

Dynamics of Power and Violence: A Study of Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*

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Abstract: This paper is a modest attempt at analyzing Tendulkar's expose of how power leads to degeneration, corruption, sexuality and violence. The paper further tends to make deep insights into the complex dynamics of power and violence which Tendulkar has depicted very artistically imparting human depths and complexity to the play. Tendulkar's treatment of mob psychology on the one hand and his insights into the working of the psyche of a man like Ghashiram, who has, to begin with, no sense of position or power in the everyday social world on the other, is critically examined. The perspective taken up here also upholds the question of violence in its various manifestations as depicted in *GhashiramKotwal* in a cause and effect manner and how 'institutionalized power' causing violence manifests itself in social structures and human relationships.

Keywords: Power, Violence, Degeneration, Cruelty, Police, Politics, Oppression, Revenge.

Introduction: As a sensitive and observant individual Tendulkar realized that the world he lived in was full of conflicts and violence. Partition of India, imposition of emergency, militancy in Punjab, Kashmir and many other parts of the country, naxal violence, Gujarat and Bombay communal riots and vandalism of Shiv Sena were the harsh realities of his times which revealed to him how easily in face of provocation and fears the beast buried in man breaks free and begins to run amuck. He felt, "an individual's biggest fear today is that of being reduced to a non-entity.... Ranged against forces that are beyond his comprehension and control – such as the state, the bureaucracy and the pressures of the system – an individual finds himself utterly helpless and, out of sheer desperation, huddles in groups and mob." This sets the stage for politicians to play on "their collective fears – real or imaginary" for their political gains (Tendulkar*The Sunday Times of India*).

An incisive understanding of such dynamics of violence and power, therefore, is required to be dealt here in this paper to know the socio-psychological aspect of the perpetrator, the impact of the response of the victim, the performance of the act itself and the environment in which the act is performed to bring out the cause and effect relation between power and violence.

As far as perception and understanding of violent behavior is concerned Tendulkar seems to believe that violence is an inherent and inevitable part of human nature. Thus, as reflected through his works, he appears to think that the beast or the animal is always there hidden inside man along with the animal instincts, which are permanent. And when man acts to meet the challenges that come his way, he occasionally appears to behave like an animal. The hidden hatreds, insecurities, sexual frustrations and long suppressed violence burst out when the situations become oppressive. He saw violence as a metaphor for life and thus “wanted to study and understand what it is, where it comes from” (Tendulkar qtd. in Wadikar 151)

At a simpler level, of course, the act of violence or conflict is the immediate outcome of primitive emotions rather than motives; rage and anger, and the urge to destroy. But the denouement must be traced back to the factors that generated it because these emotions are the outgrowth of our psychodynamic heritage. Thus the immediate reason behind violence has to be taken as an important guide for finding where the sense of outrage and injustice began to grow. Tendulkar shows that human instinct to dominate and exercise control over others is often behind almost all forms of violence. The quest for power and its perpetuation leads one to devise and employ different forms of social, cultural, economic and political strategies. Struggle for power implies efforts at raising the self by forcing others down one way or the other. Its maintenance necessitates the use of force to prevent others from moving upwards and thus to use all possible means to perpetuate hierarchy in one's own favour. Gender, class, caste and political hierarchies are, in fact, based upon the predominance of this basic human urge for power.

Power is unavoidable in social relations and is a part of everybody's daily life. It is applicable to everyone – the rich and greedy, the armed and forceful, the elected and official. Power is sometimes identified with the “ability or authority to dominate men, to coerce and

control them, obtain their obedience, interfere with their freedom and compel their actions in particular ways” (Nyberg 17).

Following the lead of the social psychologists one suspects that ‘power motive’ drives a person secretly to amass and conceal the where-withal to destroy. But it is dangerous only when it gets out of hands. One must simply be alert to signs of unusual interest in power, which are the portents of villainy. Rollo May has gathered case studies to support the view, which Tendulkar shows through his characters that in the game of power politics “those who do not develop a sense of, or a position of power in the everyday social world are the ones most likely to become corrupted psychologically and morally in ways that lead to violence” (qtd in Nyberg 37).

Political institutions of the state are its most obvious examples, illustrating how power leads to oppression and atrocities. The use of violence by state has always been legitimized by the perpetrators as a means to enforce discipline, justice and well-being of both the individual and the society. Tendulkar exposes unsparingly the hypocrisy and brutality embodied in the social and political institutions which are used as tools of exploitation, oppression and destruction of those very men and women whom they are supposed to serve and protect.

Police is one such visible form of force employed by those in power in political realms who quite often use it to perpetuate their exploitative and oppressive rule by eliminating all possible challenges of threats to them. Though the police are supposed to be custodians of law and order, morality and justice, but it is one of the ironies of state administration that the police have universally become the symbol of cruelty, arrogance and oppression. They are supposed to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression, the peaceful against violence and disorder, and thus to respect and safeguard the rights of all.

Tendulkar presents this corrupt and cruel police of the state, who shake hands with the thief and falsely accuse and abuse innocent men creating circumstances that the abused man is forced to react in an abnormal way and smart for revenge. In *GhashiramKotwal*, Ghashiram, a Kanauj Brahmin, is falsely charged with theft and is publically hurt and

humiliated. Tendulkar, through Ghashiram's character, portrays the extraordinary bestial instinct to react violently at his victimization. Ghashiram's lust for power makes him barter away his daughter in exchange for becoming the Kotwal of Poona and especially a cruel one who delights in ruthless enforcement of his authority. This unleashes his revenge instincts and he goes, as it were, amuck with power, perpetrating the most horrifying forms of cruelty on the people of Poona.

According to Freud's theory of sublimation, the instincts of violence remain as they were in the heart suppressed due to impact of human civilization. But under certain pressures and inevitable conditions prevailing in the society, this basic instinct expresses itself violently. This often happens in situations involving struggle for power. Tendulkar's plays are replete with incidents and situations focusing incisively on this game for power. Tendulkar has dealt with such violence in *GhashiramKotwal*, showing it as an important constituent in power game. The play is particularly interesting because it takes the overwhelming violence and insult to be the main cause of psychological frustration for the male protagonist. This, in turn, provokes his own violent reaction and thus triggers off a never-ending cycle of violence. He delights in adopting coercive methods to extort confessions out of innocent people. He callously harasses people moving late in the city without his permission. And thus he imposes endless restrictions on the people of Poona. His totalitarian reign is made explicit in the play through the words of Sutradhar:

GhashiramKotwal 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...to commit suicide, without a permit, is a sin... Ghashiram Kotwal started making the rounds of Poona at night.... Started ruling in person. Accosted anyone he met in the streets. Whipped people. Arrested people. Demanded people's permits. Imprisoned people. Sued people (GK 387).

Tendulkar explores the psyche of ambitious Ghashiram to the extent of revealing the hidden sense of failure and sense of superego which has been humiliated and haunts his life. Ghashiram looks for the best way to get enough power and an official title, the Kotwalship, to be the persecutor, in order to feel powerful, and thus overcome his powerlessness. Nana, the Peshwa's representative in Pune, promises to appoint Ghashiram, whose daughter he lusts after, the Kotwal of the city. Ghashiram falls into dilemma as it is psychologically stressful

for him to live a life of sapping powerlessness. Either of the choices he makes leads to his decadence. His urge to avenge for his humiliation on the people of Pune ultimately leads him towards his doom: “a person who indulges himself in a phantasy of violent revenge...is courting lasting damage” (Gould 6).

Through the character of Ghashiram, Tendulkar makes a comment on man's unhealthy appetite for position and his urge to hurt and humiliate others. When Ghashiram uses his power to oppress the citizens of Pune one sees in him glimpses of the power-drunk officials one has ever known. Ghashiram becomes the plague of the city of brahmins. He revels in their pain and disgrace and thus finds a kind of relief from the misery and insults they had earlier inflicted upon him. This is also indicative of his emotional need to revive and reassert his sense of pride as a man by confronting his oppression. Violence, thus, forms an important tool for the brahmin man to encounter disruptive effects of violence against himself by the state. With a stronger ego, one could get out or ignore the social loss of face and the internal sense of lessened worth and thus start a new life. But like most neurotic solutions to life's problems, violence is easier, given all the restraints, assumptions, pressures and sense of injustice each person feels. Here, infliction of injury is not really the goal of most overt violence of Ghashiram, rather it is the pain caused in the other person which serves to restore or bolster the aggressor's self-esteem or sense of power.

Once, he had sold his daughter to acquire power, now, he accepts her death only to continue with the exercise of his power in a more inhuman manner. The internal and external voices that have held him back from full expression of his exasperations, frustrations and vicious hatreds have been momentarily tricked, as it were, and they seem no longer to have a case. He starts murdering and torturing people on the slightest suspicion. He loses all reason. The resulting joy of revenge, revenge beyond his wildest dreams, continues when he goes patrolling on the streets of Pune with his equally excited buddies. This kind of fantasy fulfillment of the soldiers who were obediently performing their duty also needs a closer examination. Tendulkar tries to present what has been seen in the long and gloomy history of man; one finds more hideous crimes committed in the name of obedience than in the name of rebellion. Many Nazi war criminals, for instance, claimed that they were only following orders when they committed inhuman aggressive acts. By denying responsibility for their

behaviour, they reduced their inhibitions against aggression. Through such obedience they often associate themselves with power and automatically with authoritarianism whose very essence is violence itself.

For Ghashiram, satisfaction is possible only with the realization of vengeance. The urge for this kind of satisfaction motivates one who has himself been a victim of brutal crimes to perpetrate violence on others. But this is only a vain attempt of Ghashiram to clutch at the power that seems to be slipping from his hands. His penchant for blood and violence leads to his self-destruction. The use of “physical force is a significant means of control,” but it also “depends for its long-term effectiveness upon the consent of people to such coercive arrangements.” Since “authority is legitimate power” (Back 419), the path taken by Ghashiram of control-coercion-violence-tyranny in an ascending order, becomes unacceptable and unbearable to the angry Poonaites who, ultimately, revolt against him. Ghashi becomes too big for his boots and as a result his death warrant is signed by Nana who, perceiving the institutional discrepancies, hands him over to the blood thirsty crowd, which kills him after giving him inhuman treatment:

They beat him.
They shaved his head.
They *sindur*-daubed his head.
They rode him around on a camel.
They tied him to the leg of an elephant (GK 414).

It is death worked out bit by bit with the same attention to detail as the scene of the ordeal. He is thrown in front of the Brahmins with one hand tied behind his back. The Brahmins hunker like hunters, and shouting, throw stones at him. The mob relishes the sense of justice in killing Ghashiram who had made their life so miserable. Again, the physical tortures are presented by Tendulkar in their morbid forms, but now it is the sanctioned outlet or venting out of mob fury which symbolizes the collective violence manifesting in nauseating inhuman means. Revenge, whether of Ghashiram against the Poonaites or of the people against Ghashiram, is enacted in physical form in the play. The playwright, through an “all-out assault on the senses” (Kumar 79), gears to bring to the surface and expose all the passions and instincts hidden within man’s psyche and incorporates them in a performance.

The way the angry mob tortures Ghashiram in different ways and stones him to death, gives one an ample insight into the psyche of such frustrated people. This is no more than a thirst for drama, for excitement. At a deeper psychological level it is also an expression of each person's reservoir of hostility, his desire to participate vicariously in the striking of blows. Here, Tendulkar's in-depth study of crowd psychology can be seen in the light of psychoanalyst Zimbardo's observation that groups show more violent behavior, as explained by the theory of "deindividuation," claiming that "by becoming submerged in an anonymous group, individuals lose their sense of personal identity and responsibility and are thus less inhibited about showing negative social behavior normally suppressed by their internal standards" (qtd in Semin 386).

Decades ago, in the wake of World War II, psychoanalysis identified the forms of sadomasochism that underlines mass violence and authoritarianism. Tendulkar's diagnosis of violence of Ghashiram and brahmins of Pune parallels that discovery and has ominous implications for the long term well-being of modern public life. This idea of impersonal and collective violence against individuals or groups is further expanded by thinkers like Foucault and Waldmann, who view it as an act or expression of power and thus something built into the systems. P.Waldmann gives to it the name of 'institutional violence' and describes it as the "power of disposition over subjects and dependents granted to holders of positions within a hierarchy and supported by physical sanctions" (Waldmann 431). It's most obvious example is visible in the form of state's claim to sovereignty and its assertions. Foucault, too, sees violence as something integral to institutions in modern times and finds its manifestations in the ways institutions control irregularities and suppress differences.

This again reveals Tendulkar's ability to lay bare the darker areas of human mind and locate the explosives buried in human consciousness bursting in the forms of violent behavior. Tendulkar suggests that the insatiable craze for bullying is in fact a form of human hunger for power. This urge or instinct for control and domination over others is so deep rooted in human psyche that it gets manifested in a number of forms – overt or covert. Very often it appears as a fake feat over the sense of powerlessness to change their lives that many people, especially the disadvantaged, feel in modern society.

Thus power has been regarded as a means to other ends in the case of Ghashiram as power gives an opportunity to fulfil his appetite of taking revenge. This sadistic objective renders him blind and fails him as a father, as a Kotwal, and finally as a human being proving the doctrine of Lord Acton that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (*The International Thesaurus of Quotations* 493).

Tendulkar through the example of Ghashiram’s violence also lays bare the violence inherent in the institutions like state and its law enforcing agencies, particularly when they are abused for vendetta. This form of violence is used not only against citizenry but also against one’s political opponents in the ruthless struggle to gain and perpetuate one’s hold on power. Tendulkar through his plays *GhashiramKotwal* discloses the secrets of the ways of power game wherein “each one is the devoured, and each the devourer” (GK 307). It represents the defeat and dreadful end of the individual in conflict with the ruling power and the society.

Tendulkar, through the play *GhashiramKotwal*, makes a powerful dramatic statement of the violence that humans are capable of when actuated by lust, revenge and power. Tendulkar features the corruption, intrigue, hypocrisy, greed and brutality which are inherent in today’s power politics. Through this play Tendulkar points to the ever recurring pattern of power politics manifesting in deceptions and manipulations of deputation as is seen in Peshwa-Phadnavis-Kotwal relationship. Though the play has its origin in history, it represents universal human situations which are relevant to all times and climes.

The political violence and evil depicted in this play is mainly perpetrated by a lecherous ruler who is responsible indirectly for the material and moral decadence of his society and who creates an avenging demon to cover up his amorous life. Nana Phadnavis is a lustful politician shown to be degrading himself before a power crazy alien, Ghashiram, by raising him to the level of Kotwal of Poona for having his daughter, Gauri, in return. But he knows that his defeat is only temporary and with his Machiavellian stratagem he justifies his decision that he has two bullets in his gun. With the first, he’ll fell on the “luscious daughter” of Ghashiram and with the second he will “make the city of Poona dance” (GK 384). His political shrewdness knows no bounds when he says: “We just raised a dog at our door to the

position of the Kotwali! ...What'll happen is that our misdeeds will be credited to your account. We do it; our Kotwal pays for it" (GK 384-85).

Nana has put Ghashiram on "Poona's back" so that he can countercheck "all those conspirators" (GK 384) and because, he is a stranger, no one will ever trust him and let him join them. Ghashiram straightens out the city of Poona and then wants to marry off his beloved daughter, Gauri. Nana, having exploited her sexually, sends her to Chandra, the midwife, where she dies. Ghashiram is almost mad with rage and like a wounded tiger, tries to destroy Nana. But Nana again like a shrewd and manipulative politician hypnotizes Ghashiram by philosophizing the Vedantic concept of life and death and is successful in calming down Ghashiram. But the fear of Ghashiram still lurks as he seems to develop a penchant for blood and might prove dangerous. Ghashiram fails to realize the treacherous way of the culprit Nana and is reduced to a stooge in Nana's power game. After the death of Gauri, Ghashiram is of no use to Nana and soon an opportunity comes to get rid of the disease. Ghashiram's turning into a fiend and plunging into career of bloodshed and subsequent death of twenty two Brahmins by suffocation leads to a revolt by Poona Brahmins. Poonaites want "an order to behead GhashiramKotwal" (GK 413) and Nana immediately grabs the opportunity and hands over a written order. He muses delightedly like a seasoned politician: "Use a thorn to take out a thorn. That's great. The disease has been stopped. Anyway, he was of no use any more" (GK 413).

Tendulkar, through Nana's malign power, shows how hypocrisy of these politicians manipulates the public to serve their own interest. Here, Nana justifies the end of the demon Ghashiram with the grace of the Almighty: "The demon Ghashya, who plagued all of us, has met his death... The mercy of the gods is with us always" (GK 415-16).

Thus, Nana, through his compelling exercise of power in the name of social custom, responsibility and authority, proves a real string puller, the absolute power wielder of the city of Poona. Through the scot-free life of Nana, the intention of the writer is to show the realistic world of modern politics where the crafty, immoral and law-breaking politicians prosper and flourish. Ghashiram is dead only as a person and the play becomes a symbolic political statement made on the creation of monsters by political parties in power for temporary gains, leading to inequity, brutality and ultimate destruction. The pages of history

are replete with such living examples since times immemorial to the present age: “The Ghashirams of the world die, but the situations, which give birth to such forces, recur and are personified in the character of Nana. Beneath the superficial changes in history the larger dynamics of power are cyclic” (Tendulkar qtd in Wadikar 51). Tendulkar appropriates history to create a powerful play that raises questions about the politics of power that have relevance to Indian society today and challenges contemporary values by exposing them.

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