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**SEX, EXPLOITATION AND MARGINALIZATION IN TENDULKAR'S *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL***

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**Abstract:**

*Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal (1973) is originally written in Marathi, and translated into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot in 1984. The play basically deals with the history of Maratha Empire and reflects power politics, religion, caste, violence, the crisis to gain power, caste, oppression, exploitation, etc. It candidly depicts the dark sheds of the life of Nana Phadnavis, an able administrator as well as shrewd politician. The play also covers the degradation at social, cultural and moral level.*

**Keywords:** *Sex, Power Politics, Exploitation, Humiliation, Violence, etc.*

Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1973) is originally written in Marathi, and translated into English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot in 1984. It basically deals with history of Maratha Empire. The play covers power politics, religion, caste, sex and violence. It may be called as the historical play, though the playwright denies it. It candidly and cleverly depicts the dark sheds of the life of Nana Phadnavis who, being an able administrator as well as shrewd politician sustained Maratha Empire for more than twenty years.

The play reflects loss at social and moral level, destruction and struggle for power. In this play, the Poona Brahmins are shown hypocrite, clever schemer and morally corrupt. They visit the red light area as if it is a path towards spirituality. For them, Kirtan and Lavni are same and equal. The Sutradhar explains the garden of Krishna at Mathura descend on to Bavannakhani.

Poona Brahmins go to Bavannakhani...

They go to the cemetery.

They go to Kirtan.

They go to the temple- as they have gone every day.

The street of Bavanna became for a while.

The garden of Krishna...

The garden of Hira

The garden of Saras

The garden of Moti

Became the garden of Mathura

Where Krishna played (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 10 - 25).

*Ghashiram Kotwal* portrays all the characters very realistically. One of the major issues the play deals with is sexual exploitation and suffocation. It shows how women are beaten, seduced, abused, hurt and discarded in the male dominated society. Nana is very renowned and powerful. *Ghashiram* desperately wants to be the *Kotwal* of Pooa. For the fulfillment of his selfish desire, he could go any level without thinking if it is legitimate or not; moral or immoral, rational or irrational. *Ghashiram* serves his own daughter, *Lalita Gauri* to Nana. He does this disgusting and heinous thing



only for the sake of power and position. He compels Nana to declare him as Kotwal of Pune. Nana uses Lalita Gauri as a means of fulfillment of his perpetual sexual desires. He eventually kills Lalita Gauri. When he kills her, he orders his servants to throw Gauri's dead body into the river. He utters:

NANA: Remove Gauri's corpse and throw it in the river. If anyone finds so much as a bone, I will break your bones....

SUTRADHAR: Gauri went. Nana stays. Ghashiram engraved the sorrow of Gauri on his heart...without a second thought. No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when she was pregnant (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 53)

After the death of Lalitha Gauri, Nana secretly decides to marry another teenage girl. It is his seventh marriage. During the time of Peshwa, it was possible for the men to remarry again and again.

SUTRADHAR: Nana is getting married....Nana is having his seventh time... on this day Nana's seventh wedding is ready.... My Nana's wedding; the bride is a young one.... (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 45)

Tendulkar focuses on the harassments of women at different levels. Nana sexually exploits all his wives. He is old person but doesn't seem to be hesitant in keeping extra marital relationship. The readers may be shocked to know that his seventh wife is just nine years old. The play reflects predicament of women. It shows how women are exploited in the male-controlled Indian social setup.

Astonishingly, the young girls are seen exploited in the play. In the Indian socio-cultural set up, girls are subject to respect and obey the elders at home before their marriage. Their overall behavior is monitored by their parents and the patriarchal norms. The girls do not seem to have their own choices. Gauri's passivity and reluctant obedience indicates her susceptibility in the patriarchy.

Tendulkar purposefully presented Gauri as a silent victim, because Gauri never shares her experiences of shame and humiliation; she never protests and asks why she is used as a commodity. Her all dreams and desires shatter when she is forced to submit herself to Nana and become his mistress at a very tender age. She is discarded once Nana's purpose is over. Even her death doesn't matter. Nana wants no testimony of her life or death to be left behind. After the disappearance of Gauri, Ghashiram's dialogues gain much importance:

GHASHIRAM: Where is my dear child? Tell me where is she?

CHANDRA: There- we buried her there....

GHASHIRAM: Oh! My child. My Gauri. A piece of my heart... what happened? What did that devil Nana do?

NANA: It is I. Ghashya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm....

GHASHIRAM: You deceived me Nanasaheb. You did this. You took my child's life. My only child. My innocent darling... you killed.... (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 49-50)

In the Indian patriarchal set up, the innocent characters like Gauri are always seduced, used, humiliated, tortured and discarded. Gauri could have raised her voice against injustice and torture, but she has been silenced by the power politics. Like Vijay Tendulkar, the modern dramatist, Albee, Ibsen, and Shaw have faced harsh criticism for the treatment they gave to their female characters. The patriarchal dominance is one of the major issues they have dealt in their plays. Absham Taisha is of



the view: “While being hailed as pioneers of the feminist cause were also criticized for their male biases in their treatment of women” (Taisha, 19).

Tendulkar has presented women characters as exploited and suffocating in his plays. Benare in *The! Silence Court is in Session*, Lalitha Gauri, Gulabi, and Chandra in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Sarita and Kamala in *Kamala*, Lakshmi and Champa in *Sakharam Binder* are the finest examples.

In the plays like *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Kamala*, and *Kanyadaan* women have major roles, but Tendulkar has presented them as losers, exploited, used and discarded. Some critics have called him anti-women. But Tendulkar, in one of his interviews has justified his own point of view:

When I show the struggle of a woman, it is not one woman’s fight. The individual must have name and identity and caste and background to be credible, but she is not just a woman on stage, in a particular play. I am, in writing of her situation, showing that the possibility of a struggle against it exists.... By not giving a solution, I leave possibilities open, for whatever course they change may take. When the members of my audience go home and chew on the situation, they might be able to see their daughter or sister in the woman’s position and come up with a way of changing the situation to her advantage. (Femina: Interview with Satya Saran and Vimla Patil. June 8-22, 1984: 37)

Vijay Tendulkar provokes the audiences against traditional framework that has always troubled women in household. He believes that unless the audiences see their mothers, sisters and daughters in place of exploited female characters, the situations can’t be improved. He also wants that women should fight and raise voices against the exploitation in the name of sex and gender.

In the play, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, women are seen exploited and humiliated at every step. Poona Brahmins frequently visit Bavannakhani and the house of Gulabi to enjoy erotic dances. Gulabi dances for the entertainment of Nana, Ghashiram, and other characters. Brahmin people are shown lusting after Gulabi, whereas their wives remain at home. The wives of Brahmin people are also not safe. The Sutradhar informs us: “they are sentenced to solitary confinement” (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 8) they wait for their lovers, who are Maratha landlords and owners. But they can’t do it openly as they do not have such freedom.

The unequal treatment given to the women characters reflects the contemporary social realities. Ghashiram never minds to exchange his only daughter in the negotiation of power. She escapes herself in the beginning, but later, she has no options left and she offers herself to Nana’s sexual urge. Gauri can’t behave and rebel against her father’s wish. It reflects the male chauvinism which has been prevalent even in the contemporary Indian society. While discussing on Tendulkar’s plays, Arundhati Banerjee appropriately comments:

But the evaluation of the role of an Indian woman within the institution called marriage, considered to be the holiest of the holy in our society, definitely provides a completely novel point of view showing that women are still mere slaves to their male owners in Indian Society in the latter half of the 20th century (Banerjee, 27-28).

Nana’s wives are presented as minor characters in the play. They appear on the stage only to dance when their husband when he is erotically engaged with other new girls. A Brahman lady is seen coming out disheveled, whimpering, and straightening out her clothing from the house of a Brahman



at night who is not her husband. All the women are engaged in sexual relationships with landlords and other rich people in the city.

The chant continues. Nana comes in dancing to his rhythm. The young girl comes in, ready to dance. She moves to the rhythm... Nana and the girl reappear and dance like Radha and Krishna. Seven or eight women of different age, all Nana's wives, make a dancing circle around them (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 25-26)

Adultery is a kind of a moral breakdown within a shameless and immoral person. During the rule of the Peshwa, it touched to whole community of the rulers. The Kotwal rightly describes Poona as "the adulterous city" (Tendulkar, *GK.*, 35).

On one hand, *Ghashiram Kotwal* criticizes the prostitution which has always resulted in the social evils like adultery and womanizing, on the other hand, it propagates the idea of marriage. He wants to convey that the marriage, as a sacred act must be preserved so that we can have the social stability and harmony.

In the play, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the words politics and prostitution are used for the same purpose. The stereotyped image of politician has been closely associated with the prostitution. Politicians are presented as greedy and immoral. It symbolizes the contemporary political leaders. The report of the Advisory Committee of the League of Nations appropriately reflects the issue:

Prostitution has outlived every social, economic, ethical, and political system which the West has known since the time of the Greek states. It has had its vicissitudes: but flourishing or languishing, public or clandestine, it has existed in large towns for the last 2500 years, thereby proving how deeply it is rooted in human social life (Karve and Zelliott, 370).

This burning message that the play conveys has also made it controversial. There were few reasons for banning this play on stage: it seems anti-Brahmin, it includes high amount of stuff against women and their suppression such as violence, exploitation, brutality, and the power politics. Bal Chandra Kelkar, Founder President of the Progressive Dramatic Association is of the opinion:

The whole drama has been written with an animus for Brahmins (alluded to as 'asses'), patriotic Maratha chancellor Nana Phadnavis has been portrayed as a lecherous character and the golden period of the Peshwa rule has been shown as a period of decadence (Times of India, 20 June, 2000:32).

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