

Vijay Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal as an Epitome of Critique on Protagonist Ghashiram and Antagonist Nana

Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole*

Head, Department of English, C. K. Thakur A. C.S. College, New Panvel

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Aristotle believed that man is not only a social but also political animal. Therefore, the political ideas and intuitions are resulting from the political nature of man. The greed for power, persecution and submission has been a continuous process from antiquity of life and it has increased by leaps and bounds in civilized and modernized society. This power structured relationship has been working effectively at different levels such as domestic, social and political. It is a bitter truth that in the cut throat competition for power, reputation, wealth and position people terribly exploit others and use them as mere puppets for their selfish achievements.

Vijay Tendulkar is regarded as a one of the greatest literary personalities amongst the modern Indian literature who has successfully reined Indian Drama for five decades. He has significantly contributed through his masterpieces and earned him critical acclaim and popularity amongst readers, audience and critics. As an influential dramatist of modern time, his works have become classics in the realm of Indian drama. Tendulkar's plays crossed the limits of Marathi theatre and are completely responsible for placing Indian drama in the international arena. His works are exclusively dealing with themes of public importance such as greed for power, exploitation of women and hypocrisy and they bear ample evidence to this fact that he has a very powerful message to be communicated in order reform and transform the people in the society. Initially, he appeared to be very controversial playwright but his works depicted him as an honest artist. He is not only a rebellious but also a courageous personality who is well known as a dramatist, screen and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and social reformer as well as a commentator. He was keenly associated with the civil liberties movements especially in Maharashtra. It also shows his concern for his people and society. As a realist, he rejects to be fooled by romantic concepts of movements. He scathingly attacks on the flaws and failures of unrealistic movements in his world famous plays. As a result, it is found that there is a controversy after

performing many of his plays on account of reflection of unconventional approach towards solving the problems of people and predicament of women in the society. Vijay Tendulkar is considered as a postmodern playwright who became the crusader of Maharashtra, without restricting himself in scrutinizing the restraints of social realism.

He immediately jumped into the cauldron of political radicalism and highlights on the hegemony of people in power and the hypocrisy existing in Indian mindset through his prominent plays. His plays are powerful embodiment of human foibles with an apt purpose of enlightenment and refinement. This paper aims to examine Vijay Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal* as a powerful critique on unscrupulous politicians, policemen and prostitutes who all join to create a social disharmony, lawlessness, injustice, adultery, corruption, confusion and chaos especially in Indian society. The powerful and controversial play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is consisting of lot of dance and music. The setting of the drama *Ghashiram Kotwal* takes us to the eighteenth century Peshwa regime in Maharashtra. It is apparent that, through the characters of Ghashiram Kotwal as a protagonist and Nana Padhnavis as an antagonist the dramatist has created resemblance of historical personages very successfully. This prominent play analytically criticizes on the debauchery and snobbishness of the ruling class specifically the Brahmins of Pune, who always regard themselves as the guardian of public morality. The play also creates a strong protest against the caste system prevalent Indian society.

Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a multi-layered and it is exclusively based on historical events. In spite of this, the primary emphasis is not on history but on contemporary political situations. Therefore, Tendulkar has succinctly on the blurb of the book *Ghashiram Kotwal: A Reader's Companion* pointed out: "This is a non-historical opera-like legend based on history.

Ghashiram is an offspring of a specific social situation. This social situation of Ghashiram goes beyond time and place. Although the author undertakes all the responsibility of the historical base of the episode, he does not intend to express his opinion on the Peshwa regime, Nana Padhnavis and Ghashiram Kotwal in their so-called authentic life stories in the relevant history". (20)

Hence, the playwright minutely examines various illnesses such as a corruption, vanity, greed for power present in modern society with its utter villainy carried out by men without any repentance and goodness. As far as the present drama is concerned, it is effectively woven around the paradigms of political situation where power is defined horizontally. It has been rightly pointed out by Samik Bandhyopadhyaya as: "In terms of individuals from humiliation to revenge in assertion to eventual victimization played out against the background of moral and political decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power". (Samik 587).

It is observed that intrigues and counter intrigues along with evil strategies are playing crucial role in the political game where people are well as characters become not only pawns but also puppets. Tendulkar has beautifully carved out a period of Peshwa regime as its background and in order to depict evils of greed for power. He has successfully employed two prominent historical characters such as Nana as a Satan and Ghashiram only to condemn the brutality, innocuous practices in order to amalgamate power which ultimately leads to their utter ruin and destruction. The salient features of politics as a profession are hatred, immorality, hypocrisy, jealousy, corruption and greed for power and chair.

Tendulkar's vivid description of politics and politicians are not features of Peshwa regime alone but a general prodigy. Criminalization of politics is one of the burning topics of argument and analysis in modern times. It is believed that the network between politicians and criminals is an ancient malady. Therefore, the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* throws light on this deadly relationship between politicians, criminals, policemen and prostitutes who are actively engaged in bombarding a terrible war against peace, morality, honesty and justice. As a result, S. G. Bhanegaonkar in his work "Depiction of politics, power and prostitution in *Ghashiram Kotwal*" about the evils of power politics suitably points out: "This play can be called as a condemnation of politicians, it is a challenging task carried out by 3p's in collaboration". (30)

It is revealed that the character Ghashiram comes in search of fortune to Pune with his sweetest wife and dearest daughter. Unfortunately, he becomes the victim of power structure in the beginning of the play when he is wrongly abused of theft and thrown into

prison. Later, he uses his patriarchal power over his daughter and submits her to Nana Phadnavis in exchange of political power. Right from the first entry of Ghashiram into the city of Pune, he has a longing to combine himself with the corrupt power structures of Pune. This is clear in the scene when Nana dances erotically with the courtesans, his ankles sprain and Ghashiram waiting for a chance to find legitimate position clutches the opportunity to achieve favour to Nana's predicaments and offers his back as a support for Nana.

In the play, the protagonist Ghashiram Kotwal buys power through sex. He sacrifices the virtue of his dearest daughter in the altar of worship of power. Like a typical tragic hero he suffers from imprudence and fails to have an integrated view of the truth of life. Therefore, it remarked about predicament of tragedy of Ghashiram as: "No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when he was pregnant" (GK 407).

Having purchased power through sex, Ghashiram wanders thoughtlessly. "The way a wounded tiger becomes addicted to blood, so the Kotwal has come to love the smell" (GK 407). Ghashiram's final surrender to angry Brahmins and his reconciliation with his lot puts forth his belated realization of his sin and repentance. Ghashiram like a typical tragic hero suffers from personal hamartia which ultimately leads to his terrible ruin and destruction in the play.

It is clear that elements of modern politicians are beautifully woven into the texture of the play and is reproduced in the characters of Ghashiram and Nana respectively. The bitter truth is that power makes a man blind and overwhelmed he thinks in vain that he could never be brought down. Finally, misused power boomerangs in the form of common man's wrath and destroys him. Nana as an embodiment of Iago is an artful politician who has mastered the power game. Thus, he operates his unlimited power in such way that he acquires what he wants and always reminds a winner. At the beginning, he uses his power for lecherous deeds without any morality. Then, he authorizes Ghashiram and uses him as a pawn in his evil strategies. He also uses power to victimize his preys and to hush up everything clearly. Therefore, Neela Bhallain her prominent work about the power game played by Nana as a monster and Ghashiram Kotwal succinctly remarks:

"If Ghashiram is the juggernaut hurtling throughout the play, Nana is the wily puppeteer, pulling the strings. The Machiavelli of Peshwas he outmaneuvers Ghashiram and the play testifies his mental agility and cunningness. He is the ace manipulator who makes Ghashiram the fall guy. 'We do it and our Ghashiram pays for it', when faced with an enraged mob, he again turns the situation to the dual advantage. By ordering

Ghashiram's execution, he not only pacifies the people but also comes through as the upholder of justice and goodness. The Peshwa is satisfied and Nana rids himself of a Kotwal for whom he has no more use". (96)

Tendulkar beautifully demonstrates how power makes a man to lose his self-control and become barbarous especially through the behavior of Ghashiram after becoming the Kotwal of Poona. The moment Ghashiram gains power, he is filled with pride in savagery and barbarousness. Though, he feels guilty at times, his hunger for power overwhelms the guiltiness which makes him suffocate and he poignantly remarks: "Now he's in hand... oh, my daughter... The beast... oh you people! Look! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of the wolf! Look at this father putting his heart's child up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter – a whore. The overripe bastard eating her like peach... spit on me..." (GK 381)

Thus, Ghashiram clearly understood that his innocent daughter's life has been ruined because of his egoistic nature but still his mad desires for power makes him to continue his evil designs. Tendulkar makes the fun of police force whose salient characteristics is corruption from ancient times to the modern eras. The so called police force should be the protector of law and order. In reality, Tendulkar has shown them with cruelty, oppression and arrogance. When Ghashiram comes in search of fortune to Poona, he was wrongly accused to theft, humiliated and arrested without any flaw. In addition to this, they prevent Ghashiram from attending the feast given by Peshwas. This horrible humiliation suffered in the hands of policemen hits his ego and makes him challenge. As a result, Ghashiram proudly remarks:

"I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It'll cost you! Your good days are gone... There's no one to stop me now, to mock me to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I'm devil. You've made me an animal: I'll be a devil inside... I'll make this Poona kingdom of pigs..." (GK 377)

In this critical situation, the policemen turn deaf ears to the requests of Ghashiram.

He suffers damage of reputation in hands of policemen for without any faults. The police force uses their power in wrong way so that innocent people like Ghashiram often get crushed and destroyed in the process. The passion for revenge in Ghashiram combines with the hunger for power so immensely that he hunts the best way to avenge the people of Poona. In due course of time, after attaining power as Kotwal of Poona, Ghashiram begins patrolling through the streets of Poona during the nights. The men and women have to stay at home at night and are not supposed to have extramarital relationships. As a result of the strict

imposition of his rules has been communicated aptly in the play as:

"Prostitutes' lane was desolate / the chasing of women was halted. / Pimps turned into beggars. / Counterfeit coin were worthless" (GK 388).

It is found that Ghashiram grows arrogant and mishandles people and strives for strict rules but sometimes he becomes unreasonable and stupid. In one instance, Ghashiram arrests a man who is in a hurry to fetch a midwife, Ghashiram inhumanly questions him as: "Why does she deliver in the middle of the night (*slaps him*)..." (GK 389).

In another instance, Ghashiram punishes a husband and wife on the suspicion of adultery. In another instance Ghashiram suspects a real permit to be counterfeit one as one woman goes straight to Nana and complains as: "My husband and his brother have been arrested by Kotwal's soldiers. My father-in-law died. They won't let them hold the funeral. The permit is real but they call it counterfeit. Sir, the corpse has been lying in the cremation ground since morning. The dogs are gathering. Sir please give us justice". (GK 393)

It was clear that people become fed up with the barbarous methods of Ghashiram they were not able to lay hands on him as Nana's power is behind him. Tendulkar creates situation where an innocent Brahmin wrongly is punished of theft. Ghashiram refusing to listen to the explanation displays a remorseless behavior making him to undergo the ordeal of holding a red ball iron his hands. The poor Brahmin moans and grumbles with agony and curses Ghashiram with as: "You have tormented a poor innocent Brahmin. You'll die without children! You yourself will endure torment, greater than mine. You'll die a dog's death, grinding your heels in the dirt". (GK 397)

The words of innocent Brahmin predict the decline of Ghashiram. The wages of sin are to be paid by him which is suggested by the death of Gauri in the hands of the midwife on account of forced abortion. Ghashiram, a common man becomes a terrible monster is a product by society. It is also the society which is responsible for turning him into devil and being stoned to death in the concluding part of the play.

Eventually, Ghashiram suffers from imprudence and fails to have an integrated view of the truths of life. Therefore, he painfully and remorsefully cries out as: "No one should pity GhashiramKotwal because his unmarried daughter died when he was pregnant". (GK 407)

Ghashiram's final surrender to angry Brahmins and his reconciliation with his lot puts forth his belated realization of his sin and repentance. Ghashiram like a typical hero suffers from personal

errors which ultimately lead to his utter ruin and destruction.

Tendulkar successfully connects sexuality with strategies of power that probes the rise and fall of the protagonist. Ghashiram stimulates the hunger of Nana by delaying his meeting with Gauri. He tactfully plays the game by not surrendering Gauri totally to Nana but retaining his grip by taking her away whenever he pleases. Nana is so enchanted of Gauri that he request Ghashiram to send her to the palace for few days, but Ghashiram refuses it cunningly saying that the name of the girl is at stake and Punekars spread rumors about Nana and Gauri affair. Nana though initially refuses to this idea of making him the Kotwal finally yields to his carnal desire and make Ghashiram the Kotwal.

Tendulkar has convincingly manipulated the mingling of politics, sex and religion exposing the hypocrisy and self-centered behavior of devils like Nana in the play. Politics is not the only sphere of attention of politicians, being in politics mechanically hauls them toward prostitution. The collective identity of a politician is that of a tactful, shrewd, cunning, money-minded, devils and a forceful womanizer.

Tendulkar portrays the house of Gulabi overflow with Brahmins, throwing their turbans in air enjoying lavani. These Brahmins are the ruling community during the Peshwa regime and they enjoyed power over other caste people. They have preached morality and spirituality to all others. But the same community is highly materialistic, lustful and had a love for luxury during those periods. Tendulkar again does not strive to hurt the feeling to Chitpavan Brahmin community but brings to focus the double-standard demeanor of people in power.

Therefore, Sutradhar rightly comments on the mentally disturbed wives of Brahmins as:

"The Brahmins have lost themselves in Bavanakhani and the Brahman women are at home; they stay at home; oh yes, they stay at home. The Brahmins have lost themselves in the cemetery, in kirtan; the Brahman women are sentenced to solitary confinement". (GK 368)

Tendulkar's treatment of women in this play reflects their sociological condition. Both Gauri and Gulabi endure and exist at the fancies of their male counterparts. Tendulkar criticizes how ignorant and powerless women are to allow themselves to be used as playthings and disposed by men. These women are hesitant to such a level that they grieve as they suffer but they hardly act on their own. The role of female characters in politics is thus limited only to resignation, acceptance and lamentation. The women characters also become pawns in the hands of lustful men present in the society.

When Nana fears the power of Ghashiram as Kotwal he turns the blood thirsty mob against him without any slightly grievance or lamentation. Through the death of Ghashiram and continuous successful reign of Nana, the dramatist suggests that not all the evil doers are punished but few are left free like Nana. Thus, corruption goes not only unquestioned but also continues to flourish. Unfortunately, Ghashiram's may come and Ghashiram's may go, but real power rest with Satan like Nana.

In this way, an attempt has been made to explore Vijay Tendulkar's GhashiramKotwal as a critique of protagonist Ghashiram and antagonist Nana as an embodiment of Satan in the play.

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Corresponding Author

Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole*

Head, Department of English, C. K. Thakur A. C.S. College, New Panvel

E-Mail – rajesh.yeole001@gmail.com