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State, Society and Power-Politics in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*

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Abstract:

With the advent of human civilization there has been a constant struggle between individual and 'State' for their supremacy exercising their own power mechanism. The 'State' being the representation of ruling class has created restrictions on individual for different purposes. The social thinkers have been of opinion that the 'State' and individual are contradictory in nature. To bring them in harmony should be the goal of an ideal society but in praxis it is just an impossible act. The conflict between them is reflected in victimization, hegemony and surveillance on the part of the 'State' and greed, exploitation and taxation on the part of individual. Sense of dominance is the sole issue in power-politics between them. Vijay Tendulkar, a Marathi playwright and one of the pillars of modern Indian drama has tried to show in his plays the problems of human society in its individual form or as a whole; what compels an individual to long for greed of 'power'; and how power corrupts everything. Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a study of the power game between the 'State' and an 'individual' where religion, violence, sexuality and deputation politics are employed as tools of power.

The present paper is an effort to analyse Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*, originally written in Marathi and later on translated into English, as a socio-political and cultural literary artifact that concentrates on the relationship between the 'State' and individual in the power driven society; violence as the most successful device between victimizer and victim; the power-politics with its multifarious branches; and the conclusions to harmonize different entities of powers in present scenario

Keywords: Society, Power, State, Sexuality, Religion, Violence, Hegemony.

Vijay Tendulkar is a classic and modern playwright at the same time in Marathi drama. He is also the most controversial and critical playwright of his time. As a social critic he studies 'power' and violence in various contexts of Indian society and shades away the different institutions from their artificial impositions in his plays. His handling of social realities like caste and class, cause of women, conflict between individual and society, questions of alienation and survival, power politics has been favorite subjects of study for his critics.

Ghashiram Kotwal has a fictional plot based on an historical character- Nana Phadnavis to expose the power game in a 'State' where extreme steps have been taken to control 'power' at the stake of honor and life of young girl. Talking on the controversy and allegations of distorting history and maligning the Marathi cult hero Nana Phadnavis Tendulkar remarks:

This is not a historical play. It is 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. (1986, 2)

This remark of Tendulkar reflects that in writing the play his interest does not lie in creating any historical or political play but finding the socio-political reasons that make any individual prey of the corrupt ways of the 'State' and its rulers. Through the remark he intends also that the play to be a pointer to the ever-recurring pattern of power politics manifesting in deceptions of deputation as is evident in the Peshwa Phadnavis-Kotwal relationship. Critically analyzing on historical aspect of the play Basavraj Naikar writes that the characters of Nanasaheb Phadnavis, Ghashiram, Gauri and their situations are all historical. But Tendulkar has tried to make the play not a piece of antique history, but a reflection of ever-operative mystery of life (2001, 102). Further, N.S. Dharan tries to make a valid point about the histo-political aspect of the play and says: "The inescapable reality is that as long as politics remains a power game, Nana Phadnavises, Ghashirams and Gauris are bound to emerge (2001, 116)." Brooding over the historical shade of the play E. Satynarayana suggests that *Ghashiram Kotwal*, though based on historical legend, is not actually a historical play. Unlike other dramatists, Tendulkar finds a parallel running between antiquity and contemporaneity, and here he begins in the past history to throw light on the present human predicament (2001, 126). Hence it is aptly clear that the social-structural nature of the characters is reflection of its universal political reality and power game; the play is concerned more

with the life of Ghashiram, the common man hero, than with history of Nana Phadanavis, the late eighteenth century Marathi Machiavelli. The play is histo-political to the extent that the playwright has taken historical characters and situations to comment on universal socio-political world where power-politics is played to maintain the authority and hegemony, and to fulfill the personal greed with help of surveillance, control over public opinion press, and deputation.

Ghashiram Kotwal is not a historical or political tragedy but tragedy of an individual who becomes the subject of his 'hamartia/tragic flaw'. On the pattern of Shakespearean hero Tendulkar's Ghashiram is a product of his 'error of judgement' where he wants to take revenge against Nana Phadanavis with the help of the 'power' given to him by Phadanavis himself. In the process he puts his own daughter Gauri's life at stake; he uses her as a bait to control Nana knowing his weakness for women. But he forgets Nana Phadanavis, the old politician who seduces Ghashiram's daughter on his own will, forces to death and frames a fake public opinion against Ghashiram Kotwal who is killed by the public through stones like the pig at the end of the play. Indeed, Ghashiram has been unaware of the 'ultimate power' of Nana Phadanavis who can play the cruelest and shrewdest power-game for his own benefit. He has been also ignorant about the fact that 'borrowed and secondary power' tend to be defeated, and it is created to hide something dark and heinous. Ghashiram is reason of his doom; he has been tangled in the web of power-politics in such way that he could not escape but to die. Thus, Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a play of power-politics in its multifarious ways where 'State' manipulates an individual till the end of his life and hope to improve the society; where Nana uses all mechanisms to defeat Ghashiram to satisfy his personal greed; where Gauri, a female, is put at the stake to lure the sexual desires of Nana, a male, knowingly by her own father Ghashiram; she is exploited, abused and succumbed to death at the last of play. The 'State' defeats the 'individuals' therefore society. The play may be described as a tragedy of power as there is a conflict between power and powerless behind the manifestation of historical characters and events (Naikar 102). Tendulkar, in his social criticism, is more concerned with mechanism of power, operating within the society than with the economic and political implications and sources of that power (Bandyopadhyay 1986, 2).

Ghashiram Kotwal is a play about power and its role in designing social structure. Samik Bandyopadhyay, one of the renowned critics of Vijay Tendulkar writes that in *Ghashiram Kotwal* power is defined 'horizontally' in terms of individuals against individuals; from humiliation to

revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization; played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power (2003, xli). In *Ghashiram Kotwal* the story moves around Ghashiram Savaldas, a Brahman from Kanauj comes to Poona for making his fortune. After not getting any job as per his worthiness for his livelihood he starts to work with Gulabi, the courtesan. His first meeting with Nana happens when Nana comes to visit dance at Gulabi's place where he hurts his ankle but makes balance on his stick with one foot on Ghashiram's back. He is impressed with his courteous nature and sweet wit and he gives a necklace to him which has been snatched by men of Gulabi. Later on Ghashiram suffers from an unexpected humiliation at Poona when he is wrongly accused of thievery and therefore he is arrested and imprisoned. Nobody listens to his honest explanation and clarification. Ghashiram is deeply worried about the loss of his reputation.

...I didn't steal. I swear to God I didn't. I'm not a thief. I'm from Kanauj. I'm a Brahman. I've been here two weeks. I came here to find my fortune-and lost my reputation. How did it happen? What will happen to my wife? To my daughter? What will they say when they hear of this? (16)

Ghashiram is released after few days of his imprisonment with a warning to go away from Poona. The utter humiliation, victimization, disgrace, abuse and cheating suffered by Ghashiram awakes in the powerful emotion of hatred and revenge. He therefore takes firm decision to stay in Poona and pay the people of Poona in their own coin.

...I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show you strength. It will cost you! Your Good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahman but I've become a Shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. There is no one to stop me now, to mock me, to make me bend, to cheat me. Now I am devil. (17)

Like Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Ghashiram sells his soul to the devil to buy 'power' to rule to Poona. Compelled by powerful vindictive desire, Ghashiram thinks of ways and means of achieving his goal without losing any moral principles. In other words, far from being an idealist, he becomes an opportunist and exploits the situation the best possible ways. Ghashiram has been well aware of Nanasahab's notorious weakness for women, his 'ogling' and 'leering' so he plans to use her beautiful, pretty, shy and innocent daughter Lalita Gauri as bait to attract

Nanasaheb to receive the post of Kotwal of Poona. In his blind rage of revenge he does not think of the consequences of his indiscriminate opportunism that later on becomes his 'tragic flaw'. He commits the tragic crime of sacrificing his daughter's virginity for attaining deputation power from Nanasaheb. In disguise of servant after looking Nana's sexual desperation and failure in erotic persuasion for Gauri, 'a frightened deer' at first time on his demand he promises to him "if the hunter is ready, the prey will be found (19)." Thus Nana aspires to buy sexual favour through his 'ultimate power' of ministership. Ghashiram has sex object i.e. his daughter through which he plots to attain a 'deputatory power'.

Accordingly, he brings Gauri and offers her to Nanasaheb to fulfill his sexual pleasure. Ghashiram is happy to note that he has succeeded to trap Nanasaheb through his sexual gratification. Though he feels guilty of making her daughter 'commodity' in exchange of 'power' from Nanasaheb, he compromises with his conscience as he is goaded by a strong emotion revenge against the people of Poona.

Oh, you people. Look! I've given my beloved daughter into jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for sale. Look at my innocent daughter-a whore...Spit on me. Stone me. Look, look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a Kingdom of pigs. (20)

Having been trapped sexually Nana yields to Ghashiram's terms and gives him a signed order of appointment as Kotwal of Poona. Ghashiram feels overjoyed thinking to be successful in his plot but like a true Shakespearean tragic hero he does not look into future trap in which he has been entering. The 'power game' of plotting and trapping has been going on from both parts- Nanasaheb/ 'State' and Ghashiram/ 'individual'. The circle of victim and victimizer goes on. In appointing Ghashiram the Kotwal of Poona Nanasaheb has dual benefits- sexually he can enjoy his daughter as well as use him as a thorn to remove thorns from his political field. Indeed Ghashiram has been trapped and made victim in the power-politics of 'State' and individual. Nanasaheb reveals his dark inner motives afterwards.

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. (22)

Having intoxicated with 'bought power' Ghashiram grows arrogant and high-handed; and tries to impose very strict and sometimes absurd and impractical rule according to which no whoring, cremation and inter-caste dining can be done without permit. Men and women have to stay at home at night and are not supposed to have extra-marital relationship. This anger-generated and blind power-driven rules make him a callous and sadist villain among people of Poona. His inhuman governance has brought to him only curses of a 'dog's death without a child grinding heels in the dirt'. Like a true tragic hero in his blind power he has started to dig his own grave and approach towards his demise under his tragic flaw of revenge. When he has started to seek a bridegroom for wedding of his daughter, he seems to full with over-power. "I'll make such a show of the wedding that no one's tongue will move to utter one bad word about my daughter. And if some tongue starts wagging, it's easy to cut it off!.. It's easy to find a bride-groom when one has money, jewels and respect (37)." Terribly exasperated by the news of his daughter's unexpected death he kills Chandra, the midwife who tells him that she has been pregnant before marriage and buried after death. When he asks to Nana about Gauri's death, Nansaheb gives a philosophical answer of illusion to him. Ghashiram has paid more than his crime is deserved. By surrendering his daughter to Nana for the attainment of power he has voilted the moral as well as his paternal duty. He has been caught in the web of his own 'power-game' in which Nana Phadnavis has been superior, trained and shrewd.

Further, even after knowledge of death of his daughter on the path of revenge and hunger of power he does not stop him going on path of his doom like Shakespearean Macbeth who continues to follow the same path even after losing Lady Macbeth. In place of resigning he becomes more vindictive and cruel in taking revenge against people of Poona. He crosses his limits when he orders for imprisonment in a small unventilated cell without any understanding and mercy to some South Indian Brahmans, who have come to Poona to make fortune like Ghashiram, for only plucking some fruits in his garden. Some twenty-two Brahmans die out of suffocation in the cell for which crime Ghashiram has to be punished. Under the law of retribution the angry Brahmans of Poona rush to Nanasaheb and demand justice who without any thinking gives the order of beheading Ghashiram, the Kotwal of Poona. Nana says, "Use a thorn to take out a thorn.

That's great. The disease has been stopped. Any way, there was no use for him any more (52).” Without any knowledge of these happenings when Ghashiram goes to the cell to look them, he is caught by the angry Brahmans and severely beaten. Like a tragic hero he realizes his sin, makes repentance and reconciles very late with his inescapable fortune: “I danced on your chests but I wasted the life of my little daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me (54).” At the last Ghashiram was murdered by the angry Brahmans by pelting stones on him. The ‘State’ has misused his machinery and crated a fabricated discourse in controlling and destroying one individual for its favor. In the callous and manipulated words of Nana Phadnavis, real villain and conspirator but representative of powerful’ State’ before the public at the sight of murdered Ghashiram the law of retribution and ‘power-politics’ can be perceived easily when he says:

Ladies and gentlemen. Citizens of Poona. A threat to the great city Poona has been ended today. (The crowd cheers). A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghashya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything has happened according to the wishes of the gods. The mercy of the goods is with us always. (56)

Tendulkar’s tragic play seems to be successful in creating cathartic effect due its powerful plot and thematic quality of commenting universal socio-political human condition with help of past by arousing emotions of fear and pity for Ghashiram because he has been greater than he deserves.

It can be concluded that Vijay Tendulkar’s *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a perfect tragic play on the theme of ‘power-game’ between the powerful ‘State’ represented by Nana Phadnavis and powerless ‘individual’ represented by Ghashiram Savaldas, a Brahman of Kanuj where the victimization circle, manipulation, threat method and exploiter-exploited are employed. It also illustrates how people are fooled in power games, how the most cunning person wins the game of power; and how the ‘State’ plays its role in fooling the people though creating fabricated history and fear for gods, coining of greed and hunger, and supporting favourism and ‘divide and rule’ policy. Vijay Tendulkar has been successful in commenting on present through antiquity.

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