

CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND SENSUALITY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S GHASHIRAM KOTWAL

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The distinctiveness of Indian theatre today is surely indisputable. The deeply rooted theatrical culture has undergone fundamental changes with tireless efforts of many dramatists. The new theatre with its western influence brought a drastic change in the genre. The contemporary Indian theatre draws before the audience the naked truth of the corrupted society, cruel treacherous violence and the lost morals. It splendidly and furiously portrays the younger generation's rivalry for materialistic pleasures. They are victims of frustration and depression caused due to overburden of the modern globalised world and its needs. Social change, personal problems, political upheavals, inner-conflicts, emotional traumas and cultural dilemmas and myths finds expression in the contemporary theatre. The attraction of the western culture, its lifestyle tempts the young generation to be a part of it, thus submerging one-self in the ocean of hurdles and problems, imitating and acclimatizing them.

Theatre has altogether created a different class of audience. The contemporary dramatists have experimented with various themes and issues. The contemporary drama gives an appalling account of the social and political veracity. The stark realities are boldly brought to the forefront and attempts are made to focus on them. Various types of violence are seen and experienced in the routine life as well as the social and political life is the subject matter of the dramatist. Violence is multifaceted and multifarious. The contemporary playwrights like Girish karnad, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Satish Alekar, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar and others have added glory and glamour to the stage. Vijay Tendulkar's contribution to Marathi theatre is extremely valuable. He is the one of the most prolific and controversial writer.

**CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND SENSUALITY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
GHASHIRAM KOTWAL**

The present paper is a tribute to the legendary writer who passed away on May 19th, 2008 in Pune. With his passing away, a giant banyan on our cultural and social scenario has given way. The void created can never be filled. Tendulkar's foresight in political and social issues is marvelously depicted in *Ghashiram Kotwal* written long back in 1970's still reflects the modern social political scenario.

Vijay Tendulkar was born on January 6, 1928 in Kolhapur. His father was a clerk who also published books. He grew up in a house full of books and read avidly. His father took him to the theatre and Tendulkar as a boy was also amazed at the ways the men enacted the women's roles. Books became his friends and a part of life. His body of work has been formidable. He has penned 28 full length plays, seven collections of one-acts, six collections of children's plays, four collections of short-stories, three collections of essays, a novel, and seventeen film scripts. Tendulkar is the other name of a storm, a controversy and a solid attack on the injustice.

Ghashiram Kotwal won him international fame in the mid-seventies. Tendulkar's concern for machinations of power at various levels kept growing. Human violence, terror, power politics, hypocrisy, exploitation, corruption, deceit, betrayal is portrayed in the play. It is one of the longest running plays in the world. The play is performed over six thousand times in India and abroad. It was initially banned for hurting Brahmin feelings. The playwright has very boldly accentuated the intricacies of politics and the sexual exploitation at the hands of power users. The play brings forth the ground realistic aspects in politics.

The play begins with the chorus on Holy Ganpati with tribute to Sarasvati- the goddess of wisdom and Laxmi- the goddess of wealth. Tendulkar hints at the hypocrisy prevalent in the society right in the beginning of the play. He criticises the present society and exposes the evils existing. The so called educated and high castes Brahmins deceive themselves, their family, and society in the name of religion. The Sutradhar enquires about the Brahmins, who stealthily sneak off stage, about their whereabouts. The false answers depicts the slyness, shrewdness and cunningness and moreover their hypocrisy. The Brahmins who go out for religious ceremonies are about to visit Bavvankhani, where Gulabi a courtesan performs her erotic dance. In the name of performing last rites, attending sermons the Brahmins visit her. The lechery, adultery committed by the Brahmins is portrayed by the playwright. The moral responsibility, conscience that they forget is an insult to their profession. The Brahmin wives engage in extramarital affairs with the Maratha Sardars. The solitary confinement that the females undergo makes them take the silent

***CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND SENSUALITY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
GHASHIRAM KOTWAL***

protest. Sexual violence is seen throughout the play. The chief Minister of the Peshwa, Nana visits Gulabi who dances with Ghashiram, the protagonist of the play, who comes to Poona to make fortune

Violence in various forms finds place in Vijay Tendulkar's plays. In Gulabi's court Nana sprains his ankle and Ghashiram helps him and is awarded for it. Gulabi throws him out when he refuses to give the necklace given by Nana. The slang, abusive language used by Gulabi and her men enrage him. Physical violence and corruption are the major projections in the play. Ghashiram is bashed by Gulabi's men, even during Brahmin feast and is put behind bars. Both the incidents annoy Ghashiram and make him turn animalistic. He retorts,

Ghashiram: But I'll come back. But I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! I am a Kanauj Brahmin, 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. ¹

In the cell too he is terribly treated. The playwright doesn't spare a single system that he comes across in the society. The play portrays the violence and corruption prevalent in the domestic, social, personal and political life. Tendulkar criticizes the police services for their bribe and corruption, inhuman treatment the injustice.

Tendulkar has very effectively brought out the violence against women which is not new phenomenon. Women have been the victim of violence through ages together. They are treated as weaker sex and efforts are made to make them meek and docile. Women are enslaved and prostituted and Vijay Tendulkar portrays characters like Gulabi, Nana's seven wives, Gauri and the Brahmin wives as the victims of man's lechery and greed. Women are looked down as commodities, which could be sold and purchased. Rape, a heinous crime is the biggest violence against women. Ghashiram uses his daughter to climb the ladder of success and takes revenge against the Poona people. Nana is attracted towards Gauri, Ghashiram's daughter. He wants to get her by hook or crook. Ghashiram promises Nana that he will bring the girl. Nana, older than Ghashiram, is hungry for Gauri, so intense is his lust that he is ready to

***CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND SENSUALITY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
GHASHIRAM KOTWAL***

give up everything for her. Ghashiram makes Gauri the scapegoat to gain power and makes Nana appoint him as the Kotwal of Poona.

Torture, physical violence becomes a part of the Poona people's lives. Ghashiram's reign begins with permit for everything – permit to cremate, kill a pig, abortion, steal, remarry, hide one's caste, to commit suicide, etc. are issued. Ghashiram's tortures makes the Poona people lose heart. The mental harassment, sexual violence and physical torture enforced by Ghashiram shatters the lives of the Poona people. Beating, hanging, staking, custodial deaths are some of the atrocities cause by Ghashiram. The brutalities, intolerable suspicion and domination of the Kotwal increases and poona people lose their heart. Disturbing the peace and intimacy of the families at night becomes his duty at night. The strict night watch, the questions and enquiries of the people found on the street, whipping brings back a sort of calmness in Bavvankhani, the red light area as well. Prostitution and other sexual offences reduce but the disharmony and hatred increases among the Poona people.

Ghashiram becomes addicted to power. He is so power drunk that he almost forgets his familial responsibilities. When he remembers Gauri it is too late. Nana tells him that Gauri is with Chandra, a mid-wife. Ghashiram finds out that Gauri has passed away as a victim of Nana's lust. In a fit of rage Ghashiram strangles Chandra and enters Nana's room where he is waiting eagerly for his honeymoon with his 14 year old, seventh wife. Lust, hunger and animal instinct in Nana makes him vulnerable. Ghashiram is distorted with anger and his feeling of hatred and revenge grows. He arrests a few Brahmins who are new to the city of Poona and rob a fruit from Ghashiram's garden. Ghashiram lashes out at them and throws them in a cell already tightly packed. Some of them die of suffocation and a Maratha Sardar comes to the rescue of the remaining. The Peshwa then orders nana to look into the matter, who gives the order of Ghashiram's execution. The play begins with deceit, violence and ends on the same note. Ghashiram is put to death at the hands of the mob. The people shave his head, put vermillion and make him sit on a camel backward. But even then the rage in him is no less. He challenges the people present at the scene. He says,

Ghashiram: Hit me. Beat me. Beat me some more. Hit me! Why stay so far away? Come on, you cowards. Still scared? I spit on you. Beat me. Come on, beat me. Come on, stone me, cowards. Pig shit! Come on and beat me. I dare you. Hit me. Look – one of my hands is tied. And you're scared! Come on, beat me. Crush me! Ghashiram Savaldas! Ghashiram Savaldas! I danced on

***CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND SENSUALITY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
GHASHIRAM KOTWAL***

your chests but I wasted the life of my daughter. I should be punished for the death of my daughter. Beat me. Beat me. Hit me. Cut off my hands and feet. Crack my skull. Come on, come on. Look! I'm here. Oh, that's good. Very good. (86)

He is tied to the leg of an elephant and finally stoned to death. The physical, social, sexual violence prevalent in the present day society is beautifully portrayed four decades ago by Vijay Tendulkar. He has fabulously sketched the character of Ghashiram who changed almost overnight. The human fragilities, flaws are highlighted in the play. The ambitious, power drunken Ghashiram is blind with rage and revenge and in the process destroys not only his life but also is a cause of destruction of many others including his daughter. The power drunk males like Nana and Ghashiram cheat the society as well as their own selves. The Peshwa rule is mocked at by the playwright. The cards played to consolidate power are skilfully opened by Tendulkar in front of the audience.

The corruption and lust in the society is terribly attacked by the playwright. Women are looked down upon as weaker sex, object of satisfaction. Females are expected in the male dominated society to be submissive, obedient and true wives. So we find in Nana's wives, Ghashiram's wife, Gauri as a daughter. Gauri no doubt experiences power indirectly for sometime but meets a tragic death after losing self respect, chastity and her morality as well. Gulabi too symbolises exploitation at the hands of the males. Chandra becomes a victim of treachery. Nana, the womaniser, spoils Gulabi, Gauri, his and seven wives. He is drenched in corruption, evil and lust. The women are victimized at the hands of males. Subjugation, exploitation, deceit and betrayal are seen in the case of women. Power struggles, Man's animalistic tendencies, truth triumphs are some important issues dealt successfully by Tendulkar.

The play focuses on caste Hypocrisy specifically in relation to the Brahmanical, Religious and Political hypocrisy. Ghashiram barter his daughter with Nana for the power of becoming a Kotwal. Nana's lust overrides his reasoning capacity. The common man and specifically women become pawns in the power struggle. Repentance comes too late for Ghashiram. His daughter becomes the scapegoat of his lust for power and Nana's physical lust. Chandra becomes the victim of an episode, she had no involvement in. Justice is meted out to Ghashiram at the end of the play. The play comes full circle in the end.

Tendulkar has brought out the contemporary reality decades ago. The corruption prevalent in the various fields like politics, administration, police forces, and other are handled with intense care by Tendulkar. The hunger and

***CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND SENSUALITY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S
GHASHIRAM KOTWAL***

greed for power, animalistic instincts, violence and sensuality widespread in today's society as well are found in the play. The playwright has brought to the forefront the raving for power at the cost of disintegrating and degenerating of relationships. The fickle and meek relationships all become a prey to domination. The disintegration of human values, norms and taboos in the society are brought to limelight with the extra-marital affairs, Nana's seven marriages and Gulabi's erotic behavior. Violence and hypocrisy goes hand in hand and sensuality is a middle bead connecting the two. Sacrifice of Gauri and her mother no doubt do not go unnoticed by the audience. Power stricken Ghashiram becomes powerless and meets a cruel end.

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