



Exploitation in Cotemporary Social Reality with reference to Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*

Dr. Krishna I. Patel

M. A., Ph.D

Assistant Professor

Agarwal Vidya Vihar English Medium College, Vesu.

Affiliated to Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat

Ghashiram Kotwal is a play that studies power politics and a common man's search for identity and subsequent disillusionment. It demonstrates a man, who gets caught in the matrix of opportunistic ethics of modern world. In seeking power he confronts the people who were already in power. Nana and his ruling mechanisms symbolise power politics and Ghashiram's rise and fall symbolise a common man's search for identity in the world of power. While the Brahmins of Pune snatch money from Ghashiram and treat him cruelly, Ghashiram, to avenge his humiliation, goes to the extent of selling his daughter to Peshwa Phadnavis.

The play owes its power and vibrancy to its delineation of contemporary social reality. The present paper attempts to investigate the mechanisms of politics such as treachery, sexuality, immortality, violence and even religion that are used to exploit a common man. It also proposes to examine the play as a serious satire on the hollowness of contemporary society.

Key- words: exploitation, disillusionment, contemporary society, hollowness.

Vijay Tendulkar is the most eminent and creative dramatist among the modern Marathi playwrights. Instead of craving for outdated or traditional subjects, Tendulkar has always selected the themes that expose the reality of contemporary time. His writings revoke the cultural revivalist ideologies against the various social evils and attempt to voice the conscience-raising sensitivities of the victimized and marginalized class, sex and gender. *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972) is a befitting example of Vijay Tendulkar's profound involvement in the problems of contemporary society and his deep understanding of human psychology.

Ghashiram Kotwal is set in eighteenth century Pune at the time of the Peshwa rule. The play features the Peshwa's chancellor Nana Phadnavis and when it was first staged it came up against a lot of criticism for showing the revered Nana's character in a derogatory light. However, according to Tendulkar:

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.

('Introduction,' *Ghashiram Kotwal*, 4)

Tendulkar has adopted the different folk forms of theatre and used them to represent on stage a power politics and the effects of oppression in the contemporary political scenario in *Ghashiram Kotwal*. He produces a revenge tragedy in nature, dealing with power politics, ambition, and sexual hunger. He demonstrates how in a hegemonic culture people exploit others through different strategies—social, economic and even cultural. Placed in the historical perspective, the play shows how powerful entities operate in the society to exploit others and to seek their own benefits.

As the paper proposes to focus on the exploitation in different forms, the word 'exploitation' should be understood in broader context. To exploit someone is to take unfair advantage of them. It is to use another person's vulnerability for one's own benefit. Exploitation in more than one forms can be observed in the play. The following are some attempts to understand the exploitation.

1. Exploitation of powerless people

Tendulkar, as a social being was against all exploitation and violence. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* he criticizes the social-cultural-political thuggery of Brahmins as well as the violation of common people's political consciousness in the Maharashtrian society through his theatrical art.

The circular structure of Ghashiram's career also relates primarily with the theme of exploitation. It is his journey of being exploited to being able to exploit and again being exploited. The Kanauj-born Brahmin Ghashiram comes to Poona and initially suffers, is tortured and is humiliated by the Poona Brahmins. However, he becomes 'kotwal' by selling his own daughter to Nana. But as the power comes in the most ignominious way, the pain of selling his own daughter haunts him till end. It has a tremendous psychological impact. Since he gains power in a very loathsome way, he goes on abusing it abundantly unless and until he is made powerless by Nana.

Nana's deep-rooted instinctual urge and psyche, embodied with violence and venom are projected in his dramatic monologues when he assigns Ghashiram the post of Kotwal:

NANA: Go, Ghashya, old bastard. We've made you. We made you Kotwal. Rise hell if you wish. But you don't know the ways of this Nana. This time there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we'll make the city of Poona dance. Ghashya, child, you're a foreigner. I have put you on Poona's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You will not be able to join them; they will never trust you even if you do. Because you are a stranger, you're an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the position of the kotwali! We are your sole support. Oh! You're a bastard. Ghashya, your manner will be more arrogant than that of Chitpavan Brahmans. You'll manage the difference nicely. You'll create a court--- and a half! No worry about that. What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it; our kotwal pays for it. The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram. And that luscious peach is at hand to be devoured by Nana. Excellent! Yes, Ghashya, be kotwal. This Nana blesses you.

(*Ghashiram*. Act-1. 29).

Therefore, once upon a time who is oppressed now becomes oppressor. Ghashiram the oppressor feels that he is superior to his victims – the people of Poona, so he can't tolerate being victimized by the inferior people whom he calls pigs. Ghashiram does not allow the Brahmans of Poona to do anything without taking his permission. However, Ghashiram, who gains power by satisfying Nana's sexual appetite, falls into his trap. The socially and economically powerful Nana exploits Ghashiram while Ghashiram is under the impression that he will exploit Nana. Nana offers 'kotwali' to Ghashiram, as a result of which Ghashiram persecutes the people of Poona ruthlessly and finally ends up murdered by the People of Poona. Samik Bandyopadhyay rightly comments:

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.

[BandyopadhyayV-VI]

Ghashiram's longing for power can also be compared with Dr. Faustus' craving of power. In order to conquer the world, just as Dr. Faustus sells his soul to the devil Mephistopheles, Ghashiram sells his soul – his own daughter Gauri to enjoy the power. However, Ghashiram rightly deserves our pity as the punishment is greater than he deserved. There is a tragic sense of waste illustrated by the death of Ghashiram.

Through the striking picture of a tragic figure like Ghashiram, Tendulkar has tried to bring out the truth that sycophancy not only flourishes but also prospers under the patronage of the rulers. Ghashiram Savaldas belongs not only to the late eighteenth century Peshwa Empire, but also to all phases of human history. His rise and growth from a Savaldas to the most controversial Kotwal of Poona is symbolic of the multifaceted growth of corruption in our society.

By showing the fatal end of Ghashiram in the play, Tendulkar does not want to suggest that Ghashiram has ended forever. He rather wants to draw our attention to the socio-political factors responsible for the growth of such a crisis in our society. Tendulkar raises certain significant questions such as what led to the emergence of

Ghashiram? Who is responsible for the rise and growth of Ghashiram? And what are the fatal consequences arising out of the creation of Ghashiram?

2. Exploitation on the bases of Class discrimination

Ghashiram Kotwal is a revolutionary play that criticizes the orthodox Brahmin society of the time. Though based on a historic legend, the play depicts the life of a common man. The play acclaimed a huge success in a production performed by the Progressive Dramatic Association of Pune. It was first performed on 16 December, 1972 at the Bharat Natya Mandir in Pune. For this play, Tendulkar was awarded at Maharashtra state Drama Competition in 1972-73, but later the same play was banned by the president of Progressive Dramatic Association. It was objected on the several grounds for instance-it was the critique against Brahmanic tradition, consequently it was disregarded, discarded and devalued by public. In the writers' note to Vasant Deo's Hindi translation, Tendulkar says

In my view *Ghashiram Kotwal* indicates a particular social situation which is neither old nor new. It is beyond time and space. Therefore 'Ghashiram' and Nana Phadnavis are also beyond space and time.

[\[file:///C:/Users/Admin/Desktop/precarity/11.pdf\]](file:///C:/Users/Admin/Desktop/precarity/11.pdf)

The perceptible injustices in the play are related to class discrimination and subjugation of the weaker gender. When Ghashiram uses power to oppress the citizens of Pune, it can be seen as a glimpse of each power drunk official in any political complex. The metaphor of Pune tyrants can be visualized with the anarchy and annihilation of the marginalized, untouchables, Blacks, subalterns, aboriginals, the underprivileged, peasants and small traders and manufacturers and the like world over. Even the post-modern practices of Neoliberalism and Globalization may be explained well with Marathi folk theatrical device of human curtain containing Pune Brahmins. Again the Pune Brahmins are the best metaphors for the global ruling class and Indian Hindu hegemonic practices. In all respects, *Ghashiram Kotwal* happens to be most relevant play that exposes the exploitation and subjugation of the mass by a few politically powerful people in the contemporary scenario.

The play begins with a religious song of praise to God and the popular Gods dance on the stage. Everybody on the stage seeks blessings of Ganapati for the success of the play. The author follows the age-old tradition of commencing any auspicious occasion with the worship of Lord Ganpati. But while the prayers are being offered to the Almighty, the hypocrisy and vulgar activities of Brahmanas are also revealed:

ALL. Ganapati dances the Ganapati dance.

We the Poona Brahmans bow and prance.

We the Pious Brahmans bow and prance.

SUTRADHAR. These are all Brahmans from Poona. Who are you?

ONE MAN. A Vedantic scholar.

SUTRADHAR. You?

SECOND. A Vaidya doctor.

THIRD. A Logician.

FOURTH. An astrologer.

FIFTH. A linguist.

SIXTH. I am a baron

(*Ghashiram*. Act -1. 5-6).

While identifying themselves with designation, Brahmins attempt to please God for empowering them with intellect, power, position and profit. The playwright in the voice of Sutradhar uses sarcasm to imply Brahmins' hypocrisy. Their prayers to the deity suggest the paradox of their original intention.

Brahmins are considered to be the mediators between God and a common man. They are for ages supposed to be the flag bearers of all that is pure, ethical, just, kind and holy. They are supposed to give shelter and protect mankind from curse. Their raw expressions, curses, pretences, vain and fickle minded approach shock the audience. Their corrupt mannerisms keep their wives in deception, who wait for them at home. The Brahmins inform at home to their wives that they go 'to the temple' (*Ghashiram*. Act-1. 9) to give a sermon on '*Vishwamitra and Menaka*' (*Ghashiram*. Act -1. 9-10), but in reality they go to *Bavannakhani*' (*Ghashiram*. Act-1. 10) to see the dancing girls. They compare the '*Bavannakhani*' to holy Mathura and show their debauchery. The play is a bitter satire on these so called holy Brahmanas. The following interaction illustrates Brahmanas' erotic desire and the fulfillment of their primordial instincts:

THE BRAHMINS. It's like Mathura!

Ho! Bavannakhani!

Ho! Bavannakhani!

It's like Mathura!

SUTRADHAR. Night comes

Pune Brahman go

To Bavannakhani

They go

To Bavannakhani

They go to cemetery
 They go to the kirtan
 They go to the temple --as they have done every day.
 The Brahmans go to Bavannakhani
 (*Ghashiram*. Act -1. 10).

The Brahmans of Poona disown Ghashiram- the kotwal, when he attends the Dakshina ceremony at Parvati hills to get Dakshina. Moreover, the soldiers accuse him of theft and badly insult him. It becomes unbearable for him and his anger bursts. The following conversation shows his frustrated interaction with soldiers:

SOLDIERS. Get lost! Hey! Thief, Monkey. If you so much as put a foot in the holy city of Poona, you'll lose your head. Go away. Take your ugly face far away. Don't come back to Poona. Not even your shadow should fall on the city of Poona. Get lost. Go.
 GHASHIRAM. But I'll comeback. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am a devil. You have made me an animal; I'll be a devil inside. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more
 (*Ghashiram*. Act-1. 21).

The People of Poona disrespect him; therefore he swears to avenge his fury from the citizens of Poona. He doesn't hesitate to play his dirty intentions for taking revenge against insulting treatment given to him by people of Poona. He is ambitious and respectable man. He decides to take help of Nana Phadnavis since he is the most powerful person of Poona.

Nana and most of his men are divested of human qualities and attributes and indulge in all kinds of indecent activities and illicit sex. Nana frequently neglects his duties towards society. He draws society to rot and to decay. The Brahmans, who belong to the higher stratum, behave and act perversely. Traditionally and ethnically they are the protectors of religion and culture; but their insanity, moral decadence and dehumanized mindset illustrate their psyche of violence and violation; they avail pleasure and satisfaction from detrimental and prejudicial injury to another person's dignity or possession.

3. Sexual Exploitation

The women in Tendulkar's plays are minor figures but their powerlessness, victimization and silence interface with structure of the plot. Their presence reveals povertisation of femininity and sexual exploitation. Patriarchal hegemony is unleashed through the women as a second sex to fulfill males' mental regression and repression.

Ghasiram Kotwal dramatises the greed and avarice of power-seekers in the forms of Ghasiram and Nana Phadnavis. Ghasiram the father ‘sells’ his daughter Gauri to the despotic ruler Nana who buys her as a commodity. He sexually exploits her till death. Nana’s reference to lord Ganapati having two wives indicates his manipulative and degenerating value-system:

NANA. All your dreams this Nana will fulfill. Oh, don’t be shy.

This is our house. This is a private hall. No one will see. No one in Poona today has the audacity to watch the great Nana Phadnavis !

GIRL. He will see.

NANA. He will see? Who?

GIRL. He.

NANA. That idol of holiness? That all holy Ganapati? The maker of Good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won’t say anything.

(*Ghashiram*. Act-1. 22)

Nana’s reference to the Hindu God having two wives very significantly suggests the age old Hindu tradition of subjugation and objectification of women.

At the same time, ironically, the women in the play are accomplices and active respondents to the damaging activities of the power-players. In absentia of their spouses they indulge in adultery and intimacy. Their conscious actions allegorically refer that their wild psyche wanders in wilderness of sexuality and disillusionment to find release from day to day anxieties and they find comfort zone temporarily in the shelter of their wooers.

As women easily become submissive, sexual object of abuse and violence, they are victimized by the powerful men. The discriminatory gender roles and status in society are manifested through the various verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. Gauri is a young and innocent girl, who represents all the young women and is preyed upon by predators like Nana. Gulabi, on the other hand represents the prostitute. She is the Brahman woman forced out of her house and thrust into prostitution. The female characters and their status embody them as sex objects. They are pawns and play things in the political game of Nana and Ghashiram. Tendulkar unfolds corrupt forms of violation in power relations. At various levels he deals with the concept of violence psychologically and emotionally. He theorizes how social forces misuse sexuality as a vitriolic device in socio-cultural representations of wish-fulfillment.

Sutradhar, as the dramatic personae suggests the irony of contemporary society when a powerful man rightfully marries a fourteen year old young girl:

My Nana's wedding!
 A tender blossoming bride.
 A slender willowy bride.
 A shy lily- white bride.
 A just – this – year ripened bride
 My Nana's wedding!
 Let's go to the wedding
 The Peshwa's chief minister
 Still young enough to marry!
 His moustache's turned grey.
 Not all of them are gone.
 He's got six wives.
 Look – that's not enough!
 So he's got a new one.
 She needs a companion.
 Sakhubai, Salubai, Kalubai, Saibai
 (*Ghashiram*. Act-2. 46-47).

However, the guilt of gaining power by performing such a grotesque act of selling his daughter does not spare Ghashiram. Even in the celebration of the victory of his power Ghashiram worries over the ill-fate of his daughter. He makes his daughter the victim of the dehumanized power game. Nana enjoys all sexual pleasures with her, which impregnates her and she dies while going through abortion in Chandra's house. When Ghashiram tries to inquire about her whereabouts, Nana very casually treats him and pays no heed at his frightening worry and does not help him to find Gauri, although he accepts the onus upon himself for sending her to Chandra, the midwife. Ghashiram gets shocked and visits to Chandra. There he gets aware of the actual fact that his daughter has already died. He realizes that his blind desire for unlimited power and authority has caused the death of his innocent daughter. Henceforth, he vows to avenge the death of his daughter against Nana, with whom he has befriended to attain his desires.

Tendulkar throughout the play has used female sexuality to represent the loss and destruction caused by the struggle for power. The corruption that power brings about is projected through the sexual laxity of the Brahmin dominated society of Poona. Tendulkar in *Ghashiram Kotwal* suggests that the social construction of gender is effectively a useful tool in the hands of the powerful and will lead inevitably to the dehumanizing of both the powerful and the powerless alike, the Nanans and the Ghashirams as much as the Gauris, and also bring the destruction of meaningful human relationships and social and moral values.

Conclusion

Shanta Gokhale writes

Tendulkar wanted to make a serious political statement in Ghashiram Kotwal. That was why he wrote the play, not to vent his spleen against Brahmins, as many Brahmins thought, nor to desecrate the sanctity of the stage with lurid depiction of lasciviousness, nor rake in money by entertaining audiences with song and dance and a scandalous legend about a historical figure. Its reception by many as a brilliantly mounted entertaining spectacle upset the liberal social moralist. This, more than anything else, links Tendulkar with most significant of his predecessors on the Marathi stage – playwrights who wanted to force their society to look at and judge itself in all its aspects, socio, political, moral and personal.

[http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7301/8/08_chapter%205.pdf]

The continuity of power and subsequent atrocity are found to be bestowed from Nana to Ghashiram. Ghashiram may not be a debauch like Nana but he directly encourages such a vice selling his daughter to gain Nana's favor. This erosion of moral values leads to the subversion of filial bond into a means of aggrandizement of power. Tendulkar, in his social criticism, is more concerned with the mechanism of power operating within society than with the economic and political implications and sources of that power. He observes the operations of religiosity, sexuality, deputation and politics as devices of power. In Nana's exploitation of Ghashiram, one can notice the tradition of "Use and Throw" as employed by the political leaders, who, in order to get their aims fulfilled depute on the top position their so called near ones. As long as their aims are served, the officials enjoy the life with all its charms but as soon as the aims are fulfilled, the officials become useless and even danger to the political leaders so they do not hesitate even to eliminate them from life.. N. S. Dharan states in the following words:

The inescapable reality is that as long as politics remains a power game Phadnavis, Ghashirams, and Lalita Gauris are bound to emerge. Not only in India but also the world over, we witness, Ghashiram being played on real political theatres. This universal political reality in fact accounts for the abiding popularity of the play.

[file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/10_chapter%206.pdf]

The play is an ironical commentary on our socio-political set up. Tendulkar could find a parallel in the history of Peshwa Empire and thereby suggest that such circumstances are not confined to a particular era but are seen in all times. "Nana needs Ghashiram, and Ghashiram needs Nana, but 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." -Samik Bandopadhyay rightly observes the socio-political reality as depicted in the play. Everyone exploits the other for his own benefit and gets exploited as well. The depiction of such cruel power game also makes us realize that the emergence of Ghashirams is a universal phenomenon. Ghashirams grow and prosper as and when they get identical socio-political situations in our society.

Thus, *Ghashiram Kotwal* can be viewed as a tremendous and a very powerful comment on the exploitation in the various forms in society. The play also exposes the failure of human relations owing to man's inherent cruelty to his fellow man. There is an intrinsic desire for power that goes on to take form of cruelty in each and every human character. Tendulkar has commented with reference to the play:

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 to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams.

(Ramnarayan 16)

REFERENCES

PRIMARY TEXT

Tendulkar, Vijay—*collected Plays in Translation*, OUP, New Delhi, 2005.

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Ghashiram Kotwal*, translated from Marathi by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002.

SECONDARY TEXT

Abhimanch: A Social Theatre Movement. <http://www.abhimanch.com>

Bandyopadhyay, Samik, 'Introduction', *Collected Plays in Translation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, (2004)

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. 1949. Trans. and Ed. H.M. Parshley. London: vintage, 1997.

Dharan, N. S., "The Plays of Vijay Tendulkar", Creative Books, New Delhi, 1999.

Faucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Book, 1977.

Ghokale, Shanta. "Playwright at the centre." In *Marathi Drama from 1843 to the Present*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000.

Lal, Ananda., ed., *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, Delhi. OUP, 2004

Pinglay, Prachi. "In Conversation." *The Hindu* 30 Oct. 2005.

Smart, Barry. Michel Foucault. Rev. ed. London: routledge, 2007.

Ramnarayan, Gowri, "A new myth of Sisyphus!" (Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad in conversation with Gowri Ramnarayan), *The Hindu Folio on theatre*, Feb. 1998, Pg. 16

Spear, Percival. *The Oxford History of Modern India*. Delhi: OUP, 1978.

Velu. "Viewing Comments for Ghasiram Kotwal – a Vijay Tendulkar Play."

http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7301/8/08_chapter%205.pdf

Vijay Tendulkar. New Delhi: Katha, 2001.

<http://www.theinidatree.com>

<<http://www.thehindu.com/>>

