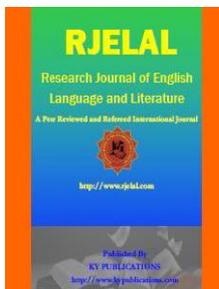




MISUSING POLITICAL POWERS FOR FULFILMENT OF LUSTY DESIRES LEADING TO VICTIMIZATION BASED ON CASTE, CLASS AND POWER POLITICS

SURETE

Research Scholar
Mewar University
Chittorgarh, Rajasthan



ABSTRACT

Man's hunger for power and status is not new. In his race for power and fame he sacrifices even his blood relations. Present paper highlights the same fact by presenting a review on Vijay Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal*, where Ghashiram sacrifices his own daughter and makes a deal with Nana Phadnavis and becomes the kotwal of Pune just to get power and to take revenge of his insult. This results into victimization of people which in turn leads to his destruction as well as his own daughter's life also gets sacrificed in this power game.

Keywords : power politics, victimization, misuse of power, harassment, sacrifice, power game.

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Man being a political animal is always hungry for power and status and his struggle for power, tyranny, sufferings and submission has been a non stop process since ancient times. In the power game man is either a captive to others or captivates others. This relationship based on power operates at different levels; social, political and domestic. Man exploits his fellow beings and uses them as puppets in this power game for fulfillment of his greed for power, money, dignity and status.

Vijay Tendulkar, a great literary giant amongst the postmodern Indian playwrights ruled the Indian drama over a period of five decades. In the field of Indian drama he made a huge contribution through his works, several of his writings became the classics of modern Indian theatre. His plays contain social issues and burning problems of society delivering various powerful messages to people.

His play *Ghashiram Kotwal*, which has been translated from Marathi into English by Jayant Karve and an American professor Eleanor Zelliot, is

a controversial drama full of dance and music. This play takes us back into the eighteenth century when there was Peshwa rule in Pune. The play features the Peshwa's chancellor Nana Phadnavis and exposes the aristocracy of the ruling class, the Brahmins of Pune, who consider them to be the custodians of public morality. The play is a story of conflict between Ghashiram Savaldas, a North Indian Brahmin from Kannauj and Nana Phadnavis, the chief Minister of the Peshwas in Maharashtra. Though the characters of Ghashiram Kotwal and Nana Phadnavis resemble the historical personages, this is not a play restricted within the history of Indian politics. The play was first performed on 16 December, 1972 at Bharat Natya Mandir in Pune, but after nineteen successful performances, the play was banned on the grounds that it was an anti-Brahmin play and the portrayal of Nana Phadnavis character was a distortion of historical facts. According to Tendulkar, "This is not a historical play. It is a 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. Although based on a historical legend, I have no intention of commentary on the morals, or lack of them, of the Peshwa, Nana Phadnavis or Ghashiram. The moral of the story, if there is any, may be looked for elsewhere. (Introduction, Ghashiram Kotwal)

Tendulkar's play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a multi-layered play based on history. But the main focus is not on history but on contemporary political scene. In an interview Manoj Bhise says, "In Ghashiram Kotwal, Tendulkar uses history but he does not merely record it. Much in the same way as T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* does. Though Eliot has scrupulously adhered to the historical details, his play is about the large topic – it is a deep searching study of Christian sainthood. In the same way, Tendulkar has used history to illuminate a much larger question of power politics." (Bhise,145)

The story is about a Brahmin, Ghashiram Sawaldas from North India, who comes to Poona in search of livelihood with his wife and daughter. Since he gets no dignified employment, he becomes a servant in courtesan Gulabi's house. In addition to the household work that he does for her, he also sings and dances when people come to enjoy her erotic songs and dance. Nana Phadnavis is presented in the play as a lusty person having several wives but he is not satisfied with them and comes to listen Gulabi's lavani (love song). One day when Nana visits Gulabi and while dancing hurts his ankle Ghashiram gives support of his back to him and this flattery of Ghashiram pleases Nana, and he rewards him with a necklace. It was the time when Peshwa's chief minister Nana Phadnavis ruled there. In Pune, Ghashiram suffers unexpected humiliations when he is wrongly accused of the thievery and is thus imprisoned. He cries out his innocence but nobody listens to him.

GHASHIRAM : I am a Brahman too.

SECOND SOLDIER : You a Brahman !

Where is your shaven head ?

Where is your holy thread ?

Where is your pious look ?

FIRST SOLDIER : Where is your holy book ?

Recite the hierarchy of caste !

Tell us, when did you last fast ?

SECOND SOLDIER : Looks like a thief !

FIRST SOLDIER : Looks like a scoundrel ! (373)

Thus, Ghashiram was arrested and insulted and Sutradhar here rightly tells about decay of policemen in his speech:

SUTRADHAR: If the police let you ! Friend, the thief is independent on the police. If not – they'll soften your bones. Sometimes they break your bones. Sometimes they crack your bones. Sometimes you lose your life. The thief earns what he thieves. It's easy income for the police. It's a partnership. The thief is a simple thief. The police are official thieves. If a thief wants to live To the police he's got to give.(376)

Criminalization of politics is one of the blazing topics of argument and analysis today, but the network between police, politicians and criminals is quite ancient. The play *Ghashiram Kotwal* highlights the deadly relationship between the police, politicians, prostitutes and criminals. S.G. Bhanegaonkar in his "Depiction of politics, power and prostitution in *Ghashiram Kotwal*" rightly states :

This play can be called as a condemnation of politicians, it is a challenging task carried out by 3p's in collaboration (Bhanegaonkar,2003)

The unexpected turn of events in Ghashiram's life crushes his very spirit. No doubt he was poor but he had a reputation in society which was now ruined. He tries to explain the mob that he was not a thief but a brahmin from Kanauj and new to Pune, but nobody listens to him. Thus he feels immensely humiliated and tormented. This humiliation generates a powerful feeling of revenge in him. Expressing his anger and revengeful feeling, he says :
GHASHIRAM : But I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona . I'll show my 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 a devil. You've made mean animal; I'll be a devil inside. I'll come back like a boar and I'll stay as a devil. I'll make pigs of all of you. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. (376)

He makes a plot of temptation in order to take revenge. Ghashiram knows that woman is the weakness of Nana, and thus Ghashiram uses his daughter Lalita Gauri as bait in this power politics game. When Nana sees Gauri in Ganesh temple, he gets attracted towards her and tries to seduce her in front of holy Ganapati statue. Nana is a lusty person and he dismisses the fear of Ganapati saying:
NANA : That idol of holiness ? That all holy Ganapati ? The maker of good? Look, he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything!

Nana becomes mad after Gauri and with reference to Lalita Gauri he says,

NANA: Our grandeur's gone if she's not had . (380)

Ghashiram dressed as a servant promises Nana to bring Gauri to him.

SERVANT : Whoever she is, if the order is given, this servant will bring her.

Now, Ghashiram barter his daughter for the kotwali of Pune. He makes a deal with Nana that Gauri will go to Nana only if Ghashiram is made the kotwal of Poona.

GHASHIRAM : All right, Sir, to shut people's mouths, make me the Kotwal of Poona. (383)

In the second act, Ghashiram is made the kotwal of Poona. Tendulkar illustrates how power makes a man lose his self-control and become barbarous through the behavior of Ghashiram after becoming the Kotwal of Poona. The moment Ghashiram gains power, he brims with pride and is enchanted in savagery and barbarousness:

GHASHIRAM : Now he's in my hands... Oh, my daughter... The beast.... Oh you people. Look ! I've given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf.... Look , look, but I will not quit. I'll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs. (381)

Ghashiram could clearly see that his daughter's life will be destroyed but his mad craving for power makes him continue his operations.

NANA: Suggest something else.

GHASHIRAM: This is the only way. Otherwise the lovely Gauri will not come to his place again.

NANA: No,! send her. I'll make you kotwal. When will you send her ?

GHASHIRAM: After I have the order, signed and sealed , in my hand. (384)

After becoming the kotwal, he started patrolling through the streets of Poona during the nights. People are supposed to stay at home at night and are not supposed to have extra marital relationships. 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.

SUTRADHAR: Ghashiram Kotwal says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a pimp, to commit a misdemeanor, to steal, to live with one's 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 prostitute herself, a Brahman may not sin, without a permit.(387)

Due to Ghashiram's strict rules the city of Poona began to tremble at his name. Ghashiram made official permit necessary for everyone and without it people were not allowed to go out of their house.

SUTRADHAR : Prostitute's Lane was desolate. The chasing of women was halted. Pimps turned into beggars. Counterfeit coins were worthless.(388)

Ghashiram turns arrogant and mishandles people and strives for strict rules.

SUTRADHAR: The nails of the Brahman's right hand are pulled out. The fingers are washed with lemon juice and soap. All the lines and signs of his hand are noted. His hands were wrapped in a bag and the bag is sealed. The ordeal is prepared. (395)

Once Ghashiram arrests a man who is in a hurry to fetch his midwife in the middle of night. Another instance shows, Ghashiram punishing a husband and wife of the suspicion of adultery. Next, Ghashiram suspects a real permit to be counterfeit one; a woman complains to Nana about this :

WOMAN : My husband and his brothers have been arrested by the 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... (393)

Thus people were fed up of the barbarous ways of Ghashiram but they were not able to lay hands on him as Nana's power was behind him.

SUTRADHAR: The way a wounded tiger becomes addicted to blood, so the Kotwal has come to love the smell. (407)

Once an innocent Brahmin was wrongly punished of theft. Ghashiram refusing to listen to the explanation make him to undergo the ordeal of holding a red hot iron ball in his hands. Poor Brahmin cried in pain and cursed Ghashiram.

BRAHMAN: 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. (397)

These words of the Brahmin proved to be true and forecasted the future decline of Ghashiram. Gauri died while her forced abortion in the hands of midwife and was buried at the order of Nana Phadnavis. At this news Ghashiram became a monster and reached to Nana for explanation. 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:

NANA: Ghashiya, how much more will you grieve? Now be calm. Whatever happened, protocol should not be forgotten. Don't forget whom do you stand before? First you must bow. Now – bow. (404)

This sudden twist of situation converts him into a wounded tiger. He turns Poona into a brutish city. His downfall begins with the capture of Brahmins as thieves when he finds them stealing mangoes from his garden. He orders to put all of them in the cell. The cell is so small that the Brahmins in the cell were unable to breathe properly. Thus because of suffocation when twenty Brahmins die and others begin to suffocate to death Sardar Phadke, the enemy of Ghashiram breaks open the door of the cell and brings out the dead Brahmins. Thus Brahmin rebelled against Kotwal and Nana obliges them and takes away the Kotwalship back from Ghashiram and angry mob punished Ghashiram.

SUTRADHAR: They beat him. They shaved his head. They sindur-daubed his head. They rode him around on a camel. They tied him to the leg of an elephant. The city of Poona watched it all. (414)

Thus, Ghashiram in his quest for power forgets morality and duties of a father. His rising to power is a major incident which changed his life. End of Ghashiram in the end of the play is a tragic episode. He accepts his moral decadence in these words.

GHASHIRAM: Hit me. Beat me. Beat me some more. Hit me! Why stay so far away? Come on, you cowards. Still scared? I spit on you. Beat me. Come on, beat me. Come on. Come on: Stone me, cowards, Pig shit! Come on and beat me. I dare you. Hit me. Look – one of my hands is tied. And you are scared! Come on, beat me. Crush me!... Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! 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. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull. Come on, come on. Look! I'm here. (415)

SUTRADHAR: No one should pity Ghashiram Kotwal because his unmarried daughter died when she was pregnant. (407)

Shailaja Wadikar observes, "The sadistic objective in his mind renders him blind and fails him as a father, as a kotwal and finally as a human being also. In his role as the kotwal of the city, he creates a hell not only for the Brahmans but for himself and for his daughter also. He fails to realize the treacherous ways of the culprit Nana and is reduced to a tool in Nana's power game." (Wadikar, 2003)

Thus after Ghashiram's death, Nana ordered three days festival. Through the death of Ghashiram and continuous reign of Nana, the playwright suggests that not all the evil doers are punished. Some are punished and some are left free like Nana. Corruption thus goes unquestioned and continues to flourish. Samik Bandhopadhyay rightly remarks, "In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, power is defined horizontally in terms of individuals against individuals from humiliation to eventual victimization". (Bandhopadhyay, 2004).

Thus Vijay Tendulkar has presented political and moral decadence in this play. Ghashiram's fate is a lesson to the readers against going to extremes for achieving unlimited power and authority. It is a demonstration of sorrow and sufferings of a person who tries to achieve power through wrong means.

The play is an ironical commentary on the socio-political setup of India. Shanta Gokhale calls it a “political comment about the creation, by political parties in power, of monsters for temporary gain, leading to iniquity, brutality and ultimate destruction” (Gokhale,1999). Play thus is a powerful satire on power politics which shows that Ghashiram’s may come and Ghashiram’s may go, but the real power lies within the dragons like Nana.

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