkar says:

This is not a historical play. It is a story in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creations of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of this story, if there is any may be looked for elsewhere. (586)

Samik Bandyopadhyay asked Tendulkar, “Did you really conceive the play as an expose of Brahmin corruption and pretensions or as a study of the power game in more general terms?” (586) He replied:

It is rather difficult to go back to the point when I thought of writing this play and recollect everything that happened to me on the conscious and subconscious levels. Broadly speaking, I had in mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams; also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow; and the irony of stoning a person to death pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams. The rest just happened, or if that sounds pretentious, happened at a subconscious level. The decadence of the class in power (The Brahmins, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental, though not accidental. (587)

In introduction of Ghashiram Kotwal, Samik Bandyopadhyay says:

In Ghashiram power is defined horizontally (in the sense in which Maurice Duverger uses it in the Idea of Politics, London, 1966) in terms of individuals against individuals; from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization; played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power. A whole aura of hymns and religious ceremonial provide the ironic screen that is pierced through and through by the crudest exercises of power. (587)
In a typical scene where Nana is trying to seduce the girl praying before Ganapati, the girl says ‘He will see’, Nana mockingly replies, ‘That idol of holiness?’ (Tendulkar 378) and the facade of ceremony collapses at once. Samik Bandyopadhyay further says, “Religion manifest in caste dominance and ceremony is a device of power in Ghashiram but more as an abstraction of awe than as material force. The material force is provided by the agents who construct and operate hierarchies that they can topple or reshuffle at will.” (587) Nana is omnipotent and he fails to catch the girl. In symbolic impotence, ‘in blind lust grabs the servant at the door’ and has to work out a deal with him to get his girl. Bandyopadhyay says:

Tendulkar suggests that the sexuality implicit in power is the brilliant innuendo that caps the situation: ‘Our grandeur is gone if she’s not had.’ Nana needs Ghashiram and Ghashiram needs Nana; in the shifting game of power, it is only a temporary adjustment that Nana exploits as long as necessary and can drop unceremoniously the moment it has served its purpose. (587)

Yet another device of power is deceptions of deputation just like religious and secular ceremony. In order to hide from the victim the real face of power, so that all resistance is deflected, the real power uses the masks of deputation. Democratic institutions as bureaucracy that intermediate, are regarded as repositories of at least executive power, are actually masks so that the real power holders can hide themselves from the eyes of the victims. Ghashiram thinks that having the charge of Kotwali means that power is in his hands whereas Nana, while handing over the power to Ghashiram knows, “What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account.” (Tendulkar 385) Here Tendulkar shows how the strategy of deputation works hand in hand with sexuality. Tendulkar is more concerned with the mechanism of power operating within society than with implications of power. Tendulkar, in Ghashiram Kotwal, observes the operations of religiosity, sexuality, and deputation’s politics as devices of power. Samik Bandyopadhyay says:

The human wall serves as an excellent symbol of the mechanism of secrecy, hiding and revealing happenings by human devices. It is the wall
again that as the singing chorus uses the chant of saints’ and gods’ names as yet another screen of complacence or consolation cast over the yawning horror of corruption and tyranny. While the tortured Brahmin groans, the Brahmin line chants the gods’ names and drowns his screams. Institutionalized sexuality and institutionalized religiosity are brought together into an unholy complicity in the reiterated image of Bavannakhani, the red light district, turned into the pleasure garden of Krishna, ‘Bavannakhani Mathura avatari’—Mathura descends on Bavankhahani.? (127))

On one level, this play is a study of the emergence of Ghashiram; his growth and his inevitable end. On another level this play is a study in different devices of power: religiosity represented by the human wall; sexuality going hand in hand with religiosity represented by Bavannakhani on one hand and Lalita Gauri on the other; deputation working as a means of power represented by Ghashiram the Kotwal. And summing up all this: violence that is part and parcel of the play of power represented by Nana ordering the death of Ghashiram and he being stoned to death by the Brahmins of Pune. The plot is of course constructed round Ghashiram and the story moves with the metamorphosis of Ghashiram from a simple village Brahmin to a power crazy monster who ultimately meets his doom. Through the story of Ghashiram the playwright has brought forth different devices of power, nucleus being Nana Phadnavis. The power in Ghashiram Kotwal is evident in religiosity, sexuality and politics of deputation individually as well as in a lethal combination of all three and in addition, violence. Power need not be confined to the state apparatus, and without doubt power and violence operate together and their interdependency is a historically established fact.

The first part of Act I makes an incisive expose of the corruption and sexual exploits of the Poona Brahmins of the time. A number of theatrical devices have been employed by Tendulkar for the purpose. One of the devices is Tamasha-type quick repartee between the Sutradhar and one break-away member of the swaying human curtain. Then there is a role reversal in this type of repartee for while in the Tamasha, the comic character known as Songdya, generally had the upper hand over the Sutradhar, the
role is reversed as Sutradhar acts as Songdya. The second important device employed by Tendulkar is the human wall/curtain that hides or reveals something according to the demand of the situation. This device harnesses with the corruptions, licentiousness of the Pune Brahmins because the human wall is used to hide or show this aspect of their character. The stage directions are at proper places in order to represent the atmosphere of adultery. The same human curtain is transformed into a group sitting at Gulabi’s hall in Bavannakhani. The third instance comes when at a number of places the sacrilegious denigrations of Krishnalila’s myth is identified with the streets of Bavanna, or is compared to Mathura itself. In order to heighten the satiric effect, the devotional chanting of hymns is heard while Bavannakhani is shown on the stage. Without saying much, the intermingling of religiosity and sexuality is achieved this way. The human curtain also facilitates inter-inner stage split that allows a glimpse of the inside while in the front portion, the play is being enacted. While the Brahmins visit Bavannakhani, the wives that stay home receive their Maratha paramours and the human curtain is used to show the opening and closure of the gate from where the Maratha Sardar enters a house. The gate opens, closes and they embrace. All this while the human curtain chants ‘Radhakrishna Hari, Mukunda Murari.’ (Tendulkar 371)

Religiosity had been utilized as a very strong power tactic in this play right from the beginning. The play starts with the human wall, which is introduced by the Sutradhar as the Brahmins of Pune, swaying to and fro, singing a hymn in praise of Ganapati, Saraswati and Lakshmi. Worship of Ganesha on the stage has been presented to expose the social pretensions and religious hypocrisies of the time. The prayer also contains the reference of Brahmins, whose unbecoming activities are been sardonically satirized in the later part of the play. It is also very interesting to note here that in the beginning, the musical note contains irony as well. In this play, music and dance come three times. While each song resonates with a contextual meaning, the dance scenes are significant dramatically. At first we hear the music in the beginning, in the form of a prayer. Second time we hear the musical note is in the middle of the play when Nana’s seventh wedding ceremony is being celebrated. The tragic death of Ghashiram Kotwal ends with music again. Here, music acts like a contrast in the Tragedy. It seems to satirize the pathetic plight and tragic end of the protagonist who in his mad pursuit of revenge becomes
inhuman but is unable to foresee that powerful people are out to destroy. Ghashiram’s war dance is also symbolic when he, banging his fist in the dust with flame of revenge in his eyes over his humiliation after a false charge of theft, (Act I) dances in the accompaniment of the forceful beat of mridang. This device intensifies the effect of bitterness in Ghashiram’s spiteful heart. It signifies a kind of decomposition, decrepitude. His war dance shows the birth of mischief and the festive dance of all, including Nana and his wives after the death of Ghashiram, shows the end of mischief. The pungent satire is that Nana orders to stone Ghashiram to death but the real power that created him flourishes as Nana.

Worship of Ganesha goes on and nothing is audible to the audience in the din of the drum and the shehnai. Nana is not bothered about the worship. He is in lavani state of mind and looks unblinkingly at a pretty girl. He moves towards the girl like a cat and tries to grab her. Tendulkar has used the images and symbols from the animal world suggesting the cruelty, savagery and sometimes lascivious and carnal activities of the animals. Here, cat and mouse image depicts the cruelty of Nana with which he wants to hunt the meek Gauri. The irony in it is that the girl, represented as mouse, the vehicle of lord Ganapati, even prays to Lord Ganapati, but he too, fails to save the chastity of the girl and an innocent girl in molested just before the statue of the Lord Ganesha. This is a very powerful facade used in the play. Morality and God are the strength of the weak. The strong need them only to further their ends. They are thrown in the back ground if the situation so demands and taken into purview if their use becomes imminent. Nana ridicules Lord Ganeshas as an idol of holiness when Gauri points out that he is watching the mis-demeanor of Nana. Pat comes the reply, “He will not say anything if you sit on our lap. He has got two wives.” (378). Behind the veil of religiosity, Nana hides his lechery and interprets the presence of God, according to his convenience and desire. The satire becomes all the more pungent because when all this happens, the chant of the holy hymns continues. It is interesting to note in Ghishiram Kotwal that hymns and sexual rhythm have been deliberately intermingled with each other in order to satirize the corrupt practices of the religious leaders who pose to be saints outwardly but inwardly they are worse than the devil. This judicious intermingling of two diametrically opposed views also presents a contrast in the play which is an important tool in modern literature.
in English. The chant of holy hymns goes on throughout the play whether it is the selection of the girl or a lavani dance or erotic gestures by the courtesan or the march of priest to the red light area or the perpetuation of violence by the guardians of discipline. Their sanctity is assaulted and dishonored pretty often in the play. Nana tries to lay his hand on young Lalita Gauri while in a religious congregation. He leers at her while others devotedly listen to Haridas in his sermons. The sanctity and holiness of prayer collapses the moment the ruler begins eyeing the girl lustily. One is compelled to feel the bitterness of the satire and think that even God is used as pawn by those in power for their misdeeds. Thus God becomes a mask for the powerful, because the common people having blind faith in religion and God will accept meekly anything that is presented before them in the garb of religion or in the name of God.

The Brahmins of Pune visit Bavanakhani, the red light area frequently. When asked by Sutraclhar as to where they are going, they also put on all sorts of masks and try to put forth different excuses, and try to hide behind temple, hymns, kirtan etc. Nana also visits this brothel and leers at the women who feel uneasy and try to adjust their saris. This is the daily routine of the Brahmins of Pune as well as Nana and this is their level of moral degradation. When the dance goes on, the Sutraclhar compares Bavanakhani to Mathura where Krishna himself is dancing with his sakhees, “Bavanakhani. Mathura avatarli.” (369) This is a sacrilegious juxtaposition which, though offensive, reveals the unholy connections between sex and religion. It is also through abuse and misuse of power in the play that we come to know that religion, which actually serves as a barrier for man preventing him from slipping into a den of vices gives way. Or it would be still better to say that it is utilized as per the convenience of man in power. Nana shatters to pieces the belief, trust and fear of God by mocking His status and power. He is so drunk with power that God becomes just an entity for him, nothing to be afraid of, and to be interpreted according to his own convenience.

Sex victory and dominance have come to occupy such a place that no conquest is complete without it. It is sometimes associated with one’s chauvinism also. Sorrowfully it is the women who suffer and continue to do so. Throughout the play the women have been the suppressed lot. Gauri is handed over to Nana without her volition by her father
to satisfy the desires of an aged man and to satisfy his own lust for power. She is handed over to a brute even without the promise of marriage. She loses her reputation, compromises her honour and finally dies a shameful death and the person responsible for this situation, is the father of Gauri- Ghashiram, who wanted to be a Kotwal. Nana is responsible for Gauri’s condition but so is her own father and both of them have their different reasons for exploiting her in that manner.

Sexuality, especially the female sexuality has been used to represent loss and destruction in struggle for power. The Poona Brahmins who represent the different places of India are degenerated and morally bankrupt. They are hypocrites, clever schemers and brutal. Instead of treading the path of spirituality, they visit prostitutes. They do not see the difference between a kirtan and a lavani. For them it is invariably the same. Nana with his insatiable desire for sex, with his numerous wives parodies lord Krishna. It is a cutting satire and monstrous simile. The filthy squalor is compared with spirituality to highlight the moral depravity of Pune. Ghashiram barters his own daughter to get the post of Kotwal of Pune from Nana. Nana, the powerful man exploits Gauri in lieu of temporarily handing over the charge of the Kotwali to Ghashiram and Ghashiram gets power by trading it with his daughter’s youth. To earn the repute and terror of the Kotwal, he turns a perfidious father, a deal worse than that signed by Faustus. So deep is the connection of power and sexuality that even Nana handing over the charge to Ghashiram says, “Go, Ghasya you bastard. We’ve made you. We’ve made you Kotwal. Go, raise hell if you wish. But you have no clue to Nana’s moves. Both barrels of this political gun are loaded full. With the first shot, I’ll lay your luscious girl.” (384)

In this deal sex impinges. The deep rooted nexus of sex, The money and power comes to the fore. The situation is explosive but the things keep moving. Nana on his part is fully culpable. Second instance of sexuality embedded in power is that it is identified with the majesty of the ruler. The visual incarnation of lechery is presented this way in the play - Nana is highly dejected and angry on his failure to grab the girl in the hall. He runs after her but like a deer she escapes the clutches of Nana just at the moment he was going to pounce upon her. Here once again the animal imagery is used. The imagery of ‘frightened deer’ that is to be pounced upon by-obviously a lion that is Nana.
more the image of ‘prey and hunter’ is utilized in this context. The image of wolf is also used in the context of Nana. His frustration is heightened when instead of the girl, Ghashiram comes in his embrace. Ghashiram of course is scolded and kicked but it does not prevent Nana to confess, “Our grandeur is gone if she is not had.” (380) He further states, “If she is found then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan! What a bosom! Birds just blossoming. We will squeeze them like this.” (380)

Ghashiram is made Kotwal almost in a blink of the eye and most carelessly. But the power that has come along with has a disconcerting price tag attached to it. With one stroke the playwright displays the greedy and tawdry contours of politics and power. The power is dissipated as a by-product of an alliance of opportunist forces. Ghashiram gets power and Nana is able to save it slipping from his hands. He will save his grandeur. It is for the exploits of power that Nana turns the Poona city into a playground of hedonistic people. For the possession of worldly power, Ghashiram gives away his daughter ironically to set the immoral and decadent people of Poona right. Little does he realize that what he is doing to obtain power is as degraded and degenerated as the people whom he wants to improve.

Deputation of power is another very powerful device and tactic of politics. Deputation is used as a camouflage, an instrument through which power is exercised. Power is relegated to a second person who governs or carries out the wishes of the master in his name. The result is that if the master is wily and corrupt, he will serve his end through the deputed person who will act as a shield. The blame will also come on the deputed person. In case of untoward or a problematic situation, this deputed person can easily be sacrificed and made a scapegoat. This is exactly what happens to Ghashiram. Such deputation hides the perpetrators from the eyes of the public. Nana very cunningly says, “... Child, you’re a foreigner. I have put you on Poona’s back. We just raised a dog at our door to the position of the Kotwali! What’ll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account.” (384)

Morally bankrupt and vile politician Nana appoints Ghashiram not only to get hold of his daughter but also to depute a man who will be his man and a checkmate to the conspirators of Poona city. He delegates some of his power and exercises his power
through him. Ghashiram is the most suitable choice in the given circumstances for Nana. Some Brahmins who have been conspiring and are up in arms against him have become a nuisance for Nana. Ghashiram, if appointed, will surely work sincerely to prove himself and will suppress the agitators. Even if he wished to join the mutineers, he cannot be allowed to, as he is an outsider and would never be trusted. Moreover as Nana will be exercising his powers through him, the misdeeds will also fall on Ghashiram; they will be credited to his account. “We do it; our Kotwal pays for it.”(385) The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram. The politics of deputation will hide Nana- the perpetrator, from the eyes of the victim. The actual exercise of power will not show. Good work will be claimed by Nana. Somewhere along the line of stratagem of power, Nana needs Ghashiram and Ghashiram needs Nana. The point where they meet becomes the point of ad-hoc arrangement because for Nana it is a marriage of convenience. Ghashiram will be in so long as he needs him. The day his purpose is solved, he will become an unwelcome visitor. He will drop him as conveniently and as unceremoniously as he raised him. When Ghashiram takes upon himself the task of setting the morals of the city right, he puts his heart and soul into it. He becomes ruthless, bold and honest officer who makes bawdy Poona dance to his tunes and see sense. He whips, sues, imprisons to a good effect but power turns him into a ruthless monster who indulges in excesses, harasses the innocent and goes to the extreme. He takes special delight in persecution. After his daughter’s death, he develops a strange penchant for human blood. One reason for it is that Nana had bestowed upon him the power to behead anybody anywhere if he is found indulging in gossip about his daughter and also promised to shield him from the ire of the people. The result is that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Ghashiram’s excesses had numbered his days. Not much time elapses when he imprisons a few Brahmins on the charge of pilferage and heartlessly suffocates some of them to death. Nana’s promise to provide him cover is only illusory. He withdraws his support for fear of being drawn into the eye of a storm and Ghashiram is sacrificed conveniently at the altar of power.

Analyzed in the light of Aristotalian theory of tragedy, Ghashiram Kotwal is a fine example of Aristotle’s concept of a complex-fatal plot. According to Aristotle, there are three ingredients of a complex-fatal plot - peripetia (reversal), anagnorisis (recognition) and pathos (scene of suffering). When there is a reversal of situation in the
status of Ghashiram, peripetia takes place. In fact we perceive two reversals in his status rather than one. The first reversal occurs when in the beginning he is taken to be a thief and then rises to the status of Kotwal in a rapid succession of events, including the unqualified support of Nana. The second reversal takes place when he becomes an object of anger and contempt. People who used to tremble at his name now become violent and revengeful because of the atrocities done by Ghashiram on them. They assault him, humiliate him. This reversal of situation leads Ghashiram to the state of recognition when he realizes the magnitude of blunders committed by him. It is a stage of perception, insight and understanding leading him to the realization of truth. He bitterly repents over what he had done and finds self-justification in what is now being done to him, “Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! I danced on your chest but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull.” (415)

Ghashiram’s character can be compared to Shakespeare’s hero ‘Macbeth’. Just as Macbeth meets his end due to his over-ambitious nature, Ghashiram is stoned to death on account of his indiscriminatory nature mixed with his ambition to rise to power. Ghashiram too would be a true Aristotelian tragic hero had Tendulkar introduced soliloquies in order to reveal the virtuous side of Ghashiram, who at one point of time is a simple individual who had come to Poona to earn his livelihood. But as the play unfolds before us, the reader realizes that he chooses evil deliberately, sticks to it whereas he could say no, and ultimately pays for it. There are many examples throughout the play which arouse pity and fear in the audience. Innocent people are tortured, suppressed and ruthlessly crushed by the orders of Ghashiram Kotwal. These instances show that Ghashiram has lost the touch of humanness in his lust for power, using his daughter to further his cause, torturing Brahmins for interrogation are some instances of change that has come over him, with power. Cries of agony are heard frequently during the course of the play but Ghashiram turns deaf ear to those cries. In order verify whether a particular Brahmin is a thief of not, Ghashiram uses physical torture. The nails of the Brahmin’s right hand are pulled out, his hands are wrapped in a bag and the bag is sealed. A red hot iron ball is placed on his hand forcibly. “The Brahmin falls to the ground and writhes in agony. Ghashiram watches, enjoying it all. He ‘smoothes his moustache.’” (396) When
Ghashiram meets an equally brutal end, the reader/ audience responds to it by thinking of Tendulkar using poetic justice as a device to convey a strong message to such an inappropriate handling of power.

The play also highlights the plight of women in a patriarchal society where woman has no choice of her own and the situation is the same whether she is Gulabi (the dancer) Gauri or the newly married bride or old wives of Nana. Woman is kept and treated as slave to her male counterpart, to the whims and wishes of the male members of the society. Situation has not undergone much change till date. Tendulkar does not talk about only the Peshwa Regime. This story is as much of today as it was of Peshwa rule. Power play and sexual exploitation of women by those in power has remained the same over the years. Almost every incident in the story can be related to an event in Indian Politics of today.

After a discussion of the different devices of power used in this play namely- religiosity, sexuality and deputation, another aspect which must be studied is that Tendulkar has tried to probe in the play just as Genet does in The Balcony (Genet), though on a different scale, the characteristic violence that is a concomitant of all desire for power. The play is full of violence. As soon as Ghashiram enters the play and begins to seek power, violence starts around him. It is Gulabi, the weaker sex, who gets Ghashiram kicked and abused. Soon after this Ghashiram is to be treated roughly again and this time it’s the soldiers who abuse and make fun of him. After a good deal of thrashing, he is put behind bars. Thereafter violence continues unabated. The kind of welcome Ghashiram got on his entry in Poona, he returns manifold to the inhabitants of that city. Corresponding to his rise to power is the reign of terror he unleashes on the city and its people. This part of the play is a study in the growth of Ghashiram Kotwal. He rises to the stature of Kotwal and lets loose hell on the people of Poona. It is a very horrifying combination of power and violence. Nag Bodus is of the view that violence used in Ghashiram is neither the violence favouring a particular caste or section of society nor is it violence arising out of steps taken by the exploited against the exploiters. Undoubtedly it is violence perpetrated by the government or under the patronage of
government. Towards the end of the play, when the Brahmins of Poona are angry and revengeful towards Ghashiram and beat him mercilessly as a result of which he dies; even this is done at the order of Nana. (73) In yet another instance of the lethal combination of power and violence, Ghashiram is stoned to death at the order of Nana, and Nana re-establishes his supremacy.

This play is an ironical commentary on our socio-political set up. With the end of one Ghashiram, we mistakenly presume that it is the end if all Ghashirams whereas the fact is that the emergence of Ghashirams is a universal phenomenon. Ghashirams grow and prosper as and when they get identical socio-political situations in the society. It is the game of power politics that has its universal relevance. Religion, sex and deputation’s politics operate as different but complementary devices of power in our society and this has been very well presented by Tendulkar in the play. The present day politics tends to centre round personalities which is a dangerous trend for any political system as it can lead to the unholy nexus between the seekers of power and those in power.

In depicting the rise, growth and fall of Ghashiram in our society, Tendulkar seems to have been influenced by a popular German playwright and the theorist of drama, Bertolt Brecht, who has clearly stated that the purpose of drama is not to produce catharsis i.e. ‘peace of mind’ all passion spent, but to encourage, stimulate and provoke the audience to think over the issues affecting the normal and balanced growth of human society. (internet entry) By showing the fatal end of Ghashiram in the play, Tendulkar does not want to suggest that Ghashiram has ended for ever. He rather wants to draw our attention to the socio-political factors responsible for the growth of such a crisis in our society. There are certain questions which keep haunting our mind: What led to the fatal consequences arising out of the creation of Ghashiram? What can be done to avert the emergence of Ghashiram like forces in society? The Ghashirams of the world die, but the situations which give birth to such forces, recur and are personified in the character of Nana. Beneath the superficial changes in history, the larger dynamics of power are
cyclical. The contemporary relevance of the play lies in the answer to these questions, and here Tendulkar stands firmly as a class in himself.

The multi-dimensional theatre dynamics of this play with its elaborate use of the human wall, folk traditions of Marathi theatre like *lavani, tamasha, abhanga* etc. and the exotic choreography in singing—all make the play a remarkable venture. The human wall serves as an excellent symbol of the mechanism of secrecy, hiding and revealing events by human devices. The juxtaposition of torture and cruelty against the ritual chanting of Gods by the Brahmin-line creates a startling effect. Some may argue that the thrust of satire and its sting is weakened by the thrill of the musical scale. But the fact remains that in this play, Tendulkar has succeeded in breaking down the notion of conventional theatre. It succeeds magnificently in its aim to expose the dirty game of power struggle and strategies and resultant violence depicted in the play. Chandrakant Bandiwadekar says that experience of watching Ghashiram sell his own daughter in order to save his life was terrifying. Extreme feeling of revenge and resultant anger and violence that arouses in Ghashiram and naked portrayal of lust in the high-stationed people was even more horrifying to watch. (109) Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal* culls out several dark secrets of a corrupt society with the unrelenting hand of a surgeon. The scope of this play is very wide. This is the reason that the characters of this play are mostly flat and nameless. They represent and symbolize a certain type of people or political leaders of any country, age or era. They are referred to by their social status or function e.g. Brahmin, soldier, women, all, others, one, second etc. Thus the individual is dwarfed by the larger structures like religion, caste system, the state and the network of law enforcing agencies. Not many realistic characters are there except Ghashiram and Nana and these two are made larger than life by the enormous extent of their vices—blind rage and blind lust respectively. *Sutradhar* is a beautifully carved out character but he is not a constant character and shifts ground as the play proceeds. He is the *Sutradhar* and introduces the play; he is the narrator or sometimes audience’s voice. At other times he is a watchman or an office-bearer when the need arises. He is a performing actor-character. He uses the *dholki* to draw attention to and lend rhythm to his speech. Through him, the chaotic
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structure of the play is held together and finds shape. ‘And in the end came the End,’ (Tendulkar 415) says the Sutradhar to draw the play to a finale, leaving the stage empty for the death-dance which Nana wraps up brilliantly with a smooth speech, “A threat to the great city of Poona has been ended today. A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghasya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything has happened according to the wishes of the Gods. The mercy of the Gods is with us always.” (415) Nana orders not to cremate Ghashiram’s body, orders to let it rot. The audience cannot relax even in the end. The play ends with the dance of Ganapati in which Ganapati himself is dancing.

Encounter in Umbugland was the first political play written by Tendulkar which was to be followed by Ghashiram Kotwal that saw maximum presentations on stage and at the same time remained the most controversial of Tendulkar plays. Political corruption, which is at the root of all evils and miseries in our society, does not escape the eyes of Tendulkar. For their petty selfish interests the politicians do not hesitate to sacrifice the larger sacred national interests. The selfish dishonest political leaders, intoxicated by power have forgotten the sacrifices made by common people. He exposes the rapid moral degeneration of political leaders in both these plays. Here, we see the ugly face of politics. Lust for power and to go to any extreme in order to remain in power is visible in both these plays. In Ghashiram we perceive gods propped up by the establishment acting as despot. Similar despotism is visible in the ministers of Encounter in Umbugland only with the difference that they are not allowed to be successful whereas despotism of Ghashiram works in the first half only to meet the tragic end in the later half. Ministers also meet the same end, even more tragic than Ghashiram because Ghashiram is killed and then at least relieved from his humility; the ministers are devoid of their manliness while still alive. With the death of Ghashiram people heaved a sigh of relief but as Michel Foucault said:

One of the first things that have to be understood is that power isn’t localized in the state apparatus and that nothing in society will be changed
if the mechanism of power that functions outside, below and alongside the state apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, is not changed. (60)

As long as the Nanas and the ministers live, the dirt of the politics can’t go even if Ghashirams die. If the Nanas and the ministers survive, they can fall as low as nadir in order to retain their position, their chair and then even killing people, burning houses, killing any person in power that is a hindrance in their path is not unimaginable for them.