

Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*: A Denunciation of Fraudulent Politicians, Policemen and Prostitutes

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Man is a political animal says Aristotle; the political ideas and intuitions are outcome of the political nature of man. Politics relates man in a state or government. The struggle for power, persecution, tyranny, sufferings, passivity and submission has been a continuous process from ancient man's life and is prolonged to thrive also in the civilized society. In the power game, man is either a captive to others or captivates others. This power structured relationship or power game operates at different levels; domestic, social and political. In the cut throat competition for power, reputation, wealth, dignity and position man exploits his fellow beings and uses them as mere puppets for his selfish motives.

Vijay Tendulkar, a literary giant among the modern Indian playwrights reined the Indian Drama over a period of five decades. He has contributed a rich crop of plays, all of which have earned him critical and popular acclaim. As an influential dramatist, several of his works have become classics of modern Indian theatre. Tendulkar's plays crossed the limits of Marathi theatre and are completely responsible for placing Indian drama in the international maps. His plays deal with themes of public importance and they bear ample evidence to this fact that he has a message to deliver, a vision to fulfill. In the beginning, he appeared as a controversial playwright but his works portrayed him as an honest artist. He is a rebellious and courageous personality who is well known as a dramatist, screen and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and a social commentator. He was actively associated with the civil liberties movements in Maharashtra. All this reveals his concern for his country and society. He is a realist and refuses to be fooled by romantic concepts of reforms and movements. He exposes the flaws and failures of unrealistic reforms and movements in his plays. The controversy that rose after performing many of his plays is the clear proof of the unconventional attitude towards solving the human problems.

Vijay Tendulkar being a postmodern playwright became the radical political of Maharashtra, without restricting himself in scrutinizing the restrains of social realism. He leaped into the cauldron of political radicalism and unravels the hegemony of people in power and the hypocrisy existing in Indian mindset through some of his plays. But he does not subscribe to any particular political ideologies, including Marxism as they are unable to understand the complex human situation and to suggest any viable solution to our hydra-headed problems. His plays are Tendulkar's powerful expression of human foibles but the playwright does not intend to offend or aggravate people but strives for enlightenment and refinement. This paper aims to analyze Vijay Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal* as a powerful criticism on corrupt politicians, policemen and prostitutes who all join to create a social disharmony, lawlessness, injustice, adultery, corruption, confusion and chaos.

The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a controversial drama full of dance and music. The setting of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* takes us to the eighteenth century Peshwa regime in Maharashtra. Though the characters Ghashiram Kotwal and Nana Padhnavis resemble the historical personages, this is not a play restricted within the history of Indian politics. The play exposes and attacks the debauchery of the ruling class-the Brahmins of Pune, who consider them to be

custodians of public morality. The play created a furor in the community and it took a while before being accepted as an unhistorical play based on some facts of history. The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* predictably arouse strong protest against the caste system and reactionary elements for their keen insight into the nature of social tension and his ability to translate his findings into dramatic and artistic equivalent.

Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a multi-layered play based on history. But the chief focus is not on history but on contemporary political scene. Tendulkar's plea printed on the blurb of the book *Ghashiram Kotwal: A Reader's Companion* goes thus:

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)

Thus the playwright explores the corrupt and sick modern society with its typical callous men who have no moral scruples.

The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is woven round the matrix of political scenario where power is defined horizontally (in the sense in which Maurice Duverger uses it in the *Idea of politics* London, 1966), 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)

Is atrocity, malfeasance and malicious strategies are embedded in the political game where man is used as pawns and puppets? Tendulkar culls out a period of Peshwa regime as its background and picks up events to annotate this query. But Tendulkar never hints at any clues regarding his political ideology but leaves the audience to ponder over the ultimate truth of the situation. Tendulkar makes use of the historical characters; Nana and Ghashiram only to expose the brutality, innocuous practices to amalgamate power which ultimately leads to their destruction.

Malignance and moral pollution are two distinctive features which particularize politics from other professions. Tendulkar's description of politics and politicians are not features of Peshwa regime alone, but a general prodigy. Criminalization of politics is one of the blazing topics of argument and analysis today, but the network between politicians and criminals is quite ancient. The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* throws symbolic radiance on this deadly relationship between politicians, criminals, policemen and prostitutes who are employed in bombarding a terrible war against peace, morality and justice. "This play can be called as a condemnation of politicians, it is a challenging task carried out by 3p's in collaboration" (30), aptly states S.G.Bhanegaonkar in his "Depiction of politics, power and prostitution in *Ghashiram Kotwal*".

The character Ghashiram comes in search of fortune to Pune with his wife and daughter. He becomes the victim of power structure in the beginning of the play when he is wrongly abused of theft and thrown to 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 evident 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 curry favour to Nana's predicaments and offers his back as a support for Nana thus literally suggesting the carrying of Nana's sexual follies on his back. Tendulkar at his point focuses that it is for the sexual folly that Ghashiram is able to be use to Nana.

Ghashiram Kotwal buys power through sex. He sacrifices the virtue of his 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. "No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when he was pregnant" (GK 407). Having purchased power through sex Ghashiram grows muddled 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 hero suffers from personal flaw which ultimately leads to his destruction.

All the aspect of modern politicians is adeptly woven into the texture of the play and is reproduced in the character Ghashiram and Nana. 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 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 moral compunction. Then he authorizes Ghashiram and uses him as a veil that he is of danger always. He also uses power to victimize, to dispose his preys and to hush up everything clearly. Neela Bhalla comments on the power game played by Nana and Ghashiram Kotwal:

If Ghashiram is the juggler naut 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 illustrates how power makes a man lose his self-control and become barbarous through the behaviour of Ghashiram after becoming the Kotwal of Poona. The moment Ghashiram gains power he brims with pride enchanted in savagery and barbarousness. Though he feels guilty at times, the hunger for power overwhelms the guiltiness which makes him clamour:

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 could clearly perceive that his innocent daughter's life has been ruined for his egotistic nature but still his mad craving for power makes him continues his operations.

Tendulkar parodies the police force whose hallmark is corruption from ancient times to the modern times. This police force ought to be the protector of law and order. But Tendulkar has projected them ironical light by associating them with cruelty, oppression and arrogance. When Ghashiram comes in search of opulence to Poona he was wrongly accused to theft, humiliated and arrested. In addition to this they prevent Ghashiram from attending the feast given by Peshwas. This utter humiliation suffered in the hands of policemen hits his ego and makes him challenge:

...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).

The policemen turn deaf ears to the pleadings of Ghashiram.

Ghashiram suffers damage of reputation in hands of policemen for no fault of his. The police force uses their power in wrong way that innocent people like Ghashiram often get crushed mistakenly. The hunger for revenge in Ghashiram combines with the hunger for power so immensely that he hunts the best way to avenge the people of Poona. Tendulkar at this juncture brings to attention of audience situations that give rise to Ghashiram like forces in society.

After gaining power as Kotwal of Poona, Ghashiram starts 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, "Prostitutes' lane was desolate / the chasing of women was halted. / Pimps turned into beggars. / Counterfeit coin were worthless" (GK 388). The nails of the Brahmin's right hand are pulled out. The fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap. All the lines and signs of his hands are noted. His hands are wrapped in a bag is sealed and ordeal is prepared (GK 395). Ghashiram grows arrogant and mishandles people and strives for strict rules but sometimes he becomes unreasonable and absurd. In one instance Ghashiram arrests a man who is in a hurry to fetch a midwife, Ghashiram inhumanly queries him, "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; a woman goes straight to Nana and complains:

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)

Though people become fed up with the barbarous ways of Ghashiram they were not able to lay hands on him as Nana's power is behind him.

Tendulkar produces congruous situation where an innocent Brahmin wrongly is punished of theft. Ghashiram refusing to listen to the explanation displays a remorseless behaviour making him to undergo the ordeal of holding a red ball iron his hands. The poor Brahmin moans and grumbles with agony, "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 forecast the future 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 due to forced abortion. Ghashiram, a common man becomes a monster is a product by society. It is also the society which is responsible for turning him into devil and being stoned to death.

Finally Ghashiram suffers from imprudence and fails to have an integrated view of the truths of life. "No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when he was pregnant" (GK 407), comments Sutradhar. Having purchased power through sex Ghashiram grows muddled 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 hero suffers from personal flaw which ultimately leads to his destruction.

Tendulkar clearly links 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. Ghashiram 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 enamored 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 Pune-kars spread rumours about Nana and Gauri. Nana though initially refuses to this idea of making him the Kotwal finally yields to his carnal desire and condescends to make Ghashiram the Kotwal.

Tendulkar has superbly manipulated the mingling of politics, sex and religion exposing the hypocrisy and self-centered behaviour of man. Politics is not the only sphere of attention of politicians; being in politics mechanically hauls them toward prostitution. The collective image of a politician is that of a tactful, shrewd, cunning, money-minded, demons and a forceful womanizer. The stupendous aptitude of our politicians to create muddled, deleterious, demoralizing and turbulent state has not been suspected, queried or challenged misery-addicted innocent citizens.

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 professed and 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 demeanour of people in power.

Tendulkar brilliantly illustrates on the convulsions of devoted Brahmin wives whose perfidious husbands 'spend their treasure on foreign thighs'. The wives of these whore-mongerers wait devotedly for their men who are totally apathetic to their corporal and emotional requirements of their wives. Sutradhar aptly comments on the mentally disturbed wives of Brahmins:

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 infers that during the Peshwa regime adultery touched all sections of the ruling community.

Tendulkar's handling of women in this play reflects their sociological condition. Both Gauri and Gulabi endure and exist at the fancies of their male counterparts. Tendulkar exposes 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.

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 playwright suggests that not all the evil doers are punished; some are left free like Nana. Thus corruption goes not only unquestioned but also continues to flourish. Ghashiram's may come and Ghashiram's may go, but real power rest with demagogues like Nana. This social set up remains unaltered forever as long as people start realizing their real exploitation.

ABBREVIATION USED: Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*: GK

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