

**A GAME OF POWER IN TENDULKAR'S GHASHIRAM KOTWAL**G. Sailaja<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. K. Gopal Reddy<sup>2</sup>, Dr. V. B. Chitra<sup>3</sup><sup>1\*</sup>(Research Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh.)<sup>2</sup>(Associate Professor and Head, the Department of English, Sri Sai Baba National Degree & PG College, Anantapur.)<sup>3</sup>(Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Anantapur.)

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**ABSTRACT**

Since immemorial times, human beings have been striving to become powerful and superior to others. They always urge to be more powerful than others hierarchizing the divisions. This has made the social pyramidal where the few at the top usurp the great power of the masses. It has become possible and usual because the people give away their power by taking the hierarchized society for granted. As the higher rungs of the hierarchized society are endowed with greater power in addition to the greater privileges, people struggle to scramble up the ladder of power. In this journey, some people go up while some go down. This sort of striving for power is recurrent in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* that explores the game of power in politics and human relations.

The objective of the paper is to focus on Tendulkar's *Ghashiram*, the protagonist of *Ghashiram Kotwal* who becomes a tragic figure because of his strong urge for power. It also examines how *Ghashiram*, in the game of power, inflicts pain on Maratha Brahmins, victimizes them, and torments them with a view to taking vengeance.

**Keywords:** *Hierarchy, Game of Power, Maratha History, Politics, Human Relations.***Citation:**

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Since immemorial times, human beings have been striving hard to become powerful and show supremacy over others. They always urge to be more powerful than others hierarchizing the divisions. This has made the social pyramidal where the few at the top usurp the great power of the masses. It has become possible and usual because the people give away their power by taking the hierarchized society for granted. As the higher rungs of the hierarchized society are endowed with greater power in addition to the greater privileges, people struggle to scramble up the ladder of power. In this journey, some people go up while some go down. This sort of striving for power is recurrent in Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*<sup>1</sup> that explores the game of power in politics and human relations. The play is bitterly criticized for its anti-Brahmanism. Dnyaneswar Nadkarni appreciates the theme of the play and says that "its theme is a searing comment on the power politics of the type of oligarchy which we see increasingly taking root in Maharashtra's politics."<sup>2</sup>

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar (1928-2008), an icon of the country's vernacular theatre, the pioneer of New Drama in the post-independence India, the angry young man of Maratha theatre, wrote thirty full-length plays and twenty-five biographies which drew the attention of public as well as the literary writers. His works deal with the controversial social themes which include struggle for existence, power-politics, women rights, corruption, etc. They are written drawing inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals which provide clear light on harsh realities. In the Afterword of *Kanyadaan*, Tendulkar acknowledges thus:

I have written about my own experiences and about what I have seen in others around me. I have been true to all this and have not cheated my generation. I did not attempt to simplify matters and issues for the audience when presenting my plays, though that would have been easier occupation .... My plays ... contain my perceptions of society and its value and I cannot write what I do not perceive.<sup>3</sup>

*Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Ghashiram Kotwal*, and *Sakharam Binder* are the most significant plays that have brought modernism to Maratha stage. He, with his solid contribution to Indian drama in English in general and Maratha theatre in particular, remained a guiding force to many future Indian dramatists. Famous writers like Mahesh Elkunchvar, Satish Alekar accept that their writing is influenced by Vijay Tendulkar. V.S. Naipaul, the 2001 Nobel Laureate in English, called him "India's best playwright."<sup>4</sup>

*Ghashiram Kotwal*, written against the backdrop of Maratha history, is about the discourse of power, absolute power, and "a powerful satire on the power-politics."<sup>5</sup> It explores how men in power give rise to certain fascist ideologies to fulfill their desires and later destroy them when they become useless. Ghashiram Savaldas is a poor Brahman from Kanauj. He comes to Poona for livelihood along with his wife and daughter. He becomes a servant in courtesan Gulabi's house when he doesn't get no noble employment that suits him and his caste. In addition to the housework that he does for Gulabi, he also sings and dances when people come to enjoy her erotic songs and dance. Once, Nana Phadnavis, the late eighteenth century Marathi Machiavelli, visits Gulabi and tries to dance with her. But suddenly he slips and his ankle sprains. Then, Ghashiram holds Nana's hurt foot in his hands and says that he has fallen grace in his hands that makes everyone envy of him. Nana feels flattened and pleased and offers him a necklace of pearls and leaves. Gulabi snatches the necklace from him and sends him out with the help of her thugs. Ghashiram feels hurt and insulted. Thus, Gulabi who once rescues persecutes him later. He, being in the position of a victim, remains helpless and powerless.

Ghashiram then goes out. He feels tired and hungry. He goes to attend a great feast arranged by Peshwa in honour of Brahmans. But the soldiers do not let him in. Meanwhile, a Brahman shouts that his money is stolen by some thief. Thinking that Ghashiram is the thief, they beat him and torment him, despite his attempts to establish innocence. The soldiers put him in prison on a false case of stealing money. After some time, they imprison him and threaten to leave Poona on the pain of death.



The Brahmans, Brahman women, Gulabi, the Maratha people look down upon Ghashiram. This immensely humiliates and torments him. Offended by the treatment meted out to him, he threatens them fiercely by saying thus:

I'll come back. I'll come back to Poona. I'll show my strength. It will cost you! Your good days are gone! ... 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. (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 17).

Soon, Ghashiram searches for the best way to get enough power to persecute the people of Poona and also to take vengeance against the people who tortured him. He disguises himself as a servant and appears with Gauri, a girl, none but his own daughter. He sends her to Nana to quench the latter's lust. Nana, impressed by the beauty of Gauri, makes advances towards her. Taking this as an advantage, Ghashiram seeks power through his daughter. He says, "Now he's in my hands .... I've given my beloved daughter in the jaws of the wolf (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 22)." Nana enjoying the erotic pleasure with Gauri issues the order making Ghashiram, the Kotwal of Poona.

The moment Ghashiram secures his trump-card of power, he starts victimizing the offenders who have humiliated him before and persecutes the enemies of Nana. He feels that he is superior to his Victims (the people of Poona). He calls the people of Poona as pigs. The Brahmans of Poona, once enjoyed the erotic pleasure with courtesans, start suffering. Even the Brahman wives who enjoyed the company of Maratha lovers and courtesans like Gulabi also see the wrath of Ghashiram. An order is passed that everybody should take permission from Ghashiram to do anything out of routine. Sutradhar narrates:

Ghashiram Kotwal says to kill a pig, to do an abortion, to be a 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.

(*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 26)

Then, he enacts laws immediately without any hesitation. He starts making rounds of Poona at night after eleven o'clock. He accosts everyone in the streets. He whips people. He arrests people and imprisons them. He demands people's permits. As a consequence, the prisons are full, Prostitute Lane in Bavannakhani has become desolate, the chasing of women is halted, pimps turn into beggars, counterfeit coins lose their worth. He harasses and punishes people on mere suspicion. He gets them tortured inhumanly when they do not confess. Revenues have increased and crimes have decreased. In gaining power, he loses his wits so that he fails to understand the irrelevance of his question which he asks Sutradhar: "Why does she (Sutradhar's wife) in the middle of the night?" (28). If he catches any sound coming from any house at night, he rouses the inmates and learns the reason for the noise. Witnessing all such incidents, the entire city of Poona trembles at Ghashiram's name. At the situation, Ghashiram, satisfied with his effective persecution, thinks of performing his daughter's marriage. He proclaims thus:

I've got the Kotwali and I've got Poona straightened out! All these proud Brahmans are as soft as cotton now. No one dares to look at Ghashiram straight in the eye! Now once I find a fitting husband for my darling daughter – that place of my heart named Lalitha 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. (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 37)

With the above lines, it is clear that "Ghashiram wants to perform the marriage of his daughter a way of exercising his power. It is also clear that Gauri, the



innocent lass, becomes the scapegoat of the power game."<sup>6</sup>

Nana continues to enjoy sex with Gauri but gets her killed when she becomes pregnant. He marries another teenage girl secretly who will be his seventh wife. Ghashiram, learning his beloved daughter's demise, becomes numb and cowed. He then murderously approaches Nana. But calms down when Nana praises his work as Kotwal. Then Nana quotes from scriptures and advises him to forget the past and to attend his present duty. He says:

What has happened happened. All the world need not know. Your good name. your reputation is our reputation. Anyone's saying strange things about the Peshwa's Kotwal would be unbrahmanical. Every care should be taken that no one anywhere speaks of this. If you hear a gossip-monger, don't wait a second longer – cut off his head! (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 45).

Ghashiram once sold his daughter for power, now accepts her death only to continue exercising his power. This is a perfect example of Ghashiram's crude self-annihilation.

Ghashiram starts acting out his fury caused by the death of Gauri. He starts murdering people. As such the people of Poona are greatly frightened. Prisons are overcrowded. Some people die of suffocation. Poona Brahmins fed up with Ghashiram's wickedness demand Nana to issue an order to 'behead Ghashiram Kotwal.' Without much hesitation, Nana gives them the order and tells them to do with him whatever they like. He says, "Use a thorn to take out a thorn. That's great. The disease has been stopped. Anyway, there was no use for him any more" (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, 52).

The angry Brahman mob surround Ghashiram, beat him, shave his head, paint saffron on it, ride him on a camel, tie him to the leg of an elephant, tie his hands behind his back, and pelts stones at him violently to death. Ghashiram, overcome by remorse, shouts at them to beat, to hit as he wasted the life of his little daughter. He, further says that, must be punished for the death of his daughter. In the end, he succumbs to injuries and

dies. Ghashiram's death reveals "the characteristic violence that is a concomitant of all desire for power."<sup>7</sup> The play ends with the epilogue of Nana in which he says that 'a threat to the great city of Poona has ended today with the death of Ghashiram who plagued all the people.'

To conclude, one may say that the game of power pervades throughout the play. In it "power is defined 'horizontally,' in terms of individuals against individuals from humiliation to revenge in assertion to eventual victimization; played out against a background of political and moral decadence and degeneracy, with sexuality impinging on strategies of power."<sup>8</sup> One may definitely find Nanas and Ghashirams in every society as long as the hierarchies of power and the alienation that is behind them continue to exist in the societies. The people of Poona believe that Ghashiram is dead. But their hope is that he is dead only as a person while his role is very much alive and somebody, in future, may play the role. That is why Tendulkar himself aptly observes:

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.<sup>9</sup>

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