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Vijay Tendulkar's *Encounter in Ubugland*: A Critique of the Statist History of Progress

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Abstract:

Vijay Tendulkar's play *Encounter in Ubugland* uses a fictional narrative as history to challenge history's claim to authenticity and disrupt the post-Independence development (hi)story of the Indian state. It captures the complex dynamics of the politics of power that works through different operational techniques and relies on political opportunism and unscrupulous arrangement of power-sharing. The exposé reveals the dark political underbelly of the state and problematises its mythic wellness and progress, stressing history's plurality of meaning. The present paper seeks to read the play through this point of problematisation and understand its critique of history made through the allegorical use of fiction as history.

Keywords: Politics, power, history, drama, post-Independence, Vijay Tendulkar

1. Introduction

Vijay Tendulkar remains foremost among others to create the post-Independence tradition(s) of Indian playwriting that negotiates the contemporary socio-political realities of the country. He remains in the forefront of the theatrical tradition, which evolves in consequence of the post-1947 condition of 'new thinking' and also aspires to be 'Indian', thematically and stylistically, in the condition unavoidably mediated by post-Independence and postcoloniality. Among different threads of the new theatre tradition, Tendulkar designs his own realistic-naturalistic style of representation that critiques, in a deceptively simple manner, the unacknowledged realities of our time, both at macro and micro levels. His plays examine different notional realities of our social life at various levels of lived experience such as caste, gender, urban middle class, as also the larger notions about nation, state, governance and progress. In his engagement with the politics of power at the macro level of nation-state, Tendulkar positions his play vis-à-vis the contemporary history, which the play relates to through the critical prism of past history (for example *Ghashiram Kotwal*). His play *Encounter in Ubugland* sets an example with a difference. The play critiques contemporary political culture of the country and dispassionately looks at political iconography, but all through the avenue of fictional history or history-like story. The interplay of drama and history through the fiction-as-history renders the critical engagement in the play provocatively effective and marks a moment of arrival for Indian socio-political drama.

Encounter in Ubugland (Dambadwipcha Mukabala), written and first produced in 1968, hits out at the contemporary trend of political growth in the country where power is alarmingly centralised and the state machinery is politicised, defying the norms of democracy and governance. The play intervenes in the linear narrative of political growth and foregrounds the disruptive twists and fissured turns of the narrative to suggest that all is not well within the euphoric march of the newly independent nation-state. Crude power politics becomes the norm where the selective few thrive on the mutual arrangement of power and the political (mis)use of the supposedly apolitical system, while common people passively bear witness to the game of power. The state staggers on its way to development as its mythic structure of growth seems to crumble. The play resorts to an allegorical fiction in order to expose this problematic growth of the state. The entire story has been presented in such a manner that it assumes a ‘historical’ authenticity – a sense/notion of history in fiction, which intensifies fiction’s allegorical effect and evocative possibilities. The present paper seeks to read the politics of power in the play vis-à-vis its historical context where the play comes from and goes back to as well. It attempts to trace history’s alternative version – fissures and failures kept hidden in the acknowledged narrative of the time – from the play’s questioning the dominant, while assessing its way of critiquing the present through fictional past.

2. Interrelation of text and context, literature and history

Encounter in Ubugland brings forth the question of interrelation between text and its context, or literature/drama and history. The post-structuralist argument for the “openness of text, [and] text’s connection with other texts” (Nayar 34) leads to the new historicist theory of the interrelation of “text and context” (Brannigan 417). The textuality of a text – the process and condition of its production – renders the meaning of a text open. The accepted meaning of text can change once its textuality is read critically and the process and condition of its production is scrutinised. The textuality of text makes it necessary to read a text in connection with its context, which is nothing but a group of other texts. To put it in a simpler way, when A is the text, B and C become the context; similarly when B is the text, A and C form the context. All texts are textual and hence open. Following this logic, a literary text (for example drama) has to be read in its non-literary context (for example history), where both the drama and the history are textualised and therefore open in meaning. They are embedded into each other during the process of production and dissemination. The drama takes its root in its socio-historical context and is mediated by it. Importantly, the drama also goes back to its context from where it comes and mediates the context sometimes by reinstating what is given (read: dominant culture/power relations/ideology) or some other time by subverting them. Thus drama gains ‘historicity’ due to its socio-historical context, or contextual history, which is actually one of the texts, or a group of texts in the context, betraying its ‘textuality’. In this interrelation of text/literature/drama and context/history, all are textual and even the non-literary/non-textual becomes textual. History, as context, loses its non-literary authenticity and becomes “human construct” (Hutcheon 16) and negotiable.

2.1. The interrelation of drama and history in post-Independence Indian theatre

In post-Independence Indian theatre, the interrelation of drama and history becomes very important because the development of drama runs parallel to the history of the newly independent nation-state. Drama plays an effective role, at the artistic-cultural level, in staging the nation, either to reinstate the narrative of nation-building or to question the very process of its build up. The inevitable interface between drama and history disproves the finality of history and makes it always open to literary negotiation. Post-Independence Indian theatre, as a product of the condition of ‘new thinking’, begins to deal with the condition. It looks at the socio-historical situation, which it comes from, as something ‘mediable’ and negotiable. This interface produces a line of remarkable plays that renders the post-Independence Indian theatre space postcolonial as well. Drama comes to display the desire for indigenousness and simultaneously a self-consciousness that examines the very process towards the indigenousness. It aspires to have an ‘Indian’ tradition of theatre as a part of the nation-building project. On the other hand, it also questions the “nationalistic postcolonial imagination” (Bhatia xxi) that calls for a powerful nation-state and its singular story of development. Both the desires – the decolonising drive to be ‘Indian’ and the voice of self-introspection – are features of the postcolonial situation that envisions a future which is self-made and self-conscious. Indian drama’s interface with history takes place mostly through the domain of past history. Contemporary history has been looked at through the history of the past, colonial or precolonial. Drama goes back to reread the past in order to cast fresh insight into the contemporary events and incidents. The entire negotiation with history, past or contemporary, works on the idea that history is contestable. ‘Official’ history of the past is unofficialised with a view to challenging the authenticity of history of the present. Tendulkar’s critically acclaimed play *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972) brilliantly works out theatre’s engagement with the problematic contemporary through the dispassionate rereading of the sanctified, authentic past.

2.2. The interrelation of drama and history through fiction-as-history

The present play *Encounter in Umbugland* is a similar example, yet with a difference. The play is deeply located in the drama-history interface of the post-Independence decades. It is clearly a product of the socio-historical condition which is marked by the tension between a declining nationalistic zeal and a growing scepticism. The volatility of the situation produces counter-discourses that begin to question the usefulness and validity of what is ‘given’ to the new nation-state. The play arises from this context of doubt and disbelief colliding with the collective euphoria over the issue of nation-building. Interestingly, past history does not become the avenue of negotiating contemporary history in the play. Tendulkar does not undertake a rereading of the past in order to probe the problematic present. On the contrary, he creates a fictional history of an imaginary land with striking parallels to the present. This creation of fictional history serves two purposes. First, the very idea of critiquing the present through fiction, which looks like history, is to destabilise history’s claim to authenticity. Fiction becomes history and vice versa. The bizarre course of events in an absurd land with its narcissistic king, authoritarian princess-turned-queen and power-hungry ministers has all the elements of disbelief. But the incredible land assumes validity and its ‘story’ becomes

'history' when its course of events has been narrativised under 'official' historiography. The account of the land has been recorded in an official manner so that it qualifies as history and hence authentic. Although the purpose of writing this fictional history, within the thematic framework of the play, is to critique the present, the very idea of writing it shows how history can be/is written. The transformation of the bizarre into the authentic and story into history proves that history is tentative and its way of arrangement of events, i.e. its version or narrative, can be made, unmade and remade. Its making, unmaking and remaking – all depend on the existing socio-historical condition or the underlying structure of power. Thus Tendulkar's fiction as history self-reflexively reveals the notional character of history's authenticity. The more ridiculous the actions of Ubugland look, the more unstable history becomes. History, thus destabilised, renders the contemporary history problematic. Unlike his other play *Ghashiram Kotwal* where Tendulkar rereads history by demystifying certain iconic characters and events and critiques the present through the unnerving parallels, he here takes on the very process of historical construction; how certain people, events or views get more attention than others and history has been made. This challenge to history's authenticity through deliberate blurring of history and fiction proves extremely powerful in its jibe at similar claim to history's authenticity at different junctures of time and space.

Secondly, the use of fiction as history offers the playwright immense freedom to deal with his story materials without committing to any available versions of them. He gets the freedom to portray a totally absurd land where the basic principles of governance – ruler's duty and people's right – cease to exist. The sarcastic humour and dispassionate insight would have been less possible in case of a retelling of some events and characters of the past. Fiction provides the space to stretch 'logic' to the limit and play with events on purpose. Tendulkar makes most of the freedom he gets in the unreal, and hence nonhistorical, world of Ubugland and creates a historical allegory of the present with an unnerving touch of serio-comedy. This freedom from the 'real' past also helps him keep aside controversies that often arise from critical reading of sanctified past. Nobody blames him for defaming any holy past or for drawing his ridiculous Ubugland, though the implied ridicule of the present in the deceptively innocent portrayal is unmistakable.

3. The play

The fiction unfolds in the land of Dambadwip, which evokes the mythical name of the Indian sub-continent, Jambu-dwip. The English Ubugland also sarcastically connotes to 'humbugland'. The land has seen the sixty-year rule of its autocratic king, Vichitravirya, and the change of guard at the royal palace after the aged king expires. His daughter-cum-sole-descendant, Vijaya, is placed on the throne by the cabinet of ministers who want to have a puppet king to fortify their interest. But things take a different turn as the new queen gradually becomes a master politician. She thwarts their plan and, thereby, makes Ubugland a hotbed of politics where multiple power-mongers are backstabbing each other and letting the country bleed. The play can be divided into two parts. First, it shows the autocratic regime of King Vichitravirya. Under the rhetoric of democracy and freedom, the king has established an oppressive system. He himself remains at the centre and disseminates his hegemonic authority through different agencies at the different tiers of the power

structure. The entire system is under his constant surveillance, directly or indirectly. From the sense of being constantly watched over by the king, the people conform to the norm and help to perpetuate the surveillance all across. This regime seems to remind one of the Foucauldian Panopticon where the inhabitants are made subject to constant surveillance by the central invisible power even without their knowledge (Smart 88). The second part of the story tells about the introduction of a ‘fresh’ subject, i.e. Vijaya, to the game of power. Interestingly, Vijaya, who initially wanted to serve the common people, steadily acclimatises herself to the existing condition and even improves on the techniques of oppression. She proves well versed, even more than her father, in manipulative and exploitative politics and shows new ways to gain and retain power against an equally skilled opposition. Her case illustrates the purposeful deputation of power in politics and how deputed power evolves into real power. This evolution exposes the ugly face of power politics which underlies the ‘system/s’ and the discourses that run them and are run by them as well.

The entire storyline of the play produces a powerful narrative that probes into some important issues hidden behind the developmental rhetoric of state. The list of issues that disturbs the progressive image of the state includes the culture of political intrigue and manipulation, criminalisation of politics, position of the common people especially the minorities of religious or ethnic or caste denomination, politics over development, and commercialised media. By looking into these factors, the play busts many notional realities about the progressive state and its political culture. The game of power displays total collapse of welfare state and governmental norms as all the competing forces hold common people to ransom to meet their political goals. The play holds the image of a state that runs on a system of oppression whose primacy of power politics has been rationalised by a narrative of development. The state firmly upholds its narrative of development that justifies its policies and operation. The myth of welfare and progress has been created and sustained through different rhetoric and apparatuses of power, and its systematic dissemination rationalises authority and contains chances of aberration. The only law of success that prevails in this game or system is that one needs to find the corridor to power and deviously conform to its norms to stay powerful. This politics of power remains hidden under the myth of progress and benevolent ruler that ensures people’s support, building a sense of comfort in them. The play critically looks through this myth of wellness and reveals a murky world of politics, unsettling the state of Ubugland and allegorically the socio-political realities of our time as well.

4. The context of contemporary history

The play’s allegorical use of fiction as history makes it necessary to consider the historical backdrop that the play interfaces with. Contemporary history of building the new nation-state and its functioning through different stages of development provides the historical context that the play mediates and is mediated by. The transfer of power in 1947 marks India’s moment of arrival at the new task of re-building and reforming the colonial and pre-Independence inheritance. And for this purpose the new leadership under the auspices of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru sets before it the task of establishing a sovereign state to mark a departure from the colonial condition. The oppressive colonial system, which impeded socio-

economic development, and its legacies in many a sector are to be encountered by the regenerated might of the new-born nation. The achievement of political power, in the form of nation-state, will lead to restructure the economy, the system of production and distribution and consequently ensure social justice. Large enterprises of planned development under the supreme guidance of the state have been undertaken. At this critical juncture, Nehru appears as the ‘chosen’ leader-cum-ideologue to guide the nation-state through. His “mature nationalism” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 144) is sure enough to bring the “realist’s utopia” (Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought* 160) through a “tryst with destiny” (Nehru qtd. in Hasan 1). Undoubtedly, Nehru’s India achieves a lot chiefly in terms of its parliamentary democracy and religious freedom, keeping itself in a dignified distance from the communal/authoritarian mess of its new-born neighbour, Pakistan. But the failures become glaring at the end of Nehru’s tenure and more so after his death in 1964. Linguistic, regional and communal strife in domestic politics, growing corruption in party and government, failure of the economy and finally the debacle in the Chinese war in 1962 seem to have blown up the ‘Nehru myth’. To quote Partha Chatterjee, “the hero had lost his magic touch” (*Possible India* 25). The so-called ‘golden age’ comes to an end, leaving behind a trail of problems unaddressed and unsolved.

The post-Nehru years witness the decline of the nationalist zeal and, consequently, other features that disrupt the socio-econo-political growth of the nation-state. Indira Gandhi’s dramatic ascent to power and reign signals a new political phase in the country. Political culture continues to dip as it is mired in dynasty politics, sycophancy, totally politicised state machinery, criminalisation of politics, and stifled democracy. The State of Emergency (1975-77) questions the validity of the Constitution and leaves a lasting impact on the political discourse of the country. Democracy is worst hit by the changing definition of politics that espouses unscrupulous capture of power and opportunistic arrangement of power sharing. The corollary of political decadence is the rise in secessionist desire, communalisation and casteisation of politics. Corrupt power-centrism, aided by communal politics, snowballs and leads to secessionist tendencies, weakening the structural spirit of the nation. Indira Gandhi’s era can be regarded as the hotbed of a ‘new way’ of doing politics that continues to adversely influence Indian political culture to date. Indian politics now seems to have become prisoner of its self-made standard and, as a result, seems to be knocking its head on its own walls of decadence.

The country’s political history after the independence provides the historical context that the play is embedded in. It would be wrong to approach the play to solely understand any particular character or incident of history; on the contrary, it should be read against the backdrop of post-Independence political decadence in general. This is, however, not to deny the universal perspective that the play generates on the unending politics of power, transcending time and space. What is to note is the politics of power in the play is highly situated, while it also assumes a transnational and transborder character. The present study attempts to probe the politically situated character of the play and explore its mutual ‘embeddedness’ in its historical context.

5. Techniques of power: Spectacle, sycophancy, dynastic rule

The world of fiction in the play displays a structure of power that runs on different techniques and rhetoric. They may look bizarre and absurd, but their ‘bizarrisation’ and ‘absurdisation’, which has been done through the freedom of fiction in the play, is the law of the land and implies how history has been made of the bizarre and absurd actions of the powerful. The myth of the leader’s larger-than-life image is a deliberate construction, through bizarre techniques, to legitimise authority. The sixty-year rule of King Vichitravirya epitomises techniques such as sycophancy and spectacle which are regularised in the name of order and decorum. The spectacle of tediously ceremonious proclamation of the king’s arrival at the royal court and the king’s order for a life-size portrait (read: spectacle) mythicise the leader as divine and the father of a nation, as it were. The leader has to be visibly translated into signs of authority so that his presence can be felt everywhere. Therefore, the image is circulated across the body of the power structure through spectacles such as portraits, statues, naming buildings and institutions, resulting in the consensual acceptance of the mighty leader by the people and the creation of hegemony. It evokes modern day construction of the ‘brand’ of leadership largely by an army of subordinates who equally profit in the arrangement of power. The leadership is sustained for the smooth operation of the power structure where the leader and the ‘led’ (read: the stakeholders in power) stand in mutual agreement of give-and-take. Sycophancy also plays a prominent role as a technique in the construction of leadership. The subordinates know no bound to flatter the leader in order to mystify his image and make it larger than life. “His Majesty is Ubugland and Ubugland is his Majesty!” (Tendulkar 277) – this statement of a courtier assures unquestionable loyalty to the ruler made one with the nation and evokes real-life example such as “Indira is India; India is Indira” (Barooah qtd. in Gupte 428). Thus, the ruler’s authority is sanctified, and the passport to the corridor of power is also ensured. A strong authority supports the arrangement of power that benefits all stakeholders in the long run. The beneficiaries of the system can even be ready for a dynastic rule if it promises mutual benefit for all interest groups. In Ubugland, the king wants to have it more, even after sixty years of (mis)rule. To his wish to rule for another fifty years, the ministers start mounting up, seventy, seventy five and even going up to, astronomically, five hundred! All these techniques strengthen power and its circulation all through the system of mutual give-and-take. The techniques may look bizarre, but their bizarre nature is rationalised by power as they and their beneficiaries become ‘history’.

5.1. Techniques of power: Deputation, corruption, politicisation

After the king’s sudden death, Princess Vijaya is transplanted by the warring ministers as a scapegoat. First of all, Vijaya’s transplantation speaks of the technique of deputed power. It seems to remind one of the alleged selection of young Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister, in 1966, by the Syndicate, “an informal party caucus, consisting of some powerful state and central leaders” (Singh 42). Indira’s honeymoon with the Syndicate did not last long and she finally frustrated her rivals to assume total authority (Park 999). Through its allegorical intervention in this politics of power, the play seems to examine the political present of the country and reread it as well. Deputation of power does not always guarantee success for the authority that employs it. The person deputed with notional power often self-discovers and

frustrates his/her employer. Vijaya's transplantation is a part of the political game, and she learns to turn the game in her favour, frustrating her mentors turned rivals.

Vijaya's counter-game reveals new techniques of power politics. Her political engineering resorts to the use of criminals against her adversary, buying off her enemies to disintegrate them and the use of the state machinery to create public opinion against them. Her strategy points to some glaring aspects of the current political culture of the country such as the nexus between politicians and criminals and the role of money in politics as corruption runs unabated. Politicisation of the state machinery becomes normal, rendering the ideal image of the state, as a neutral, benevolent and apolitical authority, suspect. The state becomes another player in the murky game of politics.

5.2. Technique of power: Politics over the minorities

The conflict between the queen and her ministers foregrounds another major concern in the country's contemporary political history – that is politics over the minorities. The drama of the conflict needs a politically saleable issue as a stage and finds the development project of the Kadamba tribe, undertaken by the queen, to be suitable for the purpose. The ministers try to derail the queen's prize-project which she tries desperately to execute for her gain. As a result, the project of development finally becomes a ground for communal politics, where the two sides try to extract political gain while the minority Kadambas are left out to face the rage of the majority community of the land. The case highlights how both the majority and the minority are used and mobilised against each other for political gain. The minority Kadambas are pampered and attended by the two warring sides till the time they are politically lucrative. They are readily discarded the moment they outlive their political usefulness.

The minorities of different denominations such as caste, religion, and tribe hold enormous importance in today's political culture of the country. The reason is their alleged tendency of voting en bloc on communal line. Their importance due to this image has two aspects. One, they certainly come to the centre stage in terms of the political and subsequent socio-economic attentions paid to them. They acquire political voice and agency which benefit their status to some extent. The constitutional guarantee of 'special care' in Article 46 in the form of reservation is ensured at the level of implementation largely because of this political importance of the minorities. But apart from this positive aspect of their important status, there is another side that proves detrimental to them. They gain political attention for their perceived way of voting en bloc on communal line, and this attention sometimes proves calamitous to the well-being of their community in the long run. They become the soft target of manipulation in the political market of profit and loss. Attempts have been made by the political powers to ensure that the minorities retain their perceived communal character for which they assume significance in politics. They are segregated and ghettoised as the monolithic 'Other'. The constitutional guarantee of 'special care' has been rendered a vote-catching device that seems more a tool to ensure the minority vote than a measure to develop the weaker sections. Unfortunately, it becomes an important apparatus that renders the minorities a passive object to political manipulation, haltering their proper development. In

present day India, the enormous political importance thrust on the Dalits and the Muslims on caste and religious lines explains the point. The ‘monolithic’ minority/weaker section, the consequent race for reservation, and other political techniques of manoeuvre result in the qualitative downfall of political culture in the country, while they also adversely affect social harmony and coexistence. The society becomes divided across caste and religion, where minorities are worst hit alongside the equally affected majorities.

5.3. Technique of power: Politics over development

The play also points out another technique which is used to safeguard political interest – i.e. politics over development. This technique shows again how politics puts people at peril under the pretence of development. The Kadamba project is a classic example of it. It explains how politics rides or backstabs development to serve the powers that be. The underprivileged Kadamba tribe becomes a mere site of political game, where all the ugly strategies are employed to safeguard the vested interests. They badly need the basic facilities of life – food, healthcare, shelter, and employment. This backwardness is largely the creation of power, which politically thrives on it. They are left to rot in their backward ghetto for political reasons. Again, for political reasons only they are enticed to the illusion of development, but this is only to reduce them to a more comprehensive state of backwardness. After the game is over, the Kadambas are slammed in more miseries than before. Now they have no parties around to woo them except the majority mob running after their blood. To them, development seems to resemble “displacement-rehabilitation-displacement continuum” (Alam 51) that more alienates a particular community from the society than rehabilitates them to normal life. Their life has been disturbed by developmental initiative which seeks to rebuild their life by disrupting its normal course and finally renders them displaced due to politicisation of the whole project. The idea of development becomes suspect for them as politicised development proves more dangerous to them than the total lack of any development undertaken for them.

6. Media as a player in the politics of power

The role of media in politics is another crucial aspect that the play examines. The presence of an autonomous media is important for democratising the structure of power in a society. Media can create a conscious and informed ‘public sphere’ due to its access to information, its ability to ensure “secondary contact” (Sinha 2803) of the people with the information accessed and its power to earn people’s consensual trust. It can assume the role of a watchdog and a regulatory body over political establishments, producing the terms of accountability. But media can also be a spoiler if it fails its ideal role due to commercialisation and political loyalty. The fast vanishing line between news and trivia endangers media’s ideal role and degrades it to “newstainment” (Purie 1) or “Tamasha news” (Purie 1), where news is packaged in such a way that it becomes consumable and sellable. On the second point of political loyalty, media’s towing to power or a political line also damages its character. It gives up its independence of opinion and unbiased standpoint as it manoeuvres in politics to remain close to the powers that be and commercially benefitted. As a result, media loses its credibility, damaging the possibility of a democratic society.

In *Encounter in Ubugland*, Tendulkar deals with media purposefully in a naturalistic style. The costume of the reporters, their make-up, appearance and arrival are highly symbolic. Their black dress suggests the enigmatic and murky role of media, while the huge pen in their hand denotes media's authority over public opinion. But everything they do has been comically exaggerated. This serio-comic style of their performance exposes how an important institution such as media degrades itself and becomes a player in the snakes and ladders game of power. This style of serio-comedy is in tune with the overall style of the play, through which the 'serious authenticity' of history has been challenged by the ludicrous absurdity of the fictional world posing as history. The reporters' stamping presence on the stage asserts media's powerful role, while the comic overtone in their performance, as they manoeuvre in politics, busts media from within. The notion that even such cheap opportunism can also be called media degrades its status and is by itself self-damaging. It is with the queen at times; some other time with the ministers; giving maximum coverage to government programmes while also reporting on the rebel group; packaging serious news of governance with 'masala' of flattery such as the queen's catching cold or the watermelon grown in her park. Media in Ubugland plays a balancing game between the probable winners, keeping all options open for it, and finally hugs the side that wins the game of power.

7. Conclusion

Encounter in Ubugland thus exposes the degrading political condition of the country down the post-Independence decades. The play uses a fictional narrative, posing as history, for its allegorical trope to address similar situation in the contemporary history of the country. This use of fictional narrative as history problematises history's claim to authenticity as history looks as fictional and, hence negotiable, as fiction. With history as contestable and changeable, the allegorical critique of contemporary political history stands valid. Further, the fictional narrative also allows the playwright freedom, from any particular historical narrative, in order to deal with characters and events with the purpose of drawing evocative parallels to contemporary realities. The whole scope of critique is thus widened by this interface between drama and history via fiction-as-history. The failed regime of Ubugland tells a lot about the failures of the independent country, kept hidden and rationalised in its 'authentic' history. The play powerfully disrupts this rationalisation of contemporary history and critiques its political context marked by decadent political culture, criminalisation of power, eroding democracy, and public apathy.

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