

**GHASHIRAMKOTWAL : PORTRAYAL OF DEGRADATION OF SOCIETY****Dr. B. N. Ravan***Asst. Professor & Head Department of English**ShripatraoChougule Arts and Science College,**Malwadi-Kotoli, Tal. Panhala, Dist.Kolhapur. (Maharashtra)*

Vijay Tendulkar is a significant name amongst the contemporary Marathi playwrights. He was born in 1928 and began his career as a journalist. He took up a job as a sub-editor of a Marathi weekly. He continued in this profession for a number of years, changing jobs and writing that he took up along side. He began with prose but soon switched over to drama.

He has been a front runner among the avante-grade playwrights. He has written till date 30 full length plays, 23 one act plays. He has written screen plays for eight Marathi movies. He has written for popular movies such as Saamna (1975), Simhasan(1979), Umbartha (1981). Even Tendulkar Festival was organized in Oct-2004 in New York by Indo-American Art Council. He has been called a literary journalist, humanist and a social critic by the I.A.C.C.

Tendulkar's earlier plays were sentimental his later plays were serious of their intent. They dealt with sex and violence. The impact of the twin human instincts on social fabric has been the prime concern of the playwright.

Tendulkar wrote the play GhashiramKotwal in 1970. It was first staged on 16<sup>th</sup> December,1972. But after nineteen performances, it was banned by the President of its dramatic association. It was objected on the grounds that the expose was anti-Brahmin, the character of Nana Phadnavis as conjured up by the playwright was historically incorrect and there was fear of revolt in the audience and a strong possibility that the audience would publically abuse the play if it was allowed to be staged. However most of the actors of the play resigned their membership from the association that banned it and staged the play under another association. It was subsequently performed a number of times not only in India but also abroad. Above critical condition Tendulkar commented, "This is not a historical play. It is a story, in prose, verse, music and dance set in a historical era. Ghashirams are creators of socio-political forces which know no barriers of time and place."<sup>1</sup> This suggests that he intends the play to be a pointer to the ever-recurring pattern of power politics manifesting in deceptions of deputations as is evident in the Peshwa-Phadnavis-Kotwal relationship. The bitter reality is this that as long as politics remains a power game, Nana Phadnavis, Ghashirams and LalitaGauri's are bound to emerge.

The play starts with an invocation to Lord Ganesh, goddesses Saraswati and Lakshmi. The main characters, apart from the Sutradhar (narrator) and chorus, are GhashiramSavaldas, Nana Phadnavis, Gulabi and Gauri and others. The others include Brahmins. This might be the possible reason why there was a stir against it. The play, thought to be a work of art, provides us with cultural heritage that was there in the time of the Peshwas upto the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, many people from different parts of the nation came to Pune in search of fortunes. Such five people as seen in the beginning of the play are a scholar, a logician, a doctor, an astrologer, a linguist and a baron and they are from towns like Shringeri, Tanjore, Rameshwar, Kumbakonaum, Banaras and other places.

Ghashiram himself is from Kanauj. The Sutradhar asks a prominent Brahmin as to where he is going at night. He is going to the red-light district. Some other says they are going to temple though they are going to the same place.

Ghashiram, the protagonist, a poor Brahmin from Kanauj, comes to Pune in search of a livelihood. When we see him first he has high hopes for life. What worries him is how to earn a living for his family in the caste society of Pune. Tendulkar skillfully brings out the tragic element in Ghashiram by setting him against a mighty exploitative system, which attempts to strip him off his modesty and humanity. He finds himself a misfit in Pune, which is dominated by the Brahmin folk. Ghashiram is denied entry into their society for he has a non-pious look, unshaven head and looks like a scoundrel. Ghashiram puts up with all sorts of humiliation in his quest for identity, and somehow shrewdly knows how to assert himself. He takes refuge in Bavannakhani where Gulabi, a courtesan, entertains Nana and his followers with dance and song. The Brahmins like their ruler Nana, with a lack of morality too much lust, married seven times, still running after young women, are corrupt out and out. The mentality, brutality of the class is successfully pointed, when the Sutradhar tells:

Night comes

Pune Brahmins go

To Bavannakhani ---- they go to the cemetery

To the Kirtan --- to the temple

As they have done everyday

Thenight progresses—the Peshwa's Chief Minister,

Nana of the nine courts--- of wealth and power

Nana Phadnavis to Gulabi's palace proceeds.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Nana and his subjects were completely busy with indelicate activities. They were interested in sex and women. Nana neglects his duties. It is the portrayal of the falling standards and degradation of society. The people under Peshwa's are likely to suffer interminably and very likely to have the equal or lower standards of morality. As it is, the priestly class under the patronage of Nana has become, haughty, barbarous and immoral. Instead of performance of religious ceremonies and listening to Kirtans they visit the prostitute's house in riotous mood and watch and perform lavanis. The contemporary Maratha society has so much degenerated from its exalted position that the women have begun to engage other men to meet their demands. Beside Brahmins their wives are also ridiculed. Men spent their time at Gulabi's place. The moral depravity and degeneration is punctuated with corruption everywhere. The Brahmins are unfaithful not only to their wives but also to their master, using religion as a cover to hide their misdeeds. The Brahmins regard Bavannakhani, the most sought after red light area, as "Mathura Avatarli" (GK18) associated with Lord Krishna. This reflects their cruel mentality and irreverence towards the religious institutions.

Ghashiram has appeared as a servant of Gulabi for his livelihood. While working for Gulabi, he comes in contact with Nana and finds a favour with him for his servility and ready wit, Nana is pleased and offers him his necklace, which he after refusing initially accepts later. His problems start from here. Gulabi, the courtesan in whose house he is working is not ready to let him walk away with the gift which Nana had bestowed on him. She lays a claim to it as it is for her that Ghashi has been able to procure it. On his refusal she orders her muscle men to take it forcibly from him and give him a good thrashing. Ghashi protests but is beaten and thrown out.

Humiliated, hungry and without money he loiters around before moving to the place where the royal favours are lavishly being thrown on the Brahmins of Poona. He looks around with his hungry eyes and queues to obtain something for him but he is a stranger and innocent of the ways of Poona city. He is blamed for the pick pocketing and is further insulted, picked and kicked by the soldiers. He is victimised and oppressed. He

pleads for mercy but gets kicking and abuses. In this insulted position he takes a vow he will return one day and convert the city of Poona into the kingdom of pigs and will spare none.

Ghashi knows that Nana is lusty and become mad for young, beautiful girls. Nana at one stage notice a beautiful girl Gauri and has attracted towards her. Nana is mad to possess her. He asks Ghashiram to get her, and is ready to pay and give anything.

Accordingly Ghashi gets his daughter Gauri for Nana, probably for dance. Nana uses her even for the gratification of his lust. Nana enjoys too much. Having once tasted Gauri Nana becomes blind to her possession for a few more times but Ghashi steps in, in a bargaining mood. Nana became very angry on him and even abused him. Ghashi bargains Gauri for the Kotwalship of Poona. This is the plan, trick of Ghashi to force Nana to take decision, indirectly to yield to him. Unable to cope up with his lust Nana grants/accepts what Ghashi wants. He himself demands the administrator for bestowing the honor of Kotwalship for him. There is best dialogue in the play.

Ghashiram – This is the only way. Otherwise the lovely Gauri will not come to this place again.

Nana.No! Send her. I will make you kotwal.

When will you send her?

Ghashiram. After I have the order, signed and sealed, in my hand?

Nana . Bastard, you've got me in a narrow pass.

Ghashiram.Yet the narrow pass of my daughter.

Ghashiram makes rounds in the city. He punishes those who go against his ethics. However Ghashiram fails to understand the true face of Nana. He has grossly misunderstood him and his cunningness. Ghashiram feels that he has succeeded in his clever plan, but tragically, he does not foresee the future trap into which he is entering. Nana has double advantage in appointing Ghashiram as the Kotwal: one sexual, and two political. He can enjoy his daughter as well as use him to control the clever Brahmins of Pune. Nana's words reveal his inner motive:

Go Ghasya, old bastard. We made you Kotwal. Raise hell if you wish. But you don't know the ways of this Nana. This time, there are two bullets this gun. With the first one we'll fell your daughter. But with the second onewe'll make the city of Pune dance. Ghasya, child, you're a foreigner. I've put you on Pune's back. Why? As a countercheck to all those conspirators. You'll not be able to join them;they'll never trust you even if you do, because you are a stranger, an outsider. We just raised a dog at our door to the Kotwali. We are sole support. Oh! You're a bastard, Ghasya... our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do, our Kotwal pays---- Excellent! Yes Ghasya, be Kotwal (GK34-35)

Ghashiram takes on the duty of looking after Pune. He does his work sincerely. He enforces the laws strictly and declares that those who commits mistake will be punished badly. Because of the strict nature of Ghashiram there is an enormous fall in the crime rate; even Brahmins shudder at the mention of his name. He declares that nothing can be done without his notice. Poona people are really tired, and irritated by Ghashiram's bad treatment and harassment. He misuses his power. But then in the course of these things, though he appears to be carried away by absolute power, he is aware of his responsibility as a father. Like every father he thinks, "it's easy to find a bride groom when one has money, jewels and respect." (GK48), but he was surprised when he heard of his daughters death. He marches into the palace of Nana with murderous intentions and a fearful face. He madly roves about until he comes face to face with him and asks as to why did he do it? But cunning Nana silences him by giving example of BhagwatGeeta on the nature of death. To earn his trust and to show sympathy towards him Nana gives him the power to behead anybody

who indulges in a gossip about Gauri. Ghashiram is still under Nana's spell he has changed for worse. The power with which he wanted to enhance the happiness of his daughter has made him impotent.

This great shock transforms Ghashiram into a wild animal. He does not pay any heed to the high resentment in the people and a Maratha Sardar gives a deathblow to him when he imprisons a few Brahman on the charges of pilferage and some of them die of suffocation in the narrow cell. He reports the matter to Nana and manages to gather crowd, which is bent upon getting Ghashibeheaded and throngs Nana's palace. When it comes to his own head, Nana signs the death warrant of Ghashi. Nana who has been waiting for an opportunity and known, "how to use a thorn to remove a thorn." (GK 63) The play ends with Ghashiram being stoned to death. Nana justified the move saying that his excesses necessitated that kind of punishment. 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 creations. They easily fit in the present political scenario as well.

In the play Tendulkar has used female sexuality to represent the loss and destruction caused by the struggle for power. How they are using and enjoying sex. He has attacked on corruption that power brings and exposed Brahmin dominated society of Pune. The play was attacked by some people who perceived the play as an attack on the great character of Nana Phadnavis, best administrator and one of the greatest patriots of the Maratha Empire. By accepting this criticism Tendulkar answered all questions by pointing out that GhashiramKotwal was not meant to be a historically accurate account of Nana or Ghashirams character or the rule over Pune. Tendulkar has very skilfully, powerfully examined one important issue of the relationship between power and gender in a patriarchal society in a historical setting with historically recognizable characters. Gender is effectively useful tool in the hands of the politicians and will lead inevitably to the dehumanizing of both the powerful and the powerless alike, the Nanas, Ghashiram, Gauri and also to the destruction, loss of meaningful human relationships and social and moral values.

The play suggests that the exercise of the power continues in much the same way and there is always scope for other Ghashirams to emerge, since nothing has really changed.

This play is interesting about power game, deputation, exploitation, degeneration of values in an 18<sup>th</sup>c. Maratha city, well-known for its wealth and splendor.

Thus GhashiramKotwal is an attack on the moral downfall of the ruling class of Maharashtra who considered themselves custodians of public morality. In the present time some political parties are creating confusion in the society by raising the issues of caste, religion, great leaders etc. Their mentality is beyond the mentality of Ghashiram.

#### **REFERENCES :-**

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