

CORRUPTION AND TRAGEDY OF POWER IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

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Vijay Tendulkar is one of the most well known Indian dramatists of twentieth century. His original writings in Marathi deal with various issues related to contemporary social, political, cultural and economic life in Maharashtra. The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* also deals with such issues. Tendulkar has used historical references and events to suit his purpose. He has treated his historical material in such a manner that it has become universal in the play.

Ghashiram Kotwal is a story of the conflict between Ghashiram Savaldas, a North-Indian Brahman from Kanauj and Nana Phadnavis, Chief Minister of the Peshwas in Maharashtra. Even the play may be considered as tragedy of power and the conflict between Ghashiram and Nana can be seen as the conflict between power and powerlessness. The play '*Ghashiram Kotwal*' is a tragedy of Ghashiram Savaldas, a Brahman from Kanauj. Plot is an organization of events which form the story of a play. A plot can be either simple or complex. A good plot shows a good man suffering due to his own faults. Vijay Tendulkar points out about the historical perspective of the play and his point of view. He declares:

This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music, and dance set in a historical era. Ghashiram is a creation of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commenting 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. 1

Ghashiram Kotwal is divided into two Acts. Each Act is divided in small scenes though these scenes are not separated from each other by dropping of the curtains or by removing all the characters from the stage. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a story of an elderly Brahman, Ghashiram Savaldas, who had come to Poona to earn his livelihood. The play begins with a song of Ganaraya and also ends with the same song. At the very beginning we are introduced with all the important characters including Ghashiram and Nana. Ghashiram was an outsider who had come to Poona in search of his fortune.

Ghashiram Savaldas is a poor Brahman from Kanauj. He comes to Poona for livelihood along with his wife and daughter. Since he gets no dignified employment to suit his caste, he becomes

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a servant in courtesan Gulabi's house. In addition to the housework that he does for her, he also sings and dances when people come to enjoy her erotic songs and the dance. Nana phadnavis is an elderly person having several wives but no children. He is a lusty person .He was not satisfied with his own wives hence he comes to listen Gulabi's lavani(folk song).One day ,Nana visits Gulabi and hurts his ankle while dancing ,Ghashiram appreciates him..Nana feels flattered and pleased and offers him a necklace of pearls and leaves. Gulabi snatches the necklace from him and sends him out with the help of her thugs. Ghashiram feels hurt and insulted. Thus, Gulabi who once rescues Ghashiram persecutes him later and Ghashiram who remains in the position of the Victim feel helpless and powerless

Ghashiram Savaldas arrives in Poona in search of his fortune, but all his hopes are shattered when he suffers an unexpected humiliation. Actually, he had committed no crime. Still he is arrested and thrown into the prison. This unexpected turn of events in his life crushes his very spirit. No doubt he was poor but it doesn't mean that he had no reputation in the society. And it is not his poverty but his loss of reputation that suffers him more. He tries to explain the mob that he was not a thief but a 'Brahman from Kanauj, new to Poona, but nobody pays and attention to know his sincere clarification. His conversation with the Sutradhar reveals the trauma of his mind. Ghashiram goes out. He feels tired and hungry. When Peshwa arranges a great feast in honor of Brahmans, he also visits there. But the soldiers do not allow him. Unfortunately some thief has stolen money in Poona. Ghashiram on the charge of theft put in prison. The soldiers beat Ghashiram severely. He feels immensely humiliated and tormented. This humiliation faced by Ghashiram generates powerful feeling of revenge. He expresses his anger and feeling of revenge. He says:

But I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of our. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more. (17)

His mistreatment by the people forces him to swear to take revenge against the people of Poona. He hatches a plot of temptation in order to take revenge. He doesn't think twice as using his daughter as manipulation part of taking revenge against insulting treatment given to him by people of Poona. It was difficult for a new person to get settled in a new city like Poona and satisfy his hunger for revenge. He is ambitious man. To satisfy his hunger of power, he decides to take help of Nana Phadnavis, the most powerful person of Poona.

Nana himself was one of the prestigious frequenters of this plays indicating his lustful nature which becomes one of the predominant force in the power struggle of the power equations. This is the place where the first meeting between Nana and Ghashiram takes place. Nana has a minor accident he injures his foot and Ghashiram helps him out of the difficult situation .Nana is extremely pleased with the help rendered and gives away strings of the expensive pulse as make reward. Nana misused of his power. Nana gives him a diamond precious gift in order to satisfy his desire of lust. Nana was lusty and the most powerful person in Poona. Nana was lusty man

therefore he offers his own daughter to Nana and in return gets appointed as the Kotwal of Poona. Act II is completely different characters of Ghashiram because of his power as Kotwal. He uses the daughter as a part of the plot to take revenge. The play deals with the technicalities of power. As Vinita Bhatnagar rightly comments:

Gauri has few lines in the play and certainly none that hint at her own perception of her experience. But Ghashiram's guilt is voiced at various parts of the dramatic text. Thus even in the triumphant celebration of his power, Ghashiram worries over the fate of his daughter.²

Ghashiram interfere with every aspect of people's life with a very strict iron control on the movement of people even within their own house. On the surface it appeared as he was trying to maintain discipline, decorum and decency in the city. In reality, he was making life even in their own homes difficult in the city of Poona. He knocked a door in the midnights suspected the morality of the house holders and woke up neighbor to give testimony against one and others. There was tight control even on the celebration of festivals. Not only these there were all manners of rules and regulation imposed on performing the last rites of death. Ghashiram reign was one of complete terror as dictatorship which took away people's joy of living. After having the power in his hands, Ghashiram begins to take revenge on the people of Poona by enforcing the law strictly. He demands permit for everything. Now people are required to carry a permit. He says:

To kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be pimp, to commit a misdemeanor, to steal, to live with divorced wife, to remarry if one's husband is alive, to hide one's caste, to use counterfeit coins, to commit suicide, without a permit is a sin. A good woman may not prostrate herself; a Brahman may not sin without a permit. (26)

He throws his own morality to winds so that he can make city Poona completely immoral. The Sutradhar says:

Behind Ghashiram Kotwal is Nana's power. If you lay a hand on Ghashiram. Nana will smash you. If you don't, then Ghashiram will get you anyway. (31)

In the next scene, Ghashiram treating the people cruelly, with the passing of time, it seems his desire for revenge is subsided and he thinks of his daughter's marriage. But when he comes to know that his daughter is no more, he becomes furious. His meeting with Nana proves fruitless. He becomes all the more cruel in his treatment. He puts the Brahmans in an overcrowded cell hence causing the death of twenty two Brahmans. During his period, revenues of the state have increased and crimes have decreased. But people of Poona trembles at Ghashiram's name. Ghashiram treats the citizen so harshly that it becomes difficult for them to live in Poona. Ghashiram feels satisfied with his effective use of power. He thinks that he can use his power to get his daughter married to a proper man. He meditates:

I've got the Kotwali and I've got Poona straightened out! All these proud Brahmans are as soft as cotton now. No one dares to look at Ghashiram straight in the eye! Now once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter that piece of my heart named Lalitha Gauri and get married, then everything will be the way I want it. (37)

Hence it shows that he wants to make the marriage of his daughter by using his power His daughter becomes the victim of the corrupt power game. Nana enjoys sexual pleasure with her. She becomes pregnant and at the time of abortion she dies .Ghashiram visits Nana to inquire about the where about his daughter Lalita Gauri whom he had not seen for ten days. In response to the inquiry Nana gave very casual answers. When Ghashiram insisted Nana told him even more casually that she had been send to Chandra the midwife .Ghashiram was shocked by this information. Ghashiram visits to Chandra the midwife makes him realized that his daughter had died. He regretted whatever had happened in his blind desire of revenge through unlimited power and authority. However, he is not prepared to take responsibility and blame for whatever had gone wrong .This is his cowardice. He puts the entire blame for daughter's death on Nana and wants to take further revenge for the lost of his daughter.

Ghashiram forgets his limits of authority as a Kotwal and tries to overpower over Nana. The conflict between them begins after the death of Ghashiram daughter. This conflict is nothing but the conflict of power and powerlessness. Nana is powerless in front of his lust for Gauri. The power equation changes after the death of Gauri.Gauri's death made Ghashiram furious .Ghashiram tries to overthrow the power and the authority of Nana by not bowing in front of him .Nana tames Ghashiram and overpowers him by making him bow in front of him. He orders:

Ghashya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm What ever happened, protocol should not be forgetton. .Don't forget whom do you stand before? First you must bow.Now –bow. (43).

After this incident, Ghashiram realizes that his power is meaningless is front of Nana. Ghashiram acquired power that makes him corrupt and arrogant that he forgets the responsibility of his authority as a Kotwal .He tries to overpower over power Nana Phadnavis. He has forgotten that Nana was the Chief Minister of Peshwa.The mutual relations between Nana and Ghashiram spoils. This creates conflict between power and powerlessness. In the first episode Ghashiram was powerless and Nana powerful. Thus the plot of *Ghashiram Kotwal* is well-knit. All the incidents in the play are closely linked with each other. There is nothing superfluous in it. So it can be said that 'Ghashiram Kotwal' has a well-constructed plot. Ghashiram is an opportunist .His development from a common man to a corrupt Kotwal is the history of moral regression of man. Ghashiram represents the contemporary society .Grant Duff observes about the Ghashiram:

No instance of greater neglect on the party of an administration, or of more extraordinary criminality in a subordinate officers, is recorded in the annals of any state than the case of Ghashiram Kotwal, or police superintendent, of the city of Poona.³ Sutradhar extracts information about the fact the Brahmins are about the visit Bavanakhani, a Red light area-the center of immoral perverted behavior, something unacceptable and unexpected of the Brahmin community. This play of permissive behavior had Gulabi, the courtesan at the center of activities. There was lot of song and dance at this plays, which had been highlighted and projected in the play.

The play ends with the death of Gauri and rebellion of the Brahmans against the Kotwal. Nana ends the oppressive use of power and declares a three day celebration for the end of stigma on society. Ghashiram sorrow and inspiration is a lesson to the audience against going to extremes

for achieving unlimited power and authority. It is a demonstration of sorrow and suffering that awaited a person who had achieved through the wrong means. The play is a social satire. It projects the society that defends corrupts Nana and punishes the Ghashiram. Thus the play is a powerful satire on the power politics. Tendulkar depicts that the play was not written to recreate the history or the historical figures but it was a reaction of an artist to contemporary political scenario.

Endnotes

1. Tendulkar, Vijay. Introduction. *Ghashiram Kotwal*. Calcutta : Seagull. 1984.p-4
2. Bhatnagar, Vinita. Theatre as Translation : A performance based Reading of *Ghashiram Kotwal*, *Dramatic Theory and Practices : Indian and Western*.ed.M.S.Kushwaha. New Delhi : Creative. 2000.p-146.
3. Duff, James Grant. *History of the Marathas* New Delhi : M.M.Publication. 1987.
4. Tendulkar, Vijay. *Ghahiram Kotwal*. trans Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Calcutta : Seagull. 1986. (All the quotations are from this edition.)