

Theme of Violence and Power Politics in Vijay Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses the power through the clash of man versus man. The play depicts the present contemporary society and socio-political ideology. The play deals with the power of politics, violence and quest for identity. The paper reveals the brutality, treachery, sensuality, and immortality. The play deals the protagonist, Ghashiram, a Brahmin who seeks power and becomes the Kotwal of Pune, but is ultimately manipulated by the cunning Diwan. It is based on the life of Nana Phadnavis, who was one of the prominent ministers in the court of the Peswa of Pune. The plays represents the important characters, Ghashiram Savaldas, Nana Phadnavis, Lalita Gauriand Gulabi.

Key words: Religiosity, power, politics contemporary, society, hypocrisy, sex and Violence

INTRODUCTION

Ghashiram Kotwal is a Marathi play written by playwright Vijay Tendulkar in 1972 as a response to the rise of a local political party, in Maharashtra. Ghashiram Kotwal deals with the complexity of religion, power and sex though grotesque is successfully brought out. Ghashiram a Brahmin from Kanauj finds himself implicated in a false case of theft and slighted by Poona Brahmins. Before that he gets a rough treatment and bashing at the hands of Poona people. He finds the city in a disarray and people very unfriendly and hostile. Their ways were awry and the administration pigheaded and haywire. He still tries to somehow cope up but fails. His dreams in a golden city are dashed to the ground and as a bonus he gets damnation. A simple and innocent that he is from an alien culture and city he finds it too much and cannot compromise with the humiliation and insult heaped upon him. He swears to avenge himself on the city. The bottled up anger and humiliation finds a release in his vow to make Poona people pigs. Brahmin though he is, he rediscovers caste. He becomes a shudra, a criminal, a useless animal. He identifies himself with rest of them and now there would be no one to stop him, to mock him, to bend him or to cheat him. He has become a devil. He has undergone a transformation and taken a pledge but he has no means at present to enforce what he has just guaranteed to city of Poona.

He wants power and wants it desperately. What he has conceived can be executed only if he becomes powerful but where would he get it from? The solution lies not very far away. He has seen and understood the moral behaviour of Brahmins of Poona. In his first encounter he has got a feel of Nana's tastes and his tremendous power. He has been successful also to get his individual notice. "He had earned Nana's confidence by his faithful service during the critical times that followed the Peshwa Narayan Rao's murder. He enjoyed the full trust of Nana Phadnavis and his administration was notoriously worse than that of his predecessors. He was the man who had been appointed to watch the movements and plans of Raghunath Rao and his family and he reported to Nana whatever suited his purpose. He had under him a large body of unscrupulous spies, everyone possessing ample means of harassing people in consequence of whom the word Ghashiram has become a permanent synonym for oppression and tyranny. The rule of Ghashiram was cruel and tyrannical" (Sharma, Ashok Kumar 2007: 50)

He finds great hope in him and begins to serve in his royal palace after he is thrown out from Gulabi's place. He catches Nana at a time when he is in a most compromising position. A girl has slipped from his hand and his power and prestige is at stake. "Ghashiram is willing to save his honour provided some power flows from Nana to him. The play is a political satire, written as historical drama. It is based on the life of Nana Phadnavis (1741-1800), one of the prominent ministers in the court of the Peshwa of Pune. Its theme is how men in power give rise to ideologies to serve their purposes, and later destroy them when they become useless" (www.goodreads.com) .

Ghashi is made Kotwal almost in a blink of the eye and most carelessly. But the power that has just come on his head has disconcerting price tag attached to it. With one stroke the playwright displays the gaudy and tawdry colours of politics and power. The power is dissipated as a bye product of an alliance of opportunist forces. Ghashi gets power and Nana is able to save it slipping from his hands. He will save his grandeur. Wadikar commented “The Ghashirams of the world die, but the situations, which give birth to such forces, recur and are personified in the character of Nana. Beneath the superficial changes in history the larger dynamics of power are cyclic” (Wadikar 51).

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 culpable. 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 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. An astute and vilely politician Nana Phadnavis appoints Ghashi not only to get hold of his daughter but also to depute a man who will be his man and a checkmate to the conspirators of Poona city. He delegates some of his power and exercises his power through him. Ghashi is the most suitable choice in the given circumstances for Nana. Some Brahmins are up in arms against him and have been conspiring. Ghashi, if appointed, will surely work sincerely to prove himself and will suppress the agitators. Even if he wished to join the mutineers, he would not be able to do that, as he is an alien and will never be trusted even if he did. And secondly as Nana will be exercising his powers through him, the misdeeds will also fall on Ghashi; they will be credited to his account. “We do it; our Kotwal pays for it. The opportunity comes in the shape of Ghashiram.” (Tendulkar) He declares. This politics of deputation will hide Nana-the perpetuator from the eyes of the victim. The actual exercise of power will not show. If it is a good deal, Nana will certainly claim that.

The second instance of sexuality embedded in power is that it is identified with the majesty of the ruler. The visual incarnation of lechery-Nana is highly dejected and angry on his failure to grab the girl in the hall. He runs after her but like a deer she escapes the clutches of Nana just at the moment he was going to pounce upon her. His frustration is heightened when instead of the girl Ghashi comes in his embrace. Ghashi of course is scolded and kicked but it does not prevent Nana to confess ‘our grandeur is gone if she is not had.’ He further states that if she is found then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan! What a boom! Birds just blossoming-we will squeeze them like this.” (Tendulkar) This is despite the fact that Nana is far older in age in comparison to the girl and is already married six times and possesses a number of mistresses.

Somewhere along the line of stratagems of power, Nana needs Ghashi and Ghashi needs Nana. The point where they meet becomes the point of ad-hoc arrangement because for Nana it is a marriage of convenience. Ghashi will be in so long as he needs him. The day his purpose is solved he will become an unwelcome visitor. He will drop him as conveniently and as unceremoniously as he raised him. “The play shows that the desire for power and the desire to settle score with one’s opponents are so strong that one can touch the bottom in the realization of any of the two or both.” (Sharma,47)

The chanting of hymns and performance of religious ceremonies become a façade on the board of exercise of power. Their sanctity is assaulted and dishonoured pretty often in the play. Nana tries to lay her hand on young Gauri while in a religious congregation. He leers at her while others are devotedly listening to Haridasa in his sermon. After they have gone, he tries to seduce the girl and fails. “The sanctity of the prayer and the holiness of god collapses when Gauri tries to put him off, says, pointing towards Ganesh, he will see.”(Tendulkar) Nana immediately retorts ‘that idol of holiness. He has got two wives.

Ghashi’s transformation was from an average mediocre Brahmin to the Kotwal of the city and back again to an average Brahmin who succumbs to the machination of the powerful results in the loss of his identity. At the head of the central executive power Nana neglects his duties and forgets the role he has to play. He indulges in wooing the lusty women. The result is the suffering of the common people like Ghashiram. The commoners under the governance of lecherous persons like Nana are no better. They invariably toe the line of their master and neglect the welfare of their women. The Maratha sardars are so maddened with the power and the unbridled sex that they spend the whole night dancing with the luscious Gulabi at her brothel. They are even unmindful of their women inviting other men to bed. In the mad exercise of power the women are treated as mere object of entertainment. The Brahmins are disloyal to everybody. They seek refuge in the religion to cover their misdeeds. The double standards and hypocrisy of Brahmins is brought out when the Sutradhar with his incisive and oblique questions pushes them to the wall. They (Brahmins) reveal their true colours.

Bavannakhani, the frequented place is described as gardens of Muthura or Muthura descends on Bahavankhani. This is a sacrilegious juxtaposition which though offensive reveals the unholy connection between sex and the religion. The institutionalised sex, religiosity and politics of deputation serve as devices of power. Nana Phadnavis being a veteran and a seasoned politician ignores his earthly duties. They are none of his concern, as even without performing them he can like

modern politician stick to power. The result is that while he has a gala time, the common subjects suffer. Realizing a threat to his power he parts with a part of it.

Nana in his mad pursuit of base pleasures and is making the best use of his position misuses and abuses power. Drunk with power and desire for beautiful women, he ignores his duties and obligations. A good example of this is given in the play when a young woman comes to him complaining that her father in law had died and the Kotwal was not giving permission to cremate his body. It had begun to rot and the dogs had started nosing in. Nana at that time is busy throwing colours at women during Rang-panchmi and shoes her away. "Tendulkar's version is political satire, as it shines a glaring light on the harsh realities of the violence and power dynamics between people who enjoy positions of power, and the powerless, which in turn, are linked inextricably to their caste and social standing. More specifically, the play addresses the utterly depraved and decadent lifestyle the privileged classes had fallen into, and the consequent exploitation that would result to weaker members of society"(auctions.pundoles.com)

It is also through abuse and misuse of power in the play that we come to know that religion, which actually serves as a girdle for man preventing him from slipping into a den of vices, gives way. Nana shatters to pieces the belief, trust and fear of god by mocking His status and powers. So drunk is he with power that disregards the fear of god. It is for the exploit of power that Nana turns the Poona city into a playground of hedonistic people. For the possession of worldly power Ghashiram gives away his daughter ironically to set the immoral and decadent people of Poona right. Little does he realize that what he is doing to obtain power is as wrongful as the people whom he wants to straighten.

When Ghashi takes upon himself the task of setting the morals right, he puts his heart and soul into it. He becomes ruthless, bold and honest officer who makes the bawdy Poona dance to his tunes and see sense. He whips, sues, imprisons to a good effect but power turns his head. He indulges in excesses, harasses the innocent and goes to the extreme. He takes special delight in persecution. After his daughter's death he develops a strange penchant for human blood. The one reason for it is that Nana had bestowed upon him greater power to behead anybody anywhere who indulges in gossip about his Gauri. Nana has promised to act as a shield between the ire of the people and him. The result is that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Ghashi's excess has numbered his days. Not too much time elapses when he imprisons a few Brahmins on the charges of pilferage and heartlessly suffocates some of them to death. Nana's promise to provide him cover is only illusory. He withdraws his support for the fear of being drawn into the eye of the storm and loses his seat of power. Ghashiram is sacrificed conveniently at the altar of power.

CONCLUSION

The play highlights the power and violence in individuals and society. It is primarily deals with power politics and plight of women in a patriarchal society. The whole play is a story of the rise and fall. Ghashiram and the Brahmans as existing around us and within us and this is a significant aspect. The play enhances the abuses his power and falls from grace after opposing Nana Phadnavis, a powerful leading role. Finally the paper covers the power misuse, religious dishonesty, and women's subjugation. The play highlights the contemporary society, police administration and women's exploitation.

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