

:: STRUCTURE ::**13.0 Objectives****13.1 Introduction****13.2 Themes of the Play *Ghashiram Kotwal*****• Check Your Progress 1****13.3 Important Characters****• Check Your Progress 2****13.4 Let Us Sum Up****13.5 Key Words****13.6 Books Suggested**

13.0 OBJECTIVES

- To discuss the themes of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* critically
- To analyze some of the important characters and their role in the play

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first unit, we discussed basics of the play and its summary in detail. In this present unit, we shall be discussing some of the major themes and important characters of the play. So you will be able to strengthen your understanding about the play and relate your observation that you must have developed while reading the first unit. *Ghashiram Kotwal* has been considered as a complete play and as a reader you must have experience the kind of expertise the author, Vijay Tendulkar possesses in crafting the play and giving it a complete shape.

While reading the play you can observe and relate to the ups and downs that Ghashiram Kotwal experiences in his life. The story of the play is set in history, but presented in a very interesting way. Most of the incidents of the play is set in past. The play deals with the various themes like violence, manipulating power and religion to oppress lower caste people in general and women in particular. You will be observing such themes that may make you thoughtful throughout the play.

13.2 THEMES OF THE PLAY *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*

Themes can be the main idea or meaning that the author conveys in a play, novel, short story or any other literary works. Themes can effectively be conveyed by proper combination of characters, setting, dialogues or plot. A play usually consists of one theme that becomes prominent and sometimes it may also have various sub themes stemming from a main theme.

Then what can be considered as the main theme in Ghashiram Kotwal? The character conflict between the Nana and Ghashiram might give an impression of being the topic at the outside level however we realize that Tendulkar has inspected the connection between religion, position, sexuality and brutality to expose the constructions of force that keep up with the state of affairs. According to Saimik Bandhopadhyay, 'In *Ghashiram* power is defined 'horizontally' in terms of individuals against individuals from humiliation, to revenge in assertion, to eventual victimization...' (*Ghashiram Kotwal*, Seagull, Calcutta, 1984, p.v.) Do you agree with that? It seems to an extent that one individual is opposed to another. On another level, however, it is clear that state forces and society remains supreme even after the death of individuals. For example, Ghashiram, Poona's innocent newcomer was unjustly accused of theft and beaten by Poona Brahmin. This incident made Ghashiram swear revenge. Interestingly, Ghashiram, himself a Brahmin, turned his back on his other brothers. The opportunity for revenge against the Brahmins presented itself as the lustful and middle-aged Nana Phadnavis wishes his beautiful daughter Lalita Gauri. Then begins the power game in which Gauri becomes a pawn and is sacrificed for Nana's lust. In return, Ghashiram was made Kotwal of Poona. This serves two purposes: first, it gives Ghashiram a chance to take revenge and to the horror of the inhabitants of Poona and the two of them, this allowed Nana to have cake and eat his one too. He has Gauri on one side and his own tyranny overshadowed by the cruelty of Ghashiram. Apparently, even at this point, the deal is unfair because the advantage is mainly on Nana's side. And in the end, Nana sacrificed Ghashiram to bloodthirsty crowd without a hint of shouting or regret and at the end play; we find that itself continues to grow.

Who is really strong; Nana or Ghashiram? Note that power is authorized only to Ghashiram, who doesn't recognize it and begins to confuse it with real power. When he loses Lalita Gauri and his game is over, he realizes his mistake and his reality. It was Nana's misconduct that was "credited to his account". It seems after that this power hides behind its agents and continues to grow strong. Make strength stay with Nana? It seems so, but even Nana's call can be called at any time Peshwa's moment. Peshwa itself is a symbol of power in the context of feudal society. Thus, the power given to it is reinforced by the social system which operates on a

status quo basis. King or Peshwa in this case has power according to divine law whose position is upheld by various state apparatus such as army, police, religious and social organizations, etc. Here, power is vested in Nana, who further delegates to Ghashiram by make him Kotwal then work through the police force. So there is an entire hierarchy of positions of power. Then it seems it's an individual against a individual, individual, individual. For example, if a person is beaten by the police, they can see the evil face. of this particular policeman. He didn't realize that the policeman was supported by police force is still maintained by a particular state. The state operates on its own according to a certain ideology. A society structured in this way ensures that power maintained and supported by such hierarchies. Attention is focused on individual's self-identified perpetrator. But the real culprit, social configuration continues cannot be argued because the individual is opposed to the individual. And even if Ghashirams were created and destroyed, society remains unchanged. Attention is diverted from reality and the problem is still intact. And Tendulkar's play very negligibly makes us ponder about and examine this phenomenon.

We've seen how violence and persecution may make power more visible. At a deeper level, it operates through social attitudes that aid in the maintenance of hierarchies and the concealment of the true source of power, which is assigned to agents like Ghashiram, who are also victims of that power. Religion and sexuality have also been employed as power strategies.

Religion

The army and police are used by the government to maintain social control. Other, more subtle policies are also employed. Take religion, for example. When we are hit, most religions teach us to turn the other cheek. This makes us incapable of reacting to oppression and injustice. When we are instilled with these values as children, first in the home, then in school, and finally in society at large, these values become so deep-seated in us that we are unable to question or change our social circumstances. Such values are instilled in us so finely that we are unaware to whether they are correct or incorrect.

The play Ghashiram Kotwal opens with a religious hymn and popular stage dancing. This establishes the backdrop against which the drama unfolds. The Brahmans visit Bavanna Khani to see the dancing girl and announce that they are going to the temple to preach on "Vishvamitra and Menaka." By comparing Bavannakhani to the holy city of Mathura, they justify their self-indulgence. In his play, the "abhanga," a devotional song, is frequently sung alongside the "lavani," or love song. Violent and cruel scenes are intermingled with devotional songs. Nana dismisses Gauri's fears when he tries to seduce her in front of the holy Ganpati statue, saying "That is the Holy Ganpati," says the narrator. Furthermore, when Ghashiram confronts Nana and accuses him of his daughter's death in the play, the later reassures him by saying: He – the Omnipresent- He

makes everything happen..... We are merely instruments.....As a result, religion becomes a valuable excuse for people's wrongdoings at that time.

Caste

Along with religion, caste plays a significant role in the play. Is it a remark on the Brahmans' decadence? The performance was first banned because it was anti-Brahman and there was a concern of a backlash from the audience. Is it truly intended to reveal Brahmans' corruption and moral degeneration? He was more concerned in 'the emergence, expansion, and inevitable death of the Ghashirams...' according to the dramatist. The decadence of the class in power (the Brahmans, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental though not accidental. Caste is utilised as a means of gaining power. According to Ghashiram, 'eating with a lower caste person is a crime,' according to the Sutradhar (p. 26). It is also illegal to sleep with a 'Mahar woman' (a lower caste among the untouchables). The Brahmans, on the other hand, have no qualms about pursuing and harassing a white Sahib for money. This demonstrates that race and colour have a higher social hierarchy rank. And the privileged Brahman who is feasted and showered with gifts in the Peshwa's Poona ranks lower than the white Sahib.

Tendulkar showed the Brahmans' two-facedness, arrogance, tyranny, as well as their wicked and adulterous behaviour. The Brahmans are distinguished by their "shaved head," "sacred thread," and "pious expression," rather than their good deeds and moral behaviour. Their petty activities are hidden by their earnest appearance. Nana, a Brahman, is being married for the sixth time, not to mention his lust for young ladies, Lalita Gauri among them. Ghashiram is a Brahman, despite his vengeance and hatred for the Brahmans.

Sexuality

Women, too, have become pawns in the power struggle, as we have witnessed. In truth, sexuality and power are inextricably linked. Consider Nana's remark on Lalita Gauri: 'Our grandeur's gone if she's not had' (p.20). It appears that a man's self-image, identity, and masculinity can only be defined in terms of women's conquest and oppression. As *lavanis* (love songs) and *abhangas* (devotional songs) are performed at merriments in Bavannakhani, which is compared to Mathura, and erotic dances to Krishna Lila, there is a strong link between sexuality and religion. The Brahman men's debaucheries are justified and whitewashed by their religious clothing. Gulabi's seductive dances, the Nana's ardent pursuit of Lalita Gauri, and the Brahman wife's secret meeting with a Maratha lover all contribute to the play's underlying eroticism.

Violence

Tendulkar researched on violence in India, and as a result, he has delved into its numerous magnitudes. He is concerned not only about state violence against the people, but also about individual violence against other individuals. Ghashiram's torture of innocent Brahmans and Gulabi's

men's hostility against Ghashiram when he is forcibly stripped of the necklace Nana had given him demonstrate this. The ordeal-by-fire episode is a vivid example of extreme violence. Unsuccessfully, an innocent Brahman convicted of robbery tries to persuade Ghashiram of his innocence. Despite the fact that the evidence suggests the Brahman has been wrongfully accused, Ghashiram has an adventure planned to prove his innocence. The nails of the Brahman's right hand are removed, and his fingers are cleansed in lemon juice and soap before being packed in a bag. An iron ball is heated red hot and seven Rangolis are drawn on the floor. The ball is then forcibly placed on the resisting Brahman's hands. Naturally, his hands bum, and the evil Ghashiram proudly shouts that if he had uttered the truth, this would not have happened, for only liars get burned. The tortured victim is then urged to 'confess,' or else the ordeal will be repeated. Left with no choice, he falls into the trap - 'I confess that I stole'. (p.36). Instead of letting him off Ghashiram orders the soldiers to 'cut off his hands and drive him out of Poena'. (p.36). This is an illustration of the terrible physical and emotional violence that humans may inflict on one another. How does this fit with the Brahmans' ostensibly religious commitment? There's also the more subtle forms of violence that humans are capable of. This is the kind of mental brutality we see when Nana uses protocol to reduce Ghashiram's pain and rage over the death of his daughter.

But what is Tendulkar's aim in portraying this violence? According to Sudhir Sonalkar 'It [violence), has to somewhere grasp the tragic human condition, it has to have a poetic dimension to it The violence of greek tragedy, moves and enriches. Tendulkar's violence shocks and even when it disturbs, the ethical question remains both untouched and unanswered'. ('Vijay Tendulkar and the Metaphor of violence' The Illustrated Weekly of India. Nov. 20, 1983, p.21). By leaving the ethical question open, Tendulkar is perhaps inviting his audience to think about the solutions for themselves. Is Tendulkar attempting to convey a message? As we all know, the purpose of art is to create questions rather than to provide answers or solutions. It becomes mere propaganda if it begins to have 'palpabale intentions on us,' as Keats would put it. As we can see, Tendulkar satirizes feudal society's absolute decadence in this play, providing us with a model for an amazing theatrical experience. He forces us to consider the state of our own civilization by revealing the faults and hypocrisies of Brahmans.

Before we move to the next section, let us do the following exercise.

• **Check Your Progress 1**

Answer the following question in your own word: (About 200 words each)

1) Which is the central theme of the play? What does Tendulkar try to depict through the story of the rise and fall of Ghashiram?

2) Describe the role of religion and sexuality in maintaining the structure of power and dominance.

3) Comment on the end of the play. (100 words approx)

13.3 IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

You must have formed some impressions about the various characters after reading the play. How do we get to know a play's characters? To present a character, the playwright employs a variety of techniques:

- i. Unlike a character in a fiction or film, the character appears on stage or novel. A character in a novel or tale can be described in great depth, but in a play, this is not possible;
- ii. he/she is mentioned by other characters;
- iii. the character interacts with other characters;
- iv. the character may soliloquize, or speak loudly on stage, his or her ideas;
- v. The character's behaviours may show some of his or her characteristics.

Tendulkar has used historical characters like Nana Phadnavis and Ghashiram Kotwal. Though Nana's character is taken from history, Tendulkar does not claim that his play should be treated as a historical play. The play is about power politics and Ghashiram is creation of Nana. Nana uses him as a pawn and throws him away when his purpose is served. Nana is symbol of a political figure that use the mad people like Ghashiram to play with. In the edition of 2005, Tendulkar has written an epilogue to Ghashiram Kotwal in which he has exposed the birth story of Ghashiram. He has stated that even after twenty-two years of his publication of the Ghashiram Kotwal, he met the character Ghashiram in a local train. Ghashiram cannot die. As long as Nanas there are Ghashirams too. Tendulkar has used just two female characters in the play, one is Gulabi and the other is Lalita Gauri. But both these women are molested by Nana. They become the prey to the lust of Nana. The art

of characterization of Tendulkar is quite different from that of other contemporary writers. Ghashiram Savaldas and Nana Phadnavis are the historical characters but Tendulkar has presented them to tackle the contemporary issues. The characters of Ghashiram and Nana are symbolic. One is demon and the other is creator of demon. History repeats. Though in the play Ghashiram is killed at the end, Ghashirams are still alive in the society and even the creators of Ghashirams, Nanas are there in the society. Tendulkar wants to criticize the tendency and behaviour and not the human being. Tendulkar's plays expose vices of the society such as hypocrisy, vulgarity, barbarism, corruption, narrow mindedness etc. Ghashiram Kotwal is based on power, sex and violence and the play explores the depths of human mind. In the portrayal of society, Tendulkar's plays mark a definite departure from the previous Marathi theatre. He presents the characters and their lives as those are. Life is projected with all its ugliness and crudity. He was interested in showing disharmony rather than harmony in the relationship between man and society. The characters in his plays are the victims of hostile situations or harsh circumstances. The characters are either aggressive or tender hearted, and they are victimized by chance (fate) or circumstances. These characters have to follow the law of life. The playwright's as well as readers' and audience's sympathy goes with the victim. In her preface Shailaja Wadikar writes, "In the treatment of his theme and delineation of characters, Tendulkar is out rightly humanitarian, but for that, one has to read his plays between the lines." (Wadikar P.XII) Psychologically speaking heredity and environment play a major part in shaping the behavior of characters. The hostile circumstances in life leave some of them aggressive and violent. But the condition of many is helpless and pitiable. Most of them are animals disguised in human forms. And Kumar Ketkar uses the term, 'Tendulkar's Human Zoo'. The function of Tendulkar's plays is neither to just entertain nor to just reveal ironies and contradictions but to help man to know himself in relation to his environment. Tendulkar aims at bringing to light some of most complex and vital issues of our existence inner and outer. Tendulkar is treated as an Avant Garde playwright for he deliberately undertakes in Ezra Pound's phrase to make it new. He had shocked the conventional sensibility and by revolting against the accepted norms and values, he shocked the traditional readers and introduced the neglected and forbidden subject matter. He did not sugar coat the realities but put the things as those are.

Ghashiram:

He is the central character in the play. He functions both as a victim and a victimizer. He is ambitious, revengeful and sometimes inhuman. But his strategy to rule is toppled down by Nana and in the end of the play Ghashiram is lynched to death on the command from Nana. Ghasi Ram, usually addressed as Ghasya by Nana is a Brahmin of Kannauj come to seek his fortune in Puna as Puna happens to be a kingdom of Brahmins

who assemble there to try and enjoy their fortune. Living along with his family in Puna, Ghasiram finds a job in Bawankhani as a pimp of a dancer's cabin and also plays iktara to the songs and dances of the courtesan, Gaulabibai. Once when Nana visits the dancer, his foot receives a sprain and Ghasiram rushes to massage the foot. Pleased by the serviceability of Ghasiram, Nana gives him a gift of a precious garland. But Gulabibai snatches away the garland and also gets him thrashed by her goons. Ghasiram once again receives a thrashing when in a queue for food and dakshina, he is accused of stealing. He decides to seek revenge on the Brahmins of Puna. He uses his young daughter to lure Nana into his trap. Ghasiram succeeds and offers to send his daughter to Nana's lustful residence on the condition that Nana appoints the former as the Kotwal of the city of Puna. The crafty Nana agrees but also plans the end of Ghasiram. He gives him a long leash to indulge in unjust acts so that the Pune-kars to whom Ghasiram is an alien would rise in revolt against the latter. It so happens and Ghasiram is sentenced to death on the demand of the Brahmins of Pune. Ghasiram is a craftless character like the modern day sharpshooters of the gangs of the underworld. Hurt by the humiliation of the Brahmins of Pune he vows to turn the city of Puna into a city of swine. He succeeds. But he is unaware of the conspiracy and diplomatic plans of Nana. He continues to commit atrocities and brutalities on the poor people of the city in order to stop all kinds of sinful practices but fails to understand that all the immorality is being promoted by Nana himself. He is so unwise that he pushes his own daughter into the unholy profession, an object of carnal desires for Nana. The girl is pathetically murdered when she is no more useful. The event breaks Ghasiram and in desperation he thrusts the Southern Brahmins into a cell where half of them are found dead. Ghasiram is cruel by temperament and immoral by nature. Or he has no leisure to be moral in the situation he has been put in. His accusation of a Brahmin of the theft and then the eventual Agnipariksha through which a burning metal ball is put in the hands of the accused and then his hands are amputated electrify the audience with horror. His recce through the city of Puna at midnight and then dragging out a man and woman who are in fact husband and wife on the charges of lechery are examples of worst kind of cruelty. In his madness for revenge he even forgets the basic norms of humanity and stifles the Brahmins by putting them in a small cell. The devilish methods he uses for arresting the citizens and the alibis he seeks to confirm the charges are the part of his nature which disqualify him for any kind of sympathy. Ghasiram is both a victim and a victimizer. He is the victim of the circumstances which have brought him to Puna to try his career there. But he is rather beaten and humiliated at every stage of his stay which forces him to adopt monstrous ways of acquiring power. He assumes the role of a victimizer now. As a Kotwal he begins to intimidate and torture people most of whom are innocent. He acts just a tool in the hands of Nana who wants a surrogate sinner for all the evil deeds he has done

himself. Then at the opportune moment Nana commands the murder of Ghasiram at the hands of common people.

Nana:

Nana has been described as the Machiavelli of Puna. He uses the tactics of deputation to mask his strategy of exercising power to hide from victims the real face of power. Like the paraphernalia of modern Indian bureaucracy he uses Ghasiram as a cover to deflect resistance to hide himself from the charge of abuse of power. Like a perfect politician he knows when to submit to Ghasiram and when to neglect him. He silently disposes of Lalita Gauri and throws her body into a river. At the end of the play he calmly and quietly signs the death verdict on Ghasiram and resumes his adventures of lust to the tune of the song “Bavankhani mein Mathuraavatari”. Nana operates his power game not only through policing or edicts but also through the network of social rituals and institutions. He has a full support to Bavankhani, a redlight area where the citizens of Puna remain lost and do not feel resentment against the centre of power. He has his mediators who act on his behalf. He promotes rituals like Ganpati Puja, Holi etc. He also organizes feasts and festivals where the poor are given alms. He is a despot who has ruthlessly and without a scruple been ruling the roost. As already discussed when his desires not fulfilled even by seven wives, he hires women of pleasure like Gulabibai and Lalita Gauri. He is lustful, festive and mirthful but equally cruel. For him religion is just a façade. When Lalita Gauri resists his embraces in front of the idol of Ganesha, Nana says, {Look at the feet of Ganesha, these are just made up of clay”. Nana is what he is described in history. Through his character Tendulkar only wants to assert that Nanas and Ghasirams are there in every age and every country.

The Brahmins of Puna:

The Brahmins of Puna are a decadent society. They are busy in merry making under the garb of religiosity. One of the Brahmins in the opening scene answers to the narrator that he is going to the temple to hear the bhajana. When enquired further, he admits that he would listen to and enjoy a lavani daance which of course is not held in a temple but only in a red light area. When the Brahmins are busy in Bavankhani, their wives are entertaining Sindhe knights in their respective houses at night. They make a queue for alms in the houses of the lords, they flock together at Puna to get pittance from the rulers. In total the play presents the Brahmins of Puna as chanting “Ram Shiva Hari, Mukund Murlī” but at their heart they are lost in the lustful desires for women. Their best representative, Nana Phadnavis is entertaining dozens of women at a time.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss the character of Ghashiram and comment on the title of the play.

13.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you were given an introduction to Vijay Tendulkar's Ghashiram Kotwal. You were also given the objectives and brief introductory background of the play. Furthermore, this unit also dealt with the various themes as well as the important characters of the play.

13.5 KEY WORDS

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| Ganapati | Lord Ganesha, God of learning and wisdom. |
| Bavannakhani | Place of entertainment where nautch girls resided |
| Kirtan | A form of religious entertainment where stories from epics are |
| sung | Usually performed in temples or village squares. |
| Lavni | Forms of folk songs that became popular during the rise of Peshwas. |
| Bamanhari | The Brahmins of Puna, also known as Pune-kars |
| Banni chali sasre | The daughter is leaving for her Husband's house |
| Kanyadan | the giving away of one's daughter. A ritual in the Hindu wedding. |

13.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- For an introduction to modern theatre and drama, you could look at: Eric Bentley (ed) -The Theory of the Modern Stage (Hannondsworth: Penguin, 1983)
- Siegfried Melchinger, The Concise.. Encyclopedia of Modern Drama (New York: Horizon Press, 1964)
- Venna Noble Dass, Modern Indian Drama in English Translation (Hyderabad, 1988).