

## POWER AND SEXUALITY: VIJAY TENDULKAR'S GHASHIRAM KOTWAL

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**Received: 03 Aug 2018**

**Accepted: 14 Aug 2018**

**Published: 21 Aug 2018**

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### ABSTRACT

*“The mechanism of power operating within the society than with economic and political implications and sources of that power”*

*---Samik Bandyopadhyaya*

*The female role in the politics of power is limited only to surrender, acceptance and quiet suffering. The position of India women right from the very beginning has been in a very precarious condition. They are deprived of their rights in the parental property. They never had a say in any important matter and relegated to a second position after their males. In the male-dominated society, obedience and silence are their only weapons. If any woman dares to act, she becomes a threat to male chauvinism and is punished. Sexual misconduct is the worst crime that a woman can indulge in and the remedy lies in passing a death sentence on her. Ghashiram is a true story of the use and abuse of women. The wives of the Maratha Sardars bear a silent testimony to it. They are unimportant and second-grade creatures therefore, they are nameless. Gauri's mother belongs to the same rank. She has given birth to her daughter but exercises no right in her welfare. They all continue to suffer in silence.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sexuality, Foucault's Theory, Punish, Discipline*

### INTRODUCTION

Tendulkar feels Pro-foundly involved in the problems of contemporary society. He has never craved for outdated or impossible subjects. Expressing human existence and presenting a deep understanding of human psychology have been the obsession with him. A befitting example of it is his “Ghashiram Kotwal” (1972), a social and political play widely acclaimed for its content as well as its design/structure. It is a landmark in the history of Indian drama in English. Tendulkar has here taken the help of Indian history to expose the reality of contemporary time. A revenge tragedy in nature, it deals with power politics, ambition, and sexual hunger.

It is the issue of sexuality, emerging from the concept of power, which has added much interest and validity to the theory of the French philosopher. Foucault's theory begins with an examination of a wildly accepted concept of sexual experience and practice. Sexuality in the Victorian era had been a matter of profession. The general adequacy of ‘the repressive hypothesis’ is necessary for the understanding of the modern concept of sexuality and the relations between power and sex. Foucault poses a series of questions

Why has sexuality being so wildly discussed and what has been said about it? What were the effects of power generalized by what was said? What are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested by them? (qtd. in Michel Foucault Barry Smart 95)

As sex became related to the matter of domesticity for the exercise of power over bodies and pleasures, the spaces for women became narrower and narrower. According to Foucault, the form of power to which the body and sex are subjected is related to the 'mode of a specification of individual.' Pleasure and power reinforce one another. Foucault's thesis is related to the 'bourgeois' or 'aristocratic' family in respect of sexuality problematised and medicated. The new distribution of pleasure, discourses, truths, and powers had the purpose of self-affirmation of the 'bourgeois'. Gradually, from the eighteenth-century a series of developments was formed as an indispensable instrument for political control and economic regulations. Thus, it is the domain of sexuality which is presented in Foucault's work as one of the most important 'concrete arrangements' through which power has been exercised over life in modern Western societies. Again, it is the emergence of bio-power which is designated for the calculation and order of knowledge and power.

The continuity of power and subsequent atrocity is found to be bestowed from Nana to Ghashiram. The Kanauj-born Brahmin Ghasiram comes to Poona as an outsider, and having initially suffered tortured and humiliation from the Poona Brhamins; he is given by Nana the authority as a 'kotwal' and becomes an insider. This he acquires in a most ignominious way—by 'selling' his daughter to Nana. It has a tremendous psychological impact. Since he gains power in a very loathsome way, he goes on abusing it abundantly unless and until he is made powerless by Nana. Ghasiram's carrier has a circular structure from an outsider he becomes the powerful Kotwal and finally goes back to the status of an outsider again. The perceptible injustices in the play are related to class discrimination and subjugation of the weaker gender. Ghasiramr is abused in the First Act, he is the abuser in the next. Tendulkar questions the justification of such an administrative device which could only produce misuse and malpractices. Ghasiram may not be a debauch like Nana but he directly encourages such a vice selling his daughter to gain Nana's favor. This erosion of moral values leads to the subversion of filial bond into a means of aggrandizement of power.

But in the deal sex impinges, the deep-rooted nexus of sex, money, and power comes to the fore. The situation is explosive but the things keep moving. Nana on his part is fully capable. At the head of the central executive power, he procures a girl by granting power to Ghashi. While he spends the next few days in the enjoyment of the pleasure, his delegated authority unleashes a reign of terror.

The power in Ghashiram Kotwal is evident in religiosity, sexuality, and politics of deputation individually as well as in a lethal combination of all three. Power need not necessarily be confined to the state apparatus.

Through power, a new voice of protest is articulated. Foucault used the term 'strategies' for the various ways in which heterogeneous elements are in conflict with one another to constitute power-relations. One of the strategies in Ghasiram Kotwal is the protection offered by Nana to the kotwal and instead, to get his daughter as a gift. This is more grosser and therefore less intense than the strategic devices used in where the cultural-intellectual domination is achieved through more subtle ways. Here she has to suffer and raise and raise a fruitless cry, as he cries of Gauri to Nana, "God will see". In both the cases, we might say, after Foucault, that the dynamics of power are to position women to be marginalized. Gauri's appeal to God goes in vain. She has to end her life in the utter disaster. Benare's outcry at the end where she unmasks the twentieth-century cultured people also come into nothing but we can feel that she gains a new power and

injects it to other women as an embodiment of a prophetic soul. Her voice becomes the collective voice of all women. She can plan the seed of protest in supplying courage to the other women to ignore the fact that they are born to suffer. This spirit is praiseworthy.

In *Ghashiram Kotwal* the theme of power constitutes one of the major aspects of the play. Ghashiram comes to the city of Pune as an outsider. He is falsely accused of theft and mercilessly cornered by the Pune Brahmins. He swears revenge on the city. He uses Nana Phadnavis, the magistrate of the Peshwa, offering his young daughter Lalita Gauri. In return he is given the power of a kotwal and wasting no time Ghashiram almost pounces on his former tormentors, rendering them to the position of slaves to his power. In the name of eradicating immorality and lasciviousness, he himself indulges in the misuse of power. Ghashiram becomes a despotic ruler. Finally, his death sentence is signed by Nana as quickly as he was given the role of a Kotwal. The ending of the play is marked by violence and disturbance. Nana considers Ghashiram to be a threat to the city and thinks that his death will restore peace in the city. Hence his declaration:

Ladies and gentleman. Citizens of Poona. A threat to the great city of Poona has ben ended today. (The crowd cheers.) A disease has been controlled. (Act Two 415)

In the theatre world of Tendulkar words and visual components are properly assimilated to carry the dramatic import of the play. The theme of the exercise of power along with violence is communicated through two characters-in First Act through Nana and in the Second through Ghashiram. The play projects that the root of power is all-pervasive. In introducing the play, Samik Bandyopadhyay pertinently writes: "Tendulkar, in his social criticism, is more concerned with the mechanism of power-operating within society." (X)

In the play, power is defined horizontally in which an individual is placed against other individuals for acquiring dominance over him. It also dramatizes the form of humiliation, revenge, eventual victimization—all these are played out against a backdrop of political and moral decadence and degeneration, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power. The entire aura of hymns and religious ceremonies provide the ironic backcloth which is pierced through by the crudest exercise of power. All these are projected in course of the action of the play. Tendulkar creates a tremendous dramatic improvisation bringing into focus the victim and the victor. This is theatrically substantiated by him in making Nana approach Gauri with a lustful desire. Gauri is a commodity to him. It is so intensely dramatic and theatrical than a detailed exposition of the episode would establish the power-relation which is the underlying motif force of the play. Nana, the representative of the patriarchal power, appears to be the earthly representation of God. He is so bent on seduction that Gauri's warning of the presence of God seems to be futile.

NANA (voice of lust). Child, what do you want?

(She turns around, startled.)

All your dreams this Nana will fulfil.

(He puts a hand, on her shoulder. She pulls back.)

Oh, don't be shy. This is our house. This is a private hall. No

One will see. No one in Poona today has the audacity to watch the great Nana Phadnavis!

GIRL He will see.

NANA He will see. Who?

GIRL (pointing to Ganapati). He.

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 would not say anything! (Act One 378)

It is an instance of the devaluation of religious values done by a despotic ruler. Tendulkar shows that power has made Nana so blind that he even breaks the ethos of cultural and religious values in using the girl for his carnal satisfaction. The episode has a naturalistic impact upon the audience. It is psychologically much patent also—a culmination of Nana's desire to use Gauri as a sexual object.

This episode has a far-reaching consequence. It connects the Nana - Ghasiram conflict into a new chord. These two male characters revolve around a female one. Their 'power' is also perpetrated on her in one way or the other. Nana exercises his power on Gauri to fulfill his sexual desire.

The play epitomizes different aspects of power-relationship in which power is related to moral decadence and sexuality. It is not only through the singular projection of Nana that the evil aspect of power has been dramatized, but also through the entire society represented by the performers of bhajan or kirtan.

In the play, the Indian tradition as designed by Manu is upheld. In *Ghashiram Kotwal*, the Brahmins are shown as enjoying tremendous power and dominance in society. Since power and corruption are related issues, they indulge in material pleasures and sexuality. The red-light area Bavannakhani is a symbol of moral degradation. It means fifty-one rooms. It has an ironic juxtaposition with the birthplace of Lord Krishna. It shows how the sacredness of love is reduced into the vileness of debauchery and sexual promiscuity.

Tendulkar has presented him as an embodiment of brutality and lastfulness right from the start of the play. His physical infirmity is contrasted with his sensuous activity. Incidentally, he is to walk unsteadily—this heightens his decadence and importance; Tendulkar in naturalistic vein shows the sexual fantasy of this despotic ruler when he imagines Gauri as a target of his lustfulness.

Nana is given the attribute of a ruthless and lustful ruler right from the start of the play—a nocturnal expeditioner engaged in search of a new woman to satisfy his lust. The Nana-Gauri encounter is the dramatization of the fate of most of the Indian woman as marginalised subalterns whose choice or appeal is mercilessly rejected. Gauri is treated as a commodity in an explicit manner; the same treatment is shown to Benare. She is also a commodity before the patriarchy though only implicitly. So from Gauri to Benare, the suffering of the 'other' is perpetually very patent in Vijay Tendulkar's theatre. One of the basic tenets of the post-colonial writing—the unmasking of the brutal forces of power and authority—can be found adequately dramatized in both the plays.

Ghashiram Kotwal is a practical application of the theoretical proposition of Foucault's concept of power and Artaud's dicta of cruelty. Foucault proposes that power is hierarchical. So the tenure of rule passes from Nana to Ghashiram. It is revealed that both these despotic rulers are made of the same clay. Their only concern is the exercise of power through oppression—Nana's main motive is sexual gratification, whereas Ghashiram exercises his brutal force in retaliation. Both of them are guided by sadistic pleasure-principle. They create an atmosphere of the medieval world of darkness. All this is done in a most palpable way in this play. This is summed up by Foucault as 'relational character of power-relationship'. He further confirms to highlight this relational character and also the subsequent resistance:

Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversity, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. (The History of Sexuality 95)

The first encounter between Nana and Guri characteristically brings together religiosity, sexuality and 'deputationist politics' as an ironic comment on the play. This view has expressed by Angelie Multani in the essay "Off-Centre: The Displacement of women Characters in Ghashiram Kotwal and Tara" (Shubhramanyam 113). The plight of Gauri is bitterly commented upon by Nana when he tells her: "Look he has two wives. One on this side, one on that side. If you sit on our lap, he won't say anything!"(378). Gauri has to accept authority. Just as Nana loses his authority as a ruler, Ghashiram does the same as a father.

The conversation between Nana and the servant is highly significant as it reflects the ideology of ownership and commodification when Gauri flees away from Nana's clutch.

NANA [.....] we had it in our hands—then the prey fled.

SERVENT You'll get her back.

NANA How—after this!

SERVENT If the hunter is ready, the prey will be found.

NANA But not that one!

SERVENT Even she will be found; that everyone will be found. (379).

## CONCLUSIONS

It presents the power politics between Nana Phadnavis and Ghashiram—the former being hungry for sex and the latter, for power. From a common man, Chashiram becomes a beast in his search for power. The play is a glaring example of the saying that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". It succeeds in presenting political power and revenge at their worst. It shows that desire for power and the desire to revenge are so strong that one can go to the basest of things. This signifies the present political scenario so well!

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