

CHAPTER 6

“A VIOLENT OPPRESSIVE
TRANSFORMATION OF POWER ”

— ‘GHASHIRAM KOTWAL’

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In the age of primitive man, when human beings were living in the forest, they need the violence for securing food or for protection of their own lives or their beloved one's lives. The basic instincts are gone mild outwardly due to the education and civilization process. But the basic instinct of violence and sexual urge remained as they were in the heart suppressed. Under certain unavoidable situations and pressures these two basic instincts of human being come out from the bottom of the heart violently. Naturally these two elements become the important constituents in power game.

Vijay Tendulkar makes a clever use of both the above constituents in his play ‘Ghashiram Kotwal’. The character of Ghashiram is portrayed as an embodiment of the instinct of violence. The other important character, Nana Phadnavis, processing power in his hands, is portrayed as an embodiment of libido of sexual urge.

‘Ghashiram Kotwal’ is a two-act play which consist powerful components of song, dance and music. Tendulkar uses the elements of the folk forms like Dashavatar, Khel, Tamasha, Kirtan and Bharud. In this play Tendulkar depicts the rise of a poor North Indian Brahmin, Ghashiram to the position of Kotwal of Poona and his death at the hands of mob. Tendulkar skillfully portrays the transformation of an oppressed person into a cruel oppressor. The playwright shows the negative influence of power by depicting the deterioration in Ghashiram’s character after coming to power. The first act portrays the journey of Ghashiram from being a servant of a prostitute to becoming the Kotwal of Poona. When Ghashiram has humiliated several times, he has decided to be a ruler. When Ghashiram knows about weakness of Nana, he blackmails Nana and urges him to make him the Kotwal of Poona. He uses his daughter in exchange of Kotwalship. Nana issues the order making Ghashiram the Kotwal of Poona. The second act depicts Ghashiram’s inhuman torture of innocent people under the intoxication of power and its resultant violent reaction by people in which he is stoned to death.

Tendulkar has used the human curtain for presenting different situations in the play in a very skilful manner. Tendulkar skillfully uses the

combination of the device of human curtain, music and actions of the characters produces a spectacular effect in this scene.

‘Ghashiram Kotwal’ is appreciated as Tendulkar’s “Best work today”.¹ Though it is based on history, the focus is on the contemporary political scene rather than history. It is set in the late eighteenth century history of Maharashtra when Balaji Janardan Bhanu (12 February 1742 – 13 March 1800) through heredity became chief administrator (Nana Phadnavis) after his father’s death when he was fourteen years old. He married nine women and had not any children. He participated in the conspiracy against Raghunath the Peshwa after the defeat in the third Panipat battle and sudden death of Madhavrao the Peshwa. He lost his power temporarily owing to his losing good will of the Peshwa. He regained it in 1778 and continued it till his death. He was known as the Marathi Machiavelli of the late eighteenth century.

‘Ghashiram Kotwal’ was first produced by the Progressive Dramatic Association of Poona under the guidance of Dr. Jabbar Patel and the assistance of Satish Alekar on 12th December 1972 in Poona. It was followed by eighteen more performances in Bombay and Poona. Five thousand people witnessed these performances. The play won several

awards at the Maharashtra State Drama Competition during 1972-73. The success was due to rigorous endeavour of the members of the Progressive Dramatic Association of Poona. The troupe did rehearsals from 9-30 p.m. till 2-30 a.m. rigorously every day for three months. Only young people were chosen for this since it demands a great deal of physical strain. The rehearsal divided in to five parts: (1) Learning to do every pace in the rhythm (2) Learning to sing in tune (3) Learning to sing a tune (4) Blending all these to set the pace for the production and (5) Doing the costumes. All these scrupulous planning and hard work paid rich dividends in the form of the great success of the play and also winning several awards.

But after nineteen performances, the Progressive Dramatic Association of Poona together with the president banned the play. They were afraid that there would be a violent reaction against the play as it had been criticized as 'Anti-Brahmin' play and also as a play of historical distortion on the role of Nana, a Marathi cult-hero. Then most of the members of the association quit the association and formed Theatre Academy on 27th March 1973. They revived the production of the play on 11th January 1974, and the play completed 300 shows successfully.

It is very true that the play was controversial but charges against the play was only due to misunderstanding. It is neither anti-Brahmin nor intended to distort history. Its sole focus is on the contemporary political scene. In an author's note Tendulkar says:

"This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in 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." ²

It is very sound and clear, after the long period of time passed to first performance of this play that, it depicts a power game. So many critiques have written about this aspect of the play. The form and techniques were unique and modern at that time, so many discussions and comments were made by scholars. There is no doubt about contemporariness of the play. Famous writer and scholar Girish Karnad explains the contemporary relevance of 'Ghashiram Kotwal' in an introduction to his three plays. In his own words:

"In his 'Ghashiram Kotwal', Tendulkar uses Dashavatar, a traditional semi-classical form, to investigate a contemporary political problem, the emergence of 'demons' in public. These

demons are initially created by political leaders for the purpose of their own power games but ultimately go out of control and threaten to destroy their own creators. It is a theme recurrent in Indian mythology. The demon made indestructible by the boon of gods and then turning on the gods themselves.³

Therefore unless we understand the power game in the play, we are likely to miss the theme and process of transformation of power. If we understand the power game and the process we totally disagree with what Veena Noble Das says. She says "The central weakness of the play is that Ghashiram has been provided with too explicit reason for his conversion from man to monster," but in our world no one provides reasons to become a monster. It is a necessity of a political person to work out ways to find power in an unconventional manner and then a man becomes monster, through back up of that politically ambitious person. It is a constant process and Tendulkar skillfully illustrated it in 'Ghashiram Kotwal'.

The play begins with the prayer to Lord Ganesha (God of Success), Saraswati (Goddess of Wisdom) and Laxmi (Goddess of Wealth). The actors praying to the deities exit and the Sutradhar asks them to stop the prayer song. He learns about the professions of Brahmans that make the human wall. Each one of them tries to sneak one after the other. He questions them where they are going. They try to avoid telling the truth but he cleverly traps

them into telling the truth. They curse him for it and go to Bavannakhani, the red light area. The beginning of the play juxtaposes the holy prayer and the unholy lust of the Brahmans and thus betrays the hypocrisy of the society. While Brahmans enjoy erotic pleasure at Bavannakhani, their wives are condemned to solitary confinement at home. This shows oppressive patriarchal culture of Hindu society. As Sudhir Kakar says: “No sex in marriage please, we are Indian”,⁴ which reflects the theme of Hindu culture. Men are allowed to get pleasure from courtesans or from other supply, because men has the power to rule, men has power to explore, and men are the pillar of the patriarchal society. The power transforms into action, it transforms in heredity.

Ghashiram Savaldas, a poor Brahman from Kanauj, comes with his wife and daughter to Poona for livelihood. He becomes a servant in famous courtesan, Gulabi's house. In addition to the housework that he does for her, he also accompanies her in her erotic songs and dances. Once, Nana Phadnavis visits Gulabi. He sprains his ankle during his dance. Then Ghashiram holds his hurt foot in his hands and says: “In my hands has fallen—grace! All here envy me my place. This is a gift to last me all my days. (Pg. 370)

His smooth talk clearly shows that he accepts the hierarchy of power. And through it, he tries to get power from Nana who feels flattered and pleased. So he offers him a necklace of pearls and leaves. This is the first encounter between Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis. It is obvious that one person who is near to the ground level always wants to please the people of superior level. With the praise to superior person, people get the power and way towards higher position. Here in this scene Tendulkar shows the reality in a dramatic way.

When Nana leaves the place, an interesting scene happens. Gulabi snatches the necklace from Ghashiram and sends him out with the help of her thugs. As we know Gulabi is a courtesan and knowingly oppressed by power of money and position. But, here at her place she has the power and she oppresses and insults Ghashiram. The 'power' transforms and hence, Ghashiram loses both his employment and necklace. He feels hurt and humiliated. Here we can see that Gulabi who once rescues Ghashiram persecutes him later. And Ghashiram who remains in the position of the victim feels helpless and powerless.

This is the first humiliation for him. He then goes out. He feels tired and hungry. When the Peshwa arranges a great feast in honour of Brahmans,

he also goes there. But the soldiers do not let him in. Meanwhile, a Brahman whose money given by the Peshwa, is stolen yells that some thief has stolen his money. The soldiers beat Ghashiram severely, mistaking him for the thief. He not only misses the feast and the alms but also receives blows and bad name as thief. This is the second humiliation he suffers. Then, Nana comes and says that the actual thief is gone. Brahmans go running after Nana who gives them coins. Though Nana says that he is not the thief, the soldiers put Ghashiram in prison on the charge of theft. After sometime, a soldier throws him out and says to him: "Get lost. Hey! Thief, monkey. If you so much as put a foot in the holy city of Poona, you'll lose your head. Go away. Take your ugly face far away. Don't come back to Poona. Not even your shadow should fall on the city of Poona. Get lost. Go..." (Pg. 376)

Here Dramatic composition takes place. The chorus, Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Marathi lovers and others look down upon Ghashiram who feels horribly hurt for damaging his reputation for no fault of his. This is the third oppressive situation he suffers. He becomes revengeful and angry. He cannot bear the humiliation with his poverty and hunger. In his fury, he says: "But I will come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. I'll 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 me an 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. Then I'll be Ghashiram again, the son of Savaldas once more. (Pg. 376-377)

Music was an integral part of the drama, and some directorial treatment was applied to 'Ghashiram Kotwal'. Indication of mental status of character was specifically choreographed according to rhythm by director.

Vijaya Mehta a great director of the prevailing era says:

"I didn't find any special or different thing in this play; I never felt that it was a humiliation of Brahmans, but the treatment by Jabbar is great and the play is a result of the entire artiste including Tendulkar and Bhaskar Chandavarkar the music director. In fact music was the great element to gain success of the 'Ghashiram Kotwal'." ⁵

For example, after a fury by Ghashiram drum beats forcefully and Ghashiram dances a war dance.

Now Ghashiram looks for the best way to get enough power to persecute the people of Poona. Next scene is about the Ganesha temple. Some people go to the temple of Ganesha. A Story teller tells a religious tale

through song and dance. Meanwhile Nana comes and people pay their reverence to him. They listen to the tale while Nana ogles the woman. At last, at the time of prayer to Ganesha gets all door closed. Nana puts his hand on that girl and lustfully says: "All your dreams this Nana will fulfill." (Pg. 378) She expresses her fear of being seen and steals away. He runs after her and in his lusty haste holds Ghashiram who is in the guise of a servant. Then he urges the servant to go and find her: "If she is not found, no one will keep his head! Our grandeur's gone if she's not had. We tell you. If she is found, then this Nine Court Nana will conquer Hindustan! What a bosom! Buds just blossoming....We'll squeeze them like this! (Pg. 380)

At that time people know that even the Peshwa obeys whatever Nana says. Nana is very powerful and the fear of Nana grows day by day. Ghashiram, in the guise of the servant gets angry at Nana's lecherous description of his daughter but suppresses it. He acts with humility and promises to secure the fled girl for him the following day. Here, Ghashiram exactly knows the weakness of Nana, and his oppressive mind is in the process of getting profit from that weakness. The next day, he brings the girl, none other but his own daughter, Gauri, and sends her to serve Nana Phadnavis. He seeks power through a tool that is his daughter. As he speaks:

“Now he is in my hands..... I’ve given my beloved daughter in the jaws of that wolf!” (Pg. 381) Ghashiram exactly knows what he is doing.

Ghashiram on the one hand, feels guilty about sacrificing his daughter and on the other hand, feels urges to avenge the immense humiliation on the people of Poona who brought him to this state. The words put into his mouth by Tendulkar are significant: “Now he is in my hands... Oh, my daughter.... The beast (then yells at audience) Oh you people. Look! I’ve given my beloved daughter into the jaws of that wolf! Look. Look at this father putting his heart’s child for sale. Look at my innocent daughter—a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at him, eating her like a peach.... Spit on me. Stone me. Look, Look, but I will not quit. I’ll make this Poona a kingdom of pigs” (Pg. 381) Now Ghashiram blackmails Nana and urges him to make him the Kotwal of Poona. Nana issues the order making Ghashiram the Kotwal of Poona.

Transformation of power always needs two elements, one who gives the power, the authority and second who seeks power. Both are essential for the transformation of power, so here Ghashiram needs Nana and Nana needs Ghashiram. Samik Bandyopadhyay appropriately remarks:



“Tendulkar suggests the sexuality implicit in power in the brilliant innuendo... Nana needs Ghashiram and Ghashiram needs Nana”⁶

That's why the Nanas Find Ghashirams and Ghashirams rescue Nanas. Here in this play Nana uses his power to get enjoyment of sex with the girl of his choice and Ghashiram uses his asset, his daughter to enjoy power. It is a give and take process and this is the way how power transforms. In this case, Sex, for Nana, is not only a source of enjoyment but also an effective way of displaying his ultimate power. While Ghashiram needs and official title, the Kotwalship, to be the Persecutor, in order to feel powerful and thus overcomes his powerlessness. Now, Ghashiram has the power to get revenge of his insults. He starts hunting people who had humiliated him and harasses them. Nana is happy about actions of Ghashiram because those people are also enemies of Nana Phadnavis. When Ghashiram leaves the place, Nana delivers a soliloquy: “Go, Ghashya, Go, old bastard. We made you. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don't know the way of this Nana. This time, there are two bullets in this gun. With the first one, we'll fell your luscious daughter. But with the second we'll make the city of Poona dance. Ghashya, child, you are a foreigner. I have put you on Poona's back. Why? As a counter check to all

those conspirators. You will not be able to join them; they will never trust you even if you do... What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do; our Kotwal pays. (Pg. 384-385)

Transformation of power itself is an ugly game. Even both receiver and philanthropist know the bitter truth they transform. It is a necessity of every human being. Authority always wanted to exercise its power safely and test the supremacy in society. People like Ghashiram always wanted power because they never tested it. They just observed the power outside of the system and a strong desire to get powerful is a basic desire of a human being. We can see its reflection in contemporary political scene in India. Samik Bandyopadhyay writes similar to this:

“Like ceremony, both religious and secular, the deceptions of deputation constitute yet another device of power. The real power uses the masks of deputation to mediate the exercise of power, to hide from victims the real face of power so that all resistance is effectively deflected. Intermediate democratic institutions, are the paraphernalia of bureaucracy, too often regarded as repositories of at least executive, are more often than not masks or mediations that veil the actual exercise of power and hide the perpetrator from the eyes of the victim.”⁷

Oswald Summerton, a transactional Analyst focuses on another point. He explains the role of Nana through 'Game Pantagone' he adds two more roles, the spectator and the stage manager, to the three roles of drama triangle.⁸ While the Peshwa remains spectator, Nana becomes the stage manager, and manages the power game. He implants Ghashiram as manger and becomes a spectator. As a result Ghashiram persecutes the people of Poona ruthlessly and finally ends up murdered by the People of Poona. That is the reason why Samik Bandyopadhyay expresses:

"In the shifting game of power, it is only a temporary adjustment that Nana exploits as long as necessary and can drop unceremoniously the moment it has served its purpose."⁹

Once upon a time who is oppressed now becomes oppressor. Ghashiram the oppressor feels that he is superior to his victims – the people of Poona, so he can't tolerate being victimized by the inferior people whom he calls pigs. The Brahmans of Poona once upon a time enjoyed courtesan like Gulabi are forcefully stopped by an order by Ghashiram with immediate effect. Everybody has to take permission of Ghashiram to do anything out of routine. The Sutradhar says: "'Ghashiram Kotwal' says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be pimp, to commit a misdemeanour, 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. (Pg. 387) then he adds that whosoever does wrong will be punished severely.

Ghashiram started patrolling alone the streets of Poona at night after eleven o'clock. He confronts anyone that he meets in the street. He whips the people. He arrests and imprisons them. The prisons are full. He harasses and punishes the people on mere suspicion. He arrests a man who goes out without a permit to fetch a midwife at midnight. He punishes a wife and her husband on the suspicion that they have committed adultery. He gets them tortured inhumanly when they do not confess. People try to complain about this to Nana but he does not listen to them. The dialogues are as follows which explain negligence of Nana towards these complaints.

Woman: Sir, listen to my complaint. 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.... (Pg. 393)

Nana: (As if his fun has been spoiled) Where are the guards? Take this woman away at once. Who let her in without a permit? Complaints and all that go to the Kotwal. Go. Don't let anyone in. (servants take the woman away. To the Lavani dancer) All right, go on, go on! O you are a sweetheart! Wah! Wah! (Pg. 393)

Nana enjoys erotic dance and pays deaf ear to the complaints of the people. Ghashiram goes on with his inhuman persecution of the people. He becomes more oppressive. Sutradhar narrates: "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 any way. (Pg. 392) It is an irony. In ideal context who has suffered from an oppressive behaviour in past must be a good and kind authority, if he gets power. But in reality anyone who gets power always forgets past and as an authority he becomes oppressive. This process of transformation is violent and we can call it violent transformation of power.

After this scene one scene is very significant, Tendulkar writes a replicated scene of what had happened with Ghashiram in the past. There is a tradition of the Peshwa to honour the scholars and Brahmans with gifts and a feast once in a year. Next scene is the gathering of the scholars and

Brahmans. People have gathered in the special garden again for that year. One of the Brahman yells that his money is stolen. Ghashiram becomes alert and arrests a Brahman on the charge of theft. He says to him: "You are born Brahman and you steal?" (Pg. 394) This dialogue shows us that Ghashiram still remembers his earlier days when he was accused and nobody considered his explanation. So, Ghashiram makes him undergo the torment of holding a red-hot iron ball in his hands. The poor Brahman groans in agony. He is frightened and forced by another ordeal to accept the allegation. Thus, Ghashiram avenges his insult on poor Brahman. Once oppressed person now becomes a true oppressor.

The state revenue has increased and crime rate has decreased but the city of Poona trembles at the name of Ghashiram. Ghashiram feels satisfied with his effective use of power. Now he thinks that he can use his power to get his daughter married to a suitable man. He says: "I have got Kotwali and I have got Poona straightened out. All these hard, proud Brahmans are as soft as cotton now. No one dares to look at Ghashiram straight in the eyes! Now, once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter—that piece of my heart named Lalita Gauri and get her married, then everything will be the way I want it. I'll make such a show of the wedding that no one's tongue will move to utter one bad word about my daughter. (Pg. 398)

Above mentioned dialogues depict that though he has become an oppressor, he has tender emotions in his heart. At the people of Poona, he is a cruel person but as a father he has softness. Here he wants a reputed husband for his daughter, shows that though he gets power he is still working in the frame of society and the marriage of his daughter is a way of exercising his power. Unless he is very powerful, no one will accept his daughter who sleeps with Nana Phadnavis. Gauri is an innocent soul, who becomes scapegoat of the power game. Nana enjoys sex with her and she becomes pregnant. So he employs a midwife to effect abortion and Gauri dies in the midwife's crude attempt of abortion. Nana does not wait any longer and he marries another teenage girl secretly and she becomes his seventh wife. Ghashiram hears this and his heart is broken. Ghashiram approaches furiously to Nana. Nana gets frightened internally but calmly and cunningly says: "Ghashya how much more will you grieve? Now be calm. Whatever happened, protocol should not be forgotten. Don't forget that. Whom do you stand before? First you must bow. Now—bow. (Pg. 404)

As if a circus tiger obeys his master, Ghashiram obeys Nana and bows but he is still angry. Nana praises his work as Kotwal. Then, he threatens him indirectly and reminds him that he is the Chief Minister. Ghashiram is still angry. Finally Nana quotes from Vedas and advices Ghashiram to forget

past. As he says: “The Vedas have said that. After all, Ghashya, will we live forever? (Sighs) We too, every one of us, will leave. Ghashya... This body is earth, just dirt. You cannot rely upon it. What comes, goes. Four handfuls of ash remain. (Pg. 405)

Thus, Nana uses religious ideology to justify the hierarchy of power and the unjust oppression and exploitation. Ghashiram is still in trauma of his beloved daughter's death. Nana describes the Indian philosophy in detail and advises Ghashiram, to use his power to shut the mouths of the people trying to talk about his daughter badly. Ghashiram in his speech explains that Nana has agreed to give full authority to him. Nana allows Ghashiram to cut off heads of people who dare to gossip about the Kotwal.

Additional power mesmerizes Ghashiram and due to the impact of power transformation, he seems to be convinced now. He accepts his beloved daughter's death and settles for continuing to exercise power. Here Nana, the authority, cleverly manages the power play and settles down Ghashiram. Ghashiram in his internal thought process somehow knows his position. He internally realizes that though he is powerful to city of Poona, he is powerless in front of Nana. He can't accept his position in the hierarchy of power. This feeling of powerlessness haunts him and he starts

murdering people. He tortures people on the slightest reason, or suspicion. Hence, he looses reasons to justify his cruel acts. People of the town are murmuring that “The Kotwal has acquired a penchant for human blood” (Pg. 407) People of Poona are greatly terrified. The prisons are overcrowded and some of the victims die due to suffocation.

In the next scene we see that there are twenty two Brahmans died of suffocation and no one is there to help them. When guards of the jail are in deep sleep and unconscious due to consumption of opium, Sardar Phadake grabs the chance to settle the score with Ghashiram as he is his strong enemy. Sardar Phadake gets doors open and takes the dead bodies to the Peshwa and demands justice. Peshwa becomes angry and sends a call for Nana but Nana is busy. The Brahmans of Poona can't wait so mob goes to Nana's place. Nana understands the psychology of mob and issues the order for the death of Ghashiram without any hesitation. Nana tells mob to do whatever they want to do with Ghashiram. As he says: “Use a thorn to take out a thorn. That's great. The disease has stopped. Anyway, he was no use anymore.” (Pg. 413)

Cruelty and moral corruption are the two characteristics which differentiate politics from other professions, and these were not the features

of the Peshwa regime alone, but a universal phenomenon. The above mentioned scene depicts that the politicians have tremendous potentiality for doing the impossible. It shows the authority's ability for cruelty and manipulations. Hence Nana orders the mob to do whatever they want to do.

Angry mob surrounds Ghashiram. They beat him, shave his head, paint saffron on it, ride him on camel, tie him to the leg of an elephant and finally tie his hands behind his back. Ghashiram overcome by remorse says to them: "I danced on your chests but I wasted the life of my little daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull... (Pg. 415)

People shout around him. He succumbs to the injuries and dies. Nana, stage-manager in the Game Pentagon of Power, comes and addresses the people. Here, Tendulkar puts words in epilogue of Nana very precisely. Nana says: "Ladies and gentlemen. Citizens of Poona. A threat to the great city of Poona has been ended today. (The crowd cheers) A disease has been controlled. The demon Ghashya Kotwal, who plagued all of us, has met his death. Everything has happened according to the wishes of the gods. The mercy of gods is with us always." (Pg. 415) It clearly shows us the tremendous potentiality of politicians to do impossible things. They

(politicians) can make a deal with anybody, even with Gods. Nana Phadnavis is prepared to bribe even Gods for cooling down mob's anger. He says: "Do a special pooja. Pray to the Gods. Make a deal with the Gods. Promise them anything." (Pg. 412) This remark shows the politician's capability for cruelty and manipulations.

Nana bans the funeral rights for Ghashiram and orders to banish Ghashiram's all relatives. People shout and cheer. Now Gulabi comes dancing. All people dance together happily and Nana joins them. Nanas and Ghashirams will be there in every society as long as power politics exist and hence a society itself has hierarchy of power and alienation power politics remains infinite. So Ghashiram and Nana exist forever. The people of Poona think that Ghashiram is dead. But Ghashiram is dead only as a person while his role is very much alive and somebody will play the same role. Name of Kotwal changes from time to time but position and characteristic remain the same in the game of violent oppressive transformation. That's why Tendulkar says:

"Broadly speaking, I had in mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of the Ghashirams; also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow; and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams" ¹⁰

The transformation process is very interesting. Role played by Nanas, role played by Ghashirams, and role played by the people are alive forever. The people, the victim, they give away their power by accepting the hierarchy of power and by obeying the authorities. Tendulkar mentioned in his interview that he felt the need to treat the people as a single character. That is the reason why Tendulkar searched for a theatrical form that suited this play named 'Ghashiram Kotwal' as he says:

"The urgency was of finding a form in which a class or a multitude could become the central character." (He adds that "The present title "'Ghashiram Kotwal' represents the incident of 'Ghashiram Kotwal' and not the character of 'Ghashiram Kotwal'.) De-glamorization of historical incidents accidentally happened because of the form and I liked it. I meant it. ¹¹

The victim has to surrender in front of power because other people never support him. This is because of two situations, one they are also afraid to rebel and second they want to watch and enjoy sensational experience of oppression. So, people are prevented by themselves to realize their hidden power. M. Sarat Babu quotes:

"The people perhaps play underdog power games." ¹²

Ghashiram is a typical tormenter while Nana is the stage manager, the Peshwa is the spectator and the people are the victims. Like Nana, Gulabi rescues Ghashiram in the beginning and oppresses him later. When Ghashiram tries to own the necklace granted by Nana for his sycophantic poetry, Gulabi snatches the necklace from him and throws him out with the help of thugs. So Ghashiram loses the job. Nana manages the entire show. Ghashiram becomes a pawn in his power game. Ghashiram persecutes Nana's enemies without knowing it and acquires a bad name. Thus, not only his daughter but also his Kotwali is used cleverly by Nana. That is why Samik Bandyopadhyay points out,

“The real power uses the mask of deputation to mediate the exercise of power, to hide from the victims the real face of power, so that all resistance is effectively deflected.” It is Nana who exercised the power through Ghashiram to subdue his enemies but it is Ghashiram who received the wrath of the people. This throws light rather on the contemporary political scene than on the past history of Poona.”¹³

Women characters remain invisible except Gulabi and they are silent in the play. This sets the aura of patriarchal power. Ghashiram who is the victim of oppression fails to understand the powerlessness of women. He has no consideration for them. His love for his daughter is smaller than power

ambition and it seems like possessive inclination. He surrenders her to the lust of Nana for power. He does not consult his wife in this regard. He suspects a housewife and her husband to be adulterous and arrests them. His passion to overcome his powerlessness makes him mindless and loveless. He shows kindness to anyone and as a result he loses his humanity and logical reasons for justification. So he oppresses people like a power maniac. So, he fails to perceive the cunning moves of Nana as he proud of his cleverness as a Kotwal. Nana exercises power in sexual exploitation and Ghashiram exercises power for the aggressive revenge.

Tendulkar, in his social criticism, is more concerned with the mechanism of power operating within society than with the economic and political implications and sources of that power. Tendulkar, in 'Ghashiram Kotwal' observes the operations of religiosity, sexuality, deputation and politics as devices of power. In Modern India the political leaders in order to get their aims fulfilled depute on the top position their so called near ones. As long as their aims are served, the officials enjoy the life with all its charms but as soon as the aims are fulfilled, the officials become useless and even danger to the political leaders so they do not hesitate even to eliminate them from life. The politicians are even worse than the underworld dons. The tradition of "Use and Throw" has become synonymous with political

leaders and Tendulkar tries to focus on this scenario through the plight of Ghashiram.

N. S. Dharan states in the following words:

“The inescapable reality is that as long as politics remains a power game Phadnavis, Ghashirams, and Lalita Gauris are bound to emerge. Not only in India but also the world over, we witness, Ghashiram being played on real political theatres. This universal political reality in fact accounts for the abiding popularity of the play”.¹⁴

It is a well known truth that how ‘Shivsena’ arose in this scenario. Balasaheb Thackeray was emerging as a strong violent leader of Maharashtra. In his interview Tendulkar says about the whole incident. He had gone through a novel on Ghashiram by Moroba Kanhoba in the past and had correlated it with the rise of ‘Shivsena’.

As he says:

“I have read ‘Ghashiram’ written by Moroba Kanhoba few years back. When I seen the violence created by Shivsena at Mumbai. I was very close to that incidents and chaos created all around Mumbai. I have worked with Balasaheb Thackeray in a news paper while I was journalist and he was a cartoonist. The riots show me the true transformation process of to be demon

from an innocent and kind person. After some months I am able to watch a folk theatre performance in a slum area of Mumbai and I got the form suitable for the play. The process of creating 'Ghashiram Kotwal' is a lengthy one but I must have to mention that three major points are most important to generate the play within me are, one was the riots, Second was the story and third was the form." ¹⁵

We can analyze Tendulkar with help of all of his writing and it is sound and clear that he is interested in shaking the bases of conventional system. He is more concern about social and political scenario. In other words we find his plays having strong socio-political concern. Rise of Shivsena is a result of power politics of the prevailing situation. We can understand the process of Tendulkar's writing of "Ghashiram Kotwal" through definition of power politics, ethics and the incidents of Indian Politics.

Definition of Power politics is,

"On the level of international politics, power can take many forms from moral suasion to the carrot of economic benefits to the stick of sanctions or military force." ¹⁶

"Power politics" is one of the most equivocal terms in the lexicon of international affairs. In common usage it often is value-laden, usually in a

negative sense. It implies using coercion – force or threats of force – to impose one’s will upon others. Thus one can define power politics both as a term commonly used in political rhetoric and a theoretical description of how states interact in pursuit of their interests in the international arena. In American English it usually means politics based primarily on coercion rather than on cooperation, whether that coercion is military or economic.”So, those who are attached with the government or the rulers know or learn the game of power of politics in order to be on the throne. Even the people never raise their voice if their interests are served and the world goes on. Consciously or unconsciously the people also become the part of power politics.

Longman dictionary of contemporary English defines “politics” as the art or science of government and “power politics” as the system of gaining an advantage for one’s country in international politics by the use or show of armed force instead of by peaceful argument. To indulge in politics is inborn instinct of man. And as the Hindu scriptures “Mahabharata” and “Ramayana” also display the game of shrewd power politics. In “Ramayana” Kaikaiyi and Manthara symbolize the game of power politics. In Mahabharata, Duryodhan and Shakuni with their shrewd mind immortalize the word power politics. And even lord Krishna had to play power politics in

order to defeat “Adharma”. So power politics is associated with the race of man.

Vijay Tendulkar as a true theatre person wanted to make a strong political statement through this play. As Smita Mishra says:

“It is a dramatic exposure of the latent violence, treachery, sexuality and immorality and it characterizes politics. ‘Ghashiram Kotwal’, the play shows a man who, caught in the matrix of opportunistic ethics of modern world, feels alienated. It shows how a common man, seeking power, confronts the people who were already in power and undergoes an organic change.”¹⁷

The period from 1761 to 1818 was critical for the Maratha Empire. But in such a critical period one brain shines and when it fades the Maratha Empire starts declining. And the name of that man is Nana Phadnavis. His whole life is like an interesting novel. ‘Nana Phadnavis’, Balaji Janardan Bhanu (12 February 1742–13 March 1800) became Phadnavis (Administrator) at the age of fourteen by hereditary right at the death of his father. He did not have any experience of war nor physical strong body. But, yes in the game of intellect he used to defeat everyone. His intellectual capacity can be compared with Chanakya. Through shrewd strategies he was able to defeat Britishers.

In the reign of Madhavrao two young men came on the surface. They were – Mahadaji Shinde and Nana Phadnavis. Nana was a true patriot as per Maratha history. Madhavrao, Peshwa died in 1772 and a period of struggle started for Nana. Madhavrao's brother Narayanarao became the Peshwa but Raghunath killed him by treachery and became the Peshwa. Nana's devotion towards Peshwa made him restless and he fought with Raghunath and made Narayanarao son Savaii Madhavrao the Peshwa. In his life career Nana Phadnavis Fought & defeated the Britishers, Defeated Haider Ali, Controlled selfish landlords & Maratha officials, Fought with Tipu Sultan, The war between Britishers & Marathas and treaty at Salbai. He achieved Great victory in making Savaii Madhavrao as the new Peshwa and that too without shedding a single drop of blood through his sharp intellect, political strategy and statesmanship. He was a shrewd statesman and he retained his power till his death. He had nine wives and no children. Nana was a cult hero, who was worshipped as hero by Marathas. His flaws were ignored by the people, being blind to their hero's treachery; they were only too ready to stone to death their Kotwal when their Phadnavis asked them to do so. However, it was this aspect of Phadnavis' character that Tendulkar chose to highlight. He even made Ghashiram, the Kotwal of Poona in exchange of his daughter.

According to history, Ghashiram was a North Indian Brahmin, a resident of Aurangabad, who was appointed as the police prefect of Poona on 8th Feb, 1777 and continued to hold office till his death which took place on 31st August 1791 under violent circumstances. He had earned Nana's confidence by his faithful service during the critical times that followed the Peshwa Narayanrao'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 Raghunathrao 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 innocent people and as a consequence the word 'Ghashiram' has become a permanent synonym for oppression and tyranny.

Ghashiram's carving for power may be compared with Dr. Faustus' carving of power. In order to conquer the world, just as Dr. Faustus sells his soul to the devil Mephistopheles, here also Ghashiram sells his soul – his own daughter Gauri to enjoy the power. Ghashiram rightly deserves our pity for the punishment is greater than he deserved. There is a tragic sense of waste illustrated by the death of Ghashiram. Tendulkar has presented a very striking picture of a tragic figure like Ghashiram. Ghashiram Savaldas

belongs not only to the late eighteenth century Peshwa Empire, but also to all phases of human history. His rise and growth from a Savaldas to the most controversial Kotwal of Poona is symbolic of the multifaceted growth of corruption in our society. Through the shrewd and opportunistic character of Ghashiram, Tendulkar has tried to bring out the truth that sycophancy not only flourishes but also prospers under the patronage of the rulers.

As Shanta Gokhale writes:

“Tendulkar wanted to make a serious political statement in ‘Ghashiram Kotwal’. That was why he wrote the play, not to vent his spleen against Brahmins, as many Brahmins thought, nor to desecrate the sanctity of the stage with lurid depiction of lasciviousness, nor rake in money by entertaining audiences with song and dance and a scandalous legend about a historical figure. Its reception by many as a brilliantly mounted entertaining spectacle upset the liberal social moralist. This, more than anything else, links Tendulkar with most significant of his predecessors on the Marathi stage – playwrights who wanted to force their society to look at and judge itself in all its aspects, socio, political, moral and personal.”¹⁸

In depicting the rise and growth of Ghashiram in our society, Tendulkar seems to have suggested that the purpose of the drama is not to produce catharsis i.e. “Peace of mind; all passion spent” but to encourage,

stimulate and provoke the audience\reader to think over the issues affecting the normal and balanced growth of human society. By showing the fatal end of Ghashiram in the play, Tendulkar does not want to suggest that Ghashiram has ended forever. He rather wants to draw our attention to the socio-political factors responsible for the growth of such a crisis in our society. There are certain questions that keep haunting our minds. What led to the emergence of Ghashiram? Who is responsible for the rise and growth of Ghashiram? And what are the fatal consequences arising out of the creation of Ghashiram? The contemporary relevance of the play lies in the answer to these questions, and here Tendulkar stands firmly as a class by himself.

Tendulkar throughout the play has used female sexuality to represent the loss and destruction caused by the struggle for power. The corruption that power brings about is projected through the sexual laxity of the Brahmin dominated society of Poona. The play was attacked by those who perceived the play as an attack on the character of Nana Phadnavis, the finest administrator and one of the greatest patriots of the Maratha Empire. Tendulkar responded to this criticism by pointing out that 'Ghashiram Kotwal' was not meant to be a historically accurate account of Nana or Ghashiram's character or the rule over Poona. The most important thing is

that he has examined the very modern issue of the relationship between power and gender in a patriarchal society in a historical setting with historically recognizable characters. Tendulkar has underlined both the dark ambiguity of the cardboard figures of power which the male dominated society holds in high esteem and the dangers of this struggle for power in which gender has always played an important part. Meaning of gender in patriarchy is not just "difference" but division, oppression, inequity and inferiority for women and thus for all those without access to power. Tendulkar in 'Ghashiram Kotwal' suggests that the social construction of gender is effectively a useful tool in the hands of the powerful and will lead inevitably to the dehumanizing of both the powerful and the powerless alike, the Nanās and the Ghashirams as much as the Gauris, and also brought the destruction of meaningful human relationships and social and moral values.

Antonin Artaud in a letter says:

" It seems to me creation , Life itself can only be defined by a kind of strictness, the fundamental cruelty guiding things towards their inexorable goal , whatever the cost ." ¹⁹

Artaud 's philosophy of the theatre rests on the perception of cruelty at the heart of nature and man Human nature has a taste for crime, Sexuality and savageness. He feels that a play must disturb our peace of mind and

release our repressed subconsciousness. He maintains that theatre should provide the spectator with the true essence of dreams in which his fondness for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his neurotic fantasies, his utopian sense of life and things and even his cannibalism gush forth not on a theoretical and illusory level but on an inner plane.

Same as Artaud, Tendulkar also believes that the theatre has to disturb our peace and our pent-up emotions. His plays not only disturb us but even shock us. His plays are documents on the inborn cruelty of man. 'Ghashiram Kotwal' is a landmark in Indian theatre. The play focuses on the corruption, cruelty and inhuman strategies embedded in the power and revenge and hands him over to the Brahmans of Poona who stone him to death. Ghashiram makes his daughter a victim in the game of power. Nana dares to corrupt even Gods.

Tendulkar uses Marathi history for his play 'Ghashiram Kotwal'. Nana is portrayed as a lecher with an overpowering weakness for women. The play has been attacked for showing Nana Phadnavis, a cult hero, in an unsavoury light. But the play is not really about Nana. It is about a deputy who "no longer owes his position so much to solid popular or military

backing as to the diplomatic address with which he can play one party off against another.”²⁰ In an interview to Makarand Sathe Tendulkar says:

“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.”²¹

The play exposes the failure of human relations owing to man’s inherent cruelty to his fellow man. There is an innate urge for cruelty in man whether he is a ruler or subject.

Dhyaneshwar Nadkarni also finds contemporary elements in Tendulkar’s ‘Ghashiram Kotwal’. He defines transformation of power in terms of political roots in independent India. As he says about the play:

“Its theme is a searching comment on the power politics of the type of oligarchy which we see increasingly taking root in Maharashtra’s politics. Tendulkar achieves this without deviation from the artistic propriety of his characters or situation: but it is foolish to imagine that we are witnessing a good old historical with nothing pertinent to our times.”²²

The play is carved in the Peshwa period of Marathi history. But it exposes the cruelty of the decadent rules of all times.

Regarding the other aspects of the plays, the song, dance, music, thought and emotion, though they look physically separate, are organically related with the theme of the play. The treatment of human curtain in this play is a new experiment. The play is not divided into acts and scenes. Episode divisions are made cleverly by using the human curtain. The human curtain is used so intelligently as to avoid acts and scenes by the author. This can be illustrated through the speech of Ghashiram: "I'll straighten out this adulterous city in six months! (Suddenly) What's that noise? Again! Again! What are they doing in their homes at this hour of the night? (Knocks on the back of the seventh Brahman as if he were a door.) Open the door! (That man turns around and 'comes out' rubbing his eyes.)" (Pg. 390) Thus the human curtain is unified with the play.

When Ghashiram is tormented by the soldiers on the charge of theft, he denies it emotionally. Here, the 'Mrudanga' gives a forceful beat. Ghashiram dances to that beat, a war dance, banging his fist in the dust. He storms out through the audience. This gives a momentum to the force of emotion without using words. The theatrical devices-song, dance, music, thought and emotion-are unified to bring out the desired effect. The human curtain is cleverly used to avoid the interrupting division of scenes and acts.

The basic elements of transforming power are sex and violence; these two elements are basic motive to a violent act. It is a well known truth of mankind from the beginning of the primitive age. In 'Ghashiram Kotwal' the dramatist has succeeded in representing violence and sex, the basic instincts of human beings through Ghashiram and Nana. The basic instincts must have an outlet. They cannot be suppressed and when they are suppressed, they will burst out and disturb the peace of the society. Thus, the dramatist presents both violence and sex simultaneously in the play. Ghashiram's suppressed violence erupts and upsets his balance of mind whereas Nana does not lose his balance of mind as his sexual urge is never suppressed and is able to exercise power over Ghashiram.

The form of the play is always in discussion amongst theatre practitioners. Some critic says that the musical form blunts the edge of satire in the play. Point made by critiques is the musical does to a certain extent weaken the thrust of satire, and the sting is dulled. Tendulkar himself admitted while talking to Samik Bandyopadhyay:

"The criticism has point. Even then the sting was felt in Maharashtra. The Delhi production (done by Abhiyan in Hindi) had a somewhat different impact. It has less "entertainment values." i.e., less music, and more impact as a serious play. The

musical form has its advantages and disadvantages, like all forms. I could not think of an alternative when I had to write the play. The form had certain inevitability.”²³

Tendulkar uses elements of different traditional folk forms of Maharashtra. Most of the critiques say that there are more influence of “Tamasha” on ‘Ghashiram Kotwal’ but as Tendulkar says he was not precisely thinking about any specific forms while writing the play. It is definitely accepted by him that a couple of forms spinning in his mind for long time. We can also find elements of “Dashavatar” and “Bharud” in the play. Music was very impactful and so many theatre artistes acclaim it. The rich musical quality of the play makes musicians like Vasantryao Deshpande call the play “ The first ‘Sangeet Natak’ in the real sense of term”²⁴ even music is used to express changing moods and detailed characterization of characters. Thought process and physical gesture and postures are also synchronized with the rhythm of table. The songs sometimes provide dramatic relief in between tense situation and sometimes they serve to reinforce the tense atmosphere. The juxtaposition of the ‘Lavani’ and ‘Abhanga’ used to bring out the contradiction in social values and norms. It is an interesting thing that the ‘Abhanga’ which contains ‘Bhakti Rasa’ transforms in to ‘Lavani’ which is an expression of ‘Shringaar rasa’ it is

enormously proper to pronounce that “‘Ghashiram Kotwal’” is a play performed through transformation of music, transformation of rhythm, and transformation of human wall- physically and psychologically.

In short, power transformation is constant, violence is constant and through a violent oppressive transformation process we can find Ghashirams infinitely in our society and civilization exist. And this scenario gave us a tremendous, mind blowing play, ‘Ghashiram Kotwal’ – a violent oppressive transformation of power, Written by Vijay Tendulkar.

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