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**STUDY OF POWER POLITICS CAUSING CORRUPTION AND  
DEGRADATION AT SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND MORAL LEVEL IN  
TENDULKAR'S *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL***

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**Abstract:**

*Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal (1973) is a one of his masterpieces. It basically deals with the History of Maratha Empire. The play reflects the crisis to gain power. It also touches religion, caste, power politics, sexuality, oppression, exploitation, violence, etc. This play unveils shrewd and cunning politicians blinded by personal desires.*

**Keywords:** *Power Politics, Sexuality, Oppression, Exploitation, Violence, etc.*

*Ghashiram Kotwal (1973) is a masterpiece produced by Vijay Tendulkar. The play basically deals with History of Maratha Empire. Though, on the surface level, the play reflects crisis caused by the greed of power, beneath the surface, we come across the different issues like religion, caste, sexuality, oppression, exploitation and violence. The playwright has cleverly touched the dark sheds of the life of Nana Phadnavis, Maratha Empire. Nana Phadnavis is presented as an able administrator as well as a shrewd and very cunning politician.*

Sex plays a vital role in the development of the different stories in the play. It causes a huge loss at physical, emotional and psychological level in the lives of the major characters. It also results in the degradation at social, spiritual and moral levels. The playwright has shown the Poona Brahmins as hypocrite, clever schemer and morally corrupts.

*Ghashiram Kotwal* is set in Poona city. The playwright has used history to focus the clash between power and violence, the connection between power and corruption, and harassment that leads to the mockery. Tendulkar has deliberately and beautifully analyzed how powerful people's power and privileges lead them towards their doom. Nana Phadnavis, the representative of the Peshwa in Poona, appoints Ghashiram as the Kotwal of the city. This appointment is not based on quality and credibility of Ghashiram. Actually, it helps Nana to get his young and beautiful daughter, Lalita Gauri. Nana frequently humiliates Ghashiram by reminding him of his low-grade position. Nana forces Ghashiram to keep quiet about the death of his pregnant daughter. Eventually, Nana, by using his power orders the Brahmins to kill Ghashiram. Sutradhar is presented as the connecting link in the play.

SUTRADHAR: The Brahmans won't listen

NANA: What do they want? What do they want?

Sutradhar: An order to behead Ghashiram Kotwal.

Nana: Oh, shit, is that all? Bring my pen, you idiot. Bring paper.

Take this. Take it. Give it to them. Tell them to be happy. Tell them to humiliate him all they want. Run! (Tendulkar, GK, 58)



Nana Phadnavis wants to be powerful enough to bother people in the society. Nana is shown wicked, cunning and cruel. When Nana sees the people in the society going to temple for praying, he falls in love with young and beautiful girls in the queues. He tires his different tactics to tempt them. He promises them to satisfy all their dreams and ambitions. He says:

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! (Tendulkar, *GK*, 22)

Nana has occupied the highest power in Pune. But the material aspirations make him totally corrupt. He never bothered even by the highest authority, the God. It reflects Nana's rude and whimsical behaviour. He tries to justify his behavior saying that even the lord Ganesha has two wives. His reason and rationale seem to have been eclipsed by his sexual lust. When a girl escapes from the clutches of Nana, he commands his servants to fetch her at any cost. He says:

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! (Tendulkar, *GK*, 24)

All people in the city have to obey the powerful Nana. Even the Peshwas were not spared. Ghashiram uses his own daughter as a means of gaining the title and power. Nana admires Lalita Gauri and keeps sexual relationship with her. Ghashiram is also embarrassed towards his heinous guilt and his own daughter:

Now he is 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 at this father. Putting the child of his heart up for a sale. Look at my innocent daughter – a whore. That old overripe bastard! Look at his, 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 (Tendulkar, *GK*, 26).

Vinita Bhatnagar says on his worries about his daughter:

Gauri has few lines in the play and certainly none that hint at her own perception of her experience. But Ghashiram's guilt is voiced at various parts of the dramatic text. Thus even in the triumphant celebration of his power, Ghashiram worries over the fate of his daughter (Bhatnagar, 150).

Ghashiram, a poor Brahman, comes to Poona with his wife and daughter to earn his livelihood. He becomes a servant of Gulabi, a courtesan. He does her household works, joins in carnal songs and dances with her. Nana twists his ankle during the dance; Ghashiram cures it and Nana gives him a necklace as a gift. Subsequently that necklace is snatched by the thugs of Gulabi.

When Ghashiram, an outsider Brahmin, was helpless, he was ill-treated and manhandled by the Brahmins. But when Ghashiram becomes the Kotwal of Poona, he brutally dominates the poor Brahmins. He is now shown very powerful in Peshwa's reign in Poona. The play also focuses on the contemporary political problems of the society. It also discloses the hidden tendency of the weaker



person. When the weaker person occupies the power and position, his real face is unveiled; the demon within him is activated. And then, such people utilize their power to avenge, to exploit and to harass the common and poor people. Ghashiram enjoys the power, but he has to pay a heavy price. When his daughter dies in her early age, he regrets on himself.

When Ghashiram becomes a powerful Kotwal, he establishes a strict permit administration. He starts treating the poor Brahmins of Pune with cruelty and ruthlessly. He sends number of common and poor people of the city in jail. He spares no chance of harassing and tormenting the people. He orders Brahmins to go through the taste of holding a red-hot iron ball in their hands. His dialogues reflect his cruelty and ruthless attitude.

GHASHIRAM: The ordeal shall be done. The ordeal shall be done. You are heretic. Bring that hot ball over here. Hold his hands tightly. If he yells, don't let go. Let this hands burn. You should smell them burning. Smell them. [Brahman yells, mime of placing the ball forcibly on his hands. Brahman yells. Mime of the ball falling off. The Brahman falls to the ground and writhes in agony. Ghashiram watches, enjoying it all. He smooths his moustache (Tendulkar, GK, 42).

The ordeal makes a poor Brahmin groan loudly. Actually, Ghashiram takes revenge of his suffering and humiliation on the poor Brahmins. Ghashiram, with his power, starts humiliating and harassing the people who humiliated him when he was weak. In the contemporary society, we come across many persons like Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis who hurt, bother and threat common people to fulfill their wills and wishes. They never think about the pitiable conditions of the common people. Though this Ghashiram is killed in the end of the play, many Ghashirams are always at large in the society. The problem was to whom the poor victims could make complaints. Nana Phadnavis, though the highest authority is busy with merry making and enjoying sexual relations with the different girls and women.

The play beautifully covers the impact of the power politics on the lives of the major characters. In *Ghashiram Kotwal* 'Power' seems to be a vital device that has had the indispensable impact on the human existence and the formation of human relationships. One can evaluate the play from this point of view by reasonably referring to the connection of Foucault in tracing the origin and direction of power:

No one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always exerted in a particular direction with some people on one side and some on the other (Barry Smart, 73).

The play focuses on the different social and cultural issues and uproars created by power politics. Instinctively, any man like Nana or Ghashiram wants to achieve power or status. For the fulfillment of greed of power, one can go any level as the Ghashiram does and one can use the power only for fulfillment of his/her personal desires or motifs as both Nana and Ghashiram do. For a self-centered powerful man, everything is fair. Whether it is legitimate or illegitimate; fair or unfair, moral or immoral it is just a point of view. And the powerful people and politicians are so cunning and shrewd that they can justify all their deeds. These people exploit the emotions, feelings and religious beliefs of common people only for their personal gain and they have nothing to with what responsible positions they occupy. The political scenario of the play can be applied to the contemporary political situations at the state as well as the national level. We have been witness how the politicians usually



misuse the power for their personal motifs. In this play, the power is ironically used to exploit the common people at social, cultural, physical, emotional and economical levels. Dnyaneshwar Nadakarni rightly comments:

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 (Nadakarni, 21).

The play, *Ghashiram Kotwal* dramatizes the greedy power-seekers, Ghashiram and Nana Phadnavis. They are extremely self-centered. Ghashiram provides his own daughter, Lalita Gauri to the despotic ruler, Nana. He sexually exploits her till her death. This shows an obnoxious power relation through the help of visual stage props, rather than dialogues. The visual is created out of such devices as music, song, Kirtan and tamasha. The human wall on the stage has a tremendous visual impact upon the audience. And it is used as a convenient screen for hiding human follies. Tendulkar has brought the audience face to face with the stern reality of life which presents an all-pervading brutality and violence.

In the beginning of the play, Ghashiram is seen as an outsider. He is falsely accused of theft and mercilessly treated by the Poona Brahmins. He swears revenge on the city. He offers his own daughter to Nana Phadnavis, the magistrate of the Peshwa. In return he is given the power of a Kotwal. Ghashiram almost pounces on his former tormentors, rendering them to the position of slaves to his power. In the name of social and cultural reformation, he misuses his power which leads to the social and cultural uproars. Ghashiram, like Nana too becomes a despotic ruler. Finally, his death sentence is signed by Nana. In the end of the play, we witness violence and disturbance. In fact, Ghashiram became a threat to the common and poor people of the city; he has created chaos and anarchy. Nana thinks that only his death will restore peace in the city. Nana orders the people to kill Ghashiram. After the death of Ghashiram, he declares:

Ladies and gentleman, 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 the god is with us always (Tendulkar, *GK*, 61).

The character of Ghashiram symbolizes persecution and tyranny, metaphorically representing the all pervading force of power in a patriarchal society. In the opening of the play, there is a sense of omnipotence that the Brahmins enjoy over the down-trodden people. It also refers to the relationship of power and its overindulgence. The relationship is rooted in structures of power rather than in caste. It is reflected in the very opening of the play with the spectacle of twelve men singing a song of God Ganesha. It incorporates both the Goddess of learning and wealth showing not only the socio religious stance of the people but also Indian culture and its rootedness in the realm of power.

The power is always associated with the security forces. The department of Police is also seen under control of the people possessing power in the play. The play severely attacks the police department and its functioning. The police ironically favour and co-operate the cunning and faulty politicians. Vijay Tendulkar criticizes the system of police department:



GHASHIRAM: But I didn't steal. I swear to God I didn't. I'm not a thief...

SUTRADHAR: If the police let you!

Friends, the thief is dependent on the police.

If not- they'll soften your bones.

Sometimes they break you 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 partnership.

The thief is a simple thief.

The police are official thieves

....

One petty thief less in a world of big thieves.

So, little servant,

Go to the feet of God (Tendulkar, GK, 20).

People of each age are expected to learn from their past mistakes and shape their present social construct in order to have a bright future. But history repeats in power politics and sometimes becomes even worse. Politics and power are harmoniously mingled with tricky tactics. The characters like Nana and Ghashiram exercise power immorally when the former does it cautiously without harming to himself as the present day politician does, the latter does it blindly and chaotically, blinded by revenge thereby his own cruelty is boomeranged to him as he is new to politics. Ghashiram uses all his power to terrorize the common poor people. Satish Barbudhe describes the manifold power game in the play:

The play also deals with mechanics of power. It is the power of Nana which makes Ghashiram the Kotwal of Pune. It is the power of Ghashiram which terrorizes the citizens of Pune. It is the power of beauty of Lalita Gauri which enthrals Nana for some time. The power-politics is undercurrent of discontent in the citizens of Pune. It is Ghashiram who brings dishonour on Nana by his unmindful terror. Ghashiram's insolent behaviour is the principal cause of his end of power (Barbudhe, 131).

In the end of the play Ghashiram's thirst for power grows unlimited. But each time he regrets over death of his daughter, Lalita Gauri. He must have been a caring and loving father and a good citizen. But his title, power and his hatred towards the Brahmins who once tormented him turn him to be a callous and unkind tormenter. The case of his daughter and her wretched life makes him repent and internally broken. All his ambitions and expectations cause the complete devastation of the existence of her innocent daughter. Lalita Gauri represents all the innocent and faultless people who fall victims to the game of power and politics. The report of Gauri's sudden death makes Ghashiram vicious and crazy. He repents of his action, but has gone too far to turn back the tide. So, for him, like Macbeth, "returning is as tedious as go over." M. Sarat Babu says, "Once, he has sold his daughter for acquiring power. Now he accepts her death only to continue with the exercise of his power" (M. Sarat Babu, 76).



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